

*Darśanam | A Quarterly Journal on Yoga & Yoga-cikitsā*

# **KĀYA SĀMPAT**

**THE WEALTH OF HOLISTIC WELLNESS**

*March 2021 | Vol.4, No.1*



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***Darśanam***

***A Quarterly Journal on Yoga & Yoga-cikitsā***

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***THE WEALTH OF***

***HOLISTIC WELLNESS***

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KYM-*Darśanam* was a quarterly journal of the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram, devoted to *Yoga* and related aspects of Indian culture, as taught by Śrī T Krishnamacharya. Twenty one editions of the journal were published between February 1991 and February 1996. KYM-*Darśanam* was very well received by readers across the world and was valued for the authenticity of its contents and its adherence to the tradition of Śrī T Krishnamacharya.

Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram is very happy to revive KYM-*Darśanam* and offer the twelfth issue in a digitised and downloadable format, on the theme, “*Kāya Sampat* | *The Wealth of Holistic Wellness*.”

KYM-*Darśanam* offers serious students of *Yoga*, articles and content of value with regard to the philosophy, practice and application of *Yoga* in every edition. We also commit to upholding the authenticity of the legacy of our Founder, Śrī TKV Desikachar.



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***We offer our thanks to Praveena V for her assistance with the compilation of  
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## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



### “Āsanāni ca tāvanti yāvanto jīvarāśayah”

Lord Śiva indicates to Pārvatī in the *Dhyāna Bindu Upaniṣad*, that there are as many Āsana forms as there are species. What one needs to understand from the subtlety of this statement is not that there are innumerable Āsana-s per se but that the form of any and every Āsana depends on who is doing, the posture, for therein lies the intelligence of the body.

In the last few decades, we see *Yoga* gaining popularity across the world, but what has also happened is an excessive preoccupation and at times even an obsession with Āsana, to the point where Āsana is often considered synonymous with *Yoga* itself.

To take any tool of *Yoga* out of its context is to do the ancient discipline of *Yoga* a great disservice, for Āsana is not merely contortionism or exhibitionism but a significant and powerful instrument that prepares the body, breath and mind for higher *Sādhana*, with the ultimate goal being the quietening of the mind and the elimination of *Avidyā*.

The appropriate practice of Āsana without any doubt confers *Kāyasampat*, the immeasurable treasure of a healthy body-mind-senses complex, which becomes fundamental to the fulfilment of our highest human aspiration – *Kaivalyam*. As the wide-ranging benefits of Āsana are widely known and often discussed, this issue focuses instead on certain other aspects of Āsana.

While exploring the core philosophy of Āsana as presented by *Patañjali* in the *Yogasūtra*, this edition of *Darśanam* also throws the spotlight on the method of practice in the KYM tradition, also exploring the subtler psychological implications of Āsana in the larger framework of *Yoga*.

A special feature on *Śirṣāsana*, acclaimed as the King of Postures (*Āsana Sāmraṭ*), has been reproduced from the Darśanam archives.

A two-part series on Āsana nomenclature with specific reference to about 70 postures that form a part of KYM's Teacher Training Programme syllabus is also included, to help students from the KYM tradition understand and remember the names of Āsana-s in this tradition.

The *Vyutpatti* segment throws light on some commonly used terms in the context of Āsana, that will be of great use in understanding and applying the principles of Āsana.

Often, in practice, there is a tendency to emphasise perfection of form, ignoring the more significant function of any posture. We hope that this edition of *Darśanam* offers a way of understanding and working with Āsana-s transcending the physicality of the practices and leading to an experience of how Āsana is a very potent tool that helps us master the body, not for the purpose of perfection of a posture but for the purpose of eventually forgetting about the body itself.

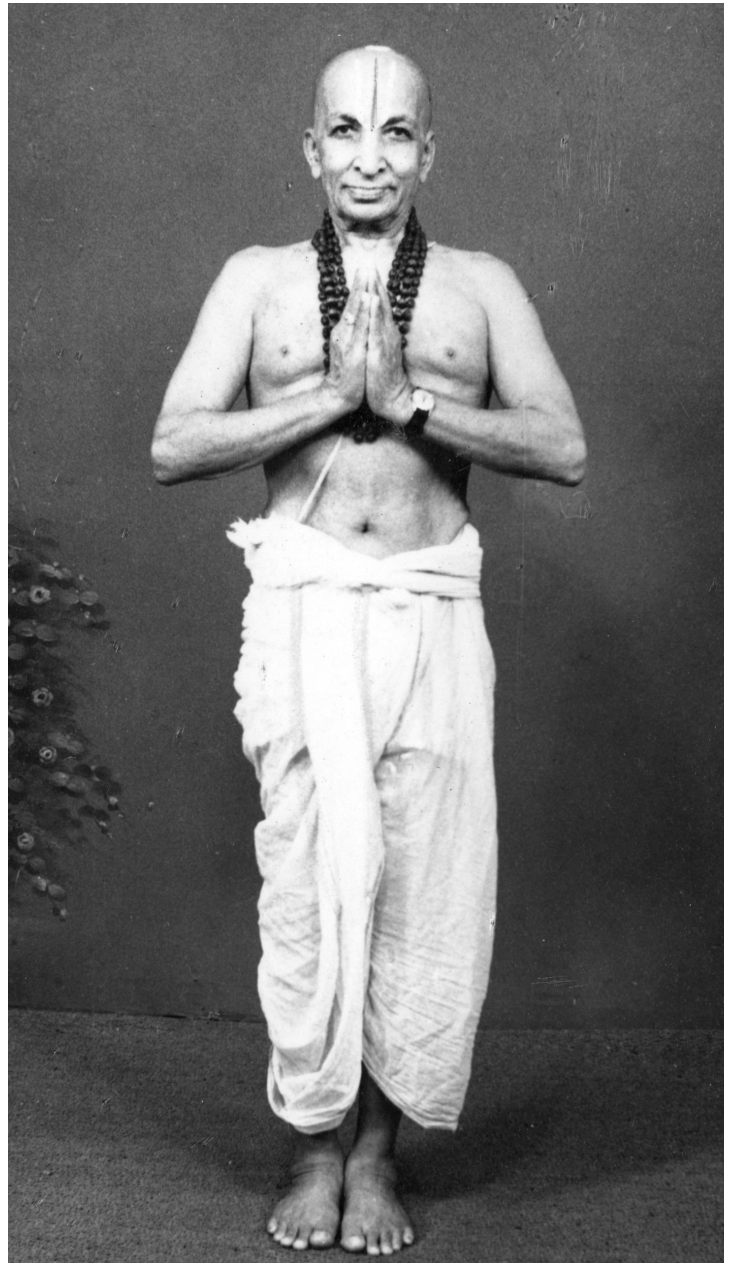
An ever present stability and ease, at all times and in all situations, that pervades not just the body, but the senses, the breath and the mind - that is the pinnacle of *Yogasādhana*.

Powerful grace...  
Resilient ease...  
Dynamic fluidity...  
Attentive adaptability...  
*Sthiram* and *Sukham*.

*Yogasūtra* 2.46 offers us three words of infinite wisdom, that apply not just to the practice of *Āsana* but to life itself.

As our teacher, *Śrī* TKV Desikachar repeatedly emphasised, *Yoga* is not what we achieve on the mat but what we cultivate and sustain off the mat, through the ebb and flow of life's myriad experiences. For therein lies the true test of how far we have progressed in our *Yogasādhana*.

*Nrithya Jagannathan*





*Remembering Sir*

*Śrī TKV Desikachar*

*Through the Eyes of His Students*

# REMEMBERING SIR

Samita Rathor

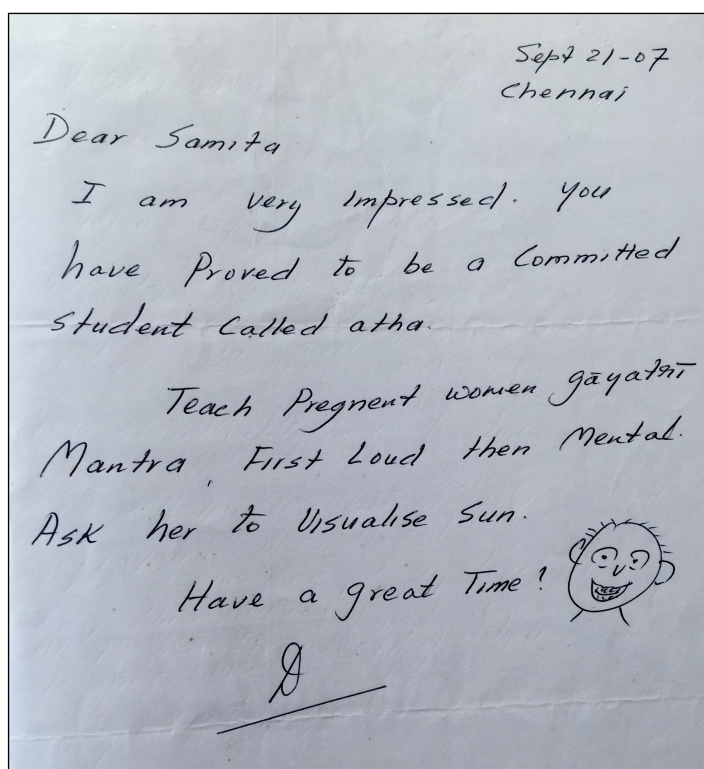


I was very grateful and humbled when Nrithya asked me to write about my experiences with Sir, TKV Desikachar. It struck my heart that no amount of writing could justify and express the actual real time experiences that transpired during the course of my relationship with Sir. This also took me back to Sir introducing me to Nrithya, almost over two decades ago in Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram of thatched coconut roofs and bamboo pillars to support, that many of us still remember.

I felt that expressing the *Parināma* (transformation) that I underwent with Sir, as his pupil, would give many a peek preview about the depth, authenticity and love shared in a relationship between a teacher and student. My transformations still continue under his blessings, guidance and presence in my living every single day.

Sir was the first, most influential, genuine and only *Yoga* Guru/Guide/Friend/Mentor and Teacher I have ever had. When you are ready to receive, that special person will appear, I heard this many times from our elders as a child. Unexpected and little did I know that my vessel was ready to receive, and true enough, Sir appeared.

In all wholesomeness, I experienced this quote in living during my time with Sir. “The success of *Yoga* does not lie in the ability to perform postures but in how it positively changes the way we live our life and our relationships.” This was the crux of the teachings that struck my cellular chords and I attribute all its glory to Sir.



## Chennai - My First Meeting With Sir at the KYM

Around my late teens in Chennai (then Madras), my dear father introduced me to yet another father figure, friend, mentor, guide and teacher par excellence, Sir, Śrī Desikachar.

I was going through a period when my low blood count and respiratory weakness were beginning to interfere with my daily living. I was bed ridden as a child while I lived in Lucknow, for over year with a plaster cast over my left leg, unable to walk, in immense pain and was on some heavy medications. The doctors were unable to detect the real issue. I had to miss school for a year. I was always short of breath and complaining of knee pain, breathlessness and low energy levels.



Eventually after my family migrated to Chennai, Sir saw me personally and gave me some guidelines after doing my *Nāḍīparīkṣa* and developing a practise, along with some food advice. I followed his instructions to the T and my health condition normalised.

After this experience, I met Sir again with my father. Sir this time asked me to come and attend one-on-one classes privately under his guidance. I was so young, innocent and unaware that I did not even realise what a blessing it was when this happened. Sir was such a strong magnet for me. The first thing he told my father was, “Your daughter will become a *Yoga* Teacher.” When I heard him say that I had no clue what I was getting into. It was almost like he made a prediction, which struck me later. I remember another incident where he made a similar prediction and so casually. I was wearing beads given to me by The Dalai Lama. Sir did not know this and just said, “So, are you going to become a monk?”

Many years later I went on to train as a Traditional Monk under the Tutelage of *Pūjya* Swami Dayananda Saraswati.

Till date, all I know was that I completely surrendered and got so fascinated by not just the teachings of *Yoga* but the manner in which Sir made it so smooth and simple, the way Sir applied it to my life to help me transform into a better human being. Added to this, what inspired me more was to see Sir and his respected wife, Mrs. Menaka Desikachar, living as ordinary humble humans, eating, seated on the floor, with so much humility and no ego. There was no presence of any superiority or pride. Just simple living and high thinking, a principle that my thoughts were always attracted to. I totally felt so comfortable in the presence of this uncomplicatedness.

### Study Time With Sir

Sir taught and introduced the living principles of *Yoga* in such a beautiful way, that I did not even realise that he was teaching and actually passing on such profound wisdom, not just in theory but also in applying the principles of the theory in my lifestyle and living, as per my nature. It was not only a classroom experience but also a very warm genuine homely feel that made all the difference. Those who have gone through studying with Sir privately will know what I am talking about.

I studied under Sir and was introduced to Mekhala, his daughter, who also taught me. I had the opportunity to learn principles of *Yoga* in its various aspects under his guidance.

He taught me about life without an ounce of superiority. This quality of Sir really helped me connect with him and myself. It cultured an immense amount of reverence for him and manifested complete *Śraddhā* and surrender. He understood me as a person. It was very easy for me to converse with him. He was a good listener. Not once did he impose his views on me. He was non-judgemental and respected my perspectives.

Sir taught me one to one in a private space in his home. He would observe everything that I would do in my practice that he taught me without uttering a word. Post every class visit, with such warmth, Sir would always drop me at the gate with utmost grace and politeness. Many a times Sir asked me to eat meals with the family, that I so thoroughly loved.

Sir initiated me into various practises and instructed me to continue them. He drew-wrote all instructions so clearly with his own hands and would give me the precious practise sheets, which even today, I still have as part of my altar.

Sir constantly encouraged and honoured me at gatherings in the presence of other senior teachers, and encouraged me to impart the wisdom inherited from my transformations always. I remember I told Sir, “Sir how can I teach? I don’t know anything.” To which he said, “I am telling you that you can teach. You have my permission.” Sir stressed so much on the depth of the heart connect with a student. These moments were very overwhelming for me. While studying with Sir, I also underwent a month-long *Yoga* and *Yoga* therapy course designed under his guidance, conducted by KYM which I undertook with his instructions. This is also when I realised the profound wisdom and knowledge of the subject matter of *Yoga* and its healing potential more in depth. Sir planted this seed in me for which I am ever grateful.

I never ever thought of or even wanted to teach yoga. The subject matter was so fascinating for

me and I wanted to constantly apply it more and more in my life journey as a laboratory to see its fruits ripen through the transformations in my life.

Sir made me mentor, teach and counsel students who visited him, many from outside India and some who were undergoing a lot of personal and relationship issues. It was an immense learning experience for me. I was very humbled to get an opportunity to be able to do this. This made me feel more and more committed to live up to the teachings of Sir. His faith in me gave me confidence to carry out his instructions to help others with the utmost love and *Śraddhā*.

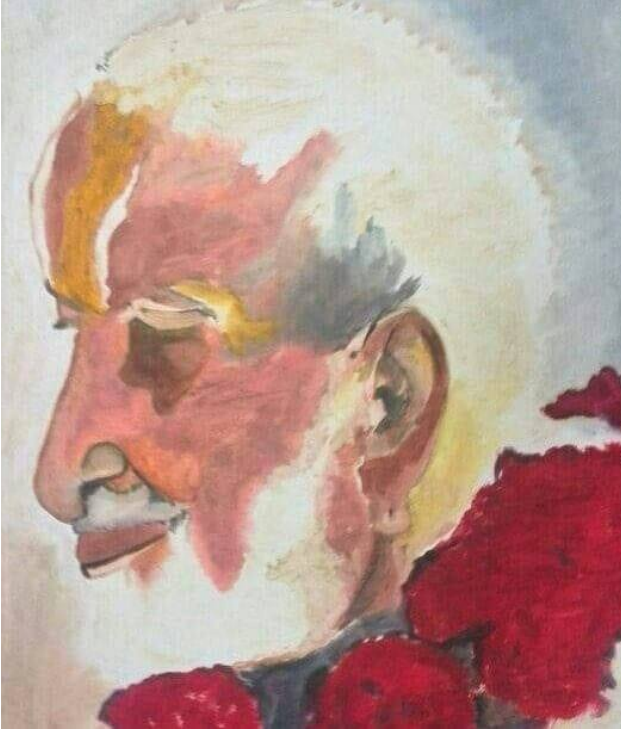
He encouraged me to learn and then, teach chanting. I privately had the opportunity and studied chanting, *Āsana-s*, *Yogasūtra* and meditation with Sir and also Mekhala Desikachar, Sir's daughter, who is also my teacher with an association of close to three decades.

### Sir’s Beautiful Spirit

Sir, not even once, ever asked me for anything in return for all the years that he so generously gave me. One day, I got Sir a *Patañjali* Statue. He looked at it and I was looking forward to him placing it in his altar. He instantly asked me to follow him to KYM and he placed the statue there in the office. I was surprised and realised that he had no attachment for the statue.

Another time, I oil painted a picture of *Śrī* Krishnamacharya and presented this to Sir. This, I thought he would keep. He presented the picture to KYM again. He just did not want anything material in return for his teachings, for his own personal gain.

Sir had once casually asked me which deity I liked. I smiled and told him *Hanumān*. A few days later he called me home for a class on a Sunday, which was unusual, as I had already attended a class on the previous day, Saturday. I was ready to sit for class and he said, “Today no class!” He asked Menaka Akka for the car keys and before I knew I was sitting in the car and he drove me all the way to a *Hanumān* Temple in Chennai. He never came in himself and asked me to go into the



temple. I did not even know it was a *Hanumān* Temple. I was left speechless, dazed and so touched by this incident. He always gave and never asked.

This is the Sir I know and will always keep these memories alive as they carry such profound value systems. A *Yoga Guru* as per our tradition is like a friend with who you can talk and share any thought processes without having a feeling of being umpired, and yet the very nature of such a teacher invokes the deepest respect.

His heart and spirit lay in the authenticity of his dedication to the teachings of his father, that he took many steps further by applying it in the changing times and world with such precise engineering.

Sir and his family gave me a lot of love and beautiful experiences of heart value. He was always a phone call away and even when I moved out of Chennai to New Delhi, we continued to be in touch and spoke regularly.

Whenever I was not in Chennai, Sir and I kept in touch by writing letters through snail mail. He replied to each and every letter that I wrote to him and without delay. His letters were so joyful to read always. His teachings made me independent. He laid

a strong and at the same time an empathetic foundation in my thought process. He said that it was important and part of *Dharma* that I listen to my inner voice when I am calm and quiet. That stayed with me always, making me malleable and ductile to face life challenges with utmost acceptance.

## Travelling With Sir

It was such a good experience to travel with Sir and Mekhala. We went up north to the Dharamsala region where Sir taught and did some incredible one-on-one healing sessions that were so wonderful to witness. A man who was unable to walk for years started walking after Sir's intervention and healing energy.

This was the spirit of Sir's teaching - dignified, humble, private, spontaneous and always available for his pupils. He was very particular about maintaining this process and methodology. He encouraged me to carry this aspect forward.

Sir also always stressed on the fact that Yoga is a personal practise and that one size does not fit all.

## Tribute To Sir – A *Gurudakṣiṇa*

While training in Rishikesh as a monk, under *Pūjya* Swami Dayananda Saraswati's guidance, I constantly kept thinking of what I could do for Sir, to keep his spirit and teachings alive in the Himalayan regions.

This thought process creation gave birth to the Living Tradition of Krishnamacharya Retreat in Rishikesh, which in my heart I dedicated to Sir. In this precious human birth of mine, I am humbled that the Divine choose me as an instrument, gave my thought processes the direction to share these deep teachings with many others.

These Teachings are a Tribute – *Gurudakṣiṇa* to my *Yoga* and *Vedānta Sampradaya* Traditions.

It was made possible only due to the *Śraddhā* that Sir instilled in me. A *Gurudakṣiṇa* is beyond just a price tag laid on *Yoga* teachings. It is to give to your teacher unconditionally for all the goodness passed on, without expecting anything in return.



### My Humble Gratitude

"I met and experienced the traditional spirit of *Yoga* in innumerable forms in this life journey through the Grace of Sir Śrī Desikachar. To me, his spirit is very much alive and will always be.

My day does not begin without offering my prayers and gratitude to Sir.

Such a strong, beautiful gift of experiencing *Yoga* in a pure form of connection - integration of the heart and mind, Sir left behind. Thank you for the Grace you bestowed on so many of us in so many different ways uniquely. Pure Grace of Guru *Parampara* (tradition), from the Heart that teaches life in unimaginable ways!

My humble gratitude to KYM for giving me an opportunity to share this heart.

Celebrating the infinite spirit of Sir.

*Śrī Gurubhyo Namaḥ*

*Sthirasukhamāsanam*



# ĀSANA IN THE YOGASŪTRA

Nrithya Jagannathan

**G**iven the preoccupation that the *Yoga* world, in general, seems to have with *Āsana* as the most prominent tool of *Yoga*, it is indeed a revelation when we realise that *Patañjali* in the *Yogasūtra* dedicates only one direct *Sūtra* referencing *Āsana*, with but two follow up *Sūtra*-s that explain the quality of *Āsana* and the outcomes of a consistent practice.

Interestingly, while *Patañjali* himself doesn't mention any names of *Āsana*, beyond emphasising *Sthiram* and *Sukham* as essential attributes of *Āsana*, the commentary of *Vyāsa* does list a select few *Āsana*-s that seem more directed towards preparing the body for a prolonged practice of *Prāṇāyāma* and *Dhyānam* in a stable seated posture.

Let us take a look at these *Āsana Sūtra*-s from the *Yogasūtra* as well as *Vyāsa*'s commentary to these *Sūtra*-s. The other commentators, in general, follow the direction indicated by *Vyāsa*, and so, for the purpose of this article, we will focus only on *Vyāsa*'s insights, using the added commentary by Swami Hariharananda Aranya which lucidly summarises these concepts.

## Yogasūtra | 2.46

### *Sthirasukhamāsanam* ||

- *Sthira* – steadiness, firmness
- *Sukham* – ease, comfort
- *Āsanam* – posture

*Āsana* must have the dual qualities of alertness and relaxation (*Śrī* TKV Desikachar).

### *Vyāsabhāṣyam*

*Tadyathā padmāsanaṁ bhadrāsanaṁ svastikaṁ  
daṇḍāsanaṁ sopāśrayaṁ paryaṅkaṁ  
krauñcaniṣadanaṁ  
hastiniṣadanamuṣṭraniṣadanaṁ  
samasaṁsthānaṁ sthirasukhaṁ yathāsukhaṁ  
cetyevamādīni ||*

They (the *Āsana*-s) are: *Padmāsana*, *Vīrāsana*, *Bhadrāsana*, *Svastikāsana*, *Daṇḍāsana*, *Sopāśraya*, *Paryaṅka*, *Krauñca-niṣadana*, *Hastiniṣadana*, *Uṣṭraniṣadana* and *Samasaṁsthānam*. When these postures can be held comfortably, they are called *Āsana*-s.

Swami Hariharananda Aranya elucidates in his commentary about how these postures are to be done. His commentary is reproduced below.

“*Padmāsana* is a well-known posture. Placing the right foot on the left thigh, and the left foot on the right thigh, one has to sit keeping the spine perfectly straight.

*Vīrāsana* is half of *Padmāsana*, (i.e. one foot has to be kept on the opposite thigh, and the other foot below the opposite thigh.

In *Bhadrāsana*, placing the soles of the feet on the ground before the scrotum, and close to each other, the soles have to be covered by the two palms.

In *Svastikāsana*, one has to sit up straight, the soles of the feet being stuck between the opposite thigh and knee.

In *Daṇḍāsana*, one has to sit stretching the two legs, closely fixing together the two heels and toes.

*Sopāśraya* is squatting tying the back and the two legs with a piece of cloth called *Yoga-paṭṭaka* (strong piece of cloth by which the back and the two legs are tied while squatting).

In *Paryāṅkāśana*, one has to lie down stretching the thighs and hands; it is also called *Śavāsana*, the posture of the dead.

*Krauñca-niśadana* etc. have to be followed by observing the posture of resting adopted by the animals concerned. Contracting the two heels and toes, and pressing one sole with the other while squatting is called *Sama-samsthāna*.

In all the *Yogic Āsana-s*, the spine has to be kept straight. The *Śruti* also says, “the breast, neck and the head have to be kept erect.” Moreover, the posture has to be motionless and comfortable. The posture which causes pain or restlessness is not a *Yogic* posture.”

Naturally, the question that follows is likely to be, “Then, from where did the vast array of *Āsana-s* evolve from?”

As an *Ānuśāsana Śāstra*, the practice of *Yoga* would have to have been learnt directly from a competent Guru, thus precluding the necessity for elaborate discussions in the early commentaries. Also, over the years in the interim between the period of *Patañjali* and the later *Haṭha* texts that offer detailed discussions on *Āsana* techniques and benefits, there could have been a lot of loss in both knowledge transfer and continuity owing to widespread political upheavals caused on account of a series of invasions between the 7th and 19th centuries. The creation of more *Āsana-s* in all planes, done statically and dynamically could also have been the response of the adept *Yoga* Masters to the rapidly devolving lifestyle and discipline among people as well.

While the number of *Āsana-s* currently in practice is of secondary importance, it is important to note from this narrative, that the *Āsana-s* elaborated upon in *Vyāsa’s* commentary require an erect spine and are done statically. Thus, they seem to be clearly oriented towards leading the practitioner towards a stable and undisturbed mental state conducive to meditation. Also of significance is Aranya’s

observation that the practitioner must not experience any pain or restlessness in the performance of a posture.

The *Tejobindu Upanisad* (1.25) states:

***Sukhenaiva bhavedyasminnajastram  
brahmacintanam  
Āsanam tadvijānīyādanyatsukhavināsanam***

Only that posture of the body that facilitates with comfort the prolonged contemplation upon *Brahman* is *Āsana*. Others that lack comfort cease to be *Āsana-s* and constitute mere physical torture.

### ***Yogasūtra | 2.47***

#### ***Prayatnaśaithilyānantasamāpattibhyām ||***

- *Prayatna* – effort, striving
- *Śaithilya* – relaxation, loosening
- *Ananta* – infinite, endless
- *Samāpatti[bhyām]* – unity, absorption

These qualities can be achieved by recognising and observing the reactions of the body and the breath to the various postures that comprise *Āsana* practice. Once known, these reactions can be controlled step by step (*Śrī* TKV Desikachar).

### ***Vyāsabhāṣyam***

***Prayatnoparamātsidhyatyāsanaṁ yena  
nāṅgamejayo bhavati | anante vā samāpannaṁ  
cittamāsanam nirvartayatīti ||***

By relaxation of the body, *Āsana* is perfected; this stops shaking of the limbs (which is an obstacle to *Samādhi*). Or, a mind fixed on the infinite brings about perfection (*Siddhi*) of the *Āsana*.

Further, *Patañjali* gives us a direction with regards to how *Sthiram* and *Sukham* in *Āsana* is to be achieved, indicating that *Sthiram* and *Sukham* are not given but the outcomes of consistent and well directed effort. The term, “*Ananta Samāpatti*” in the *Sūtra* can be variously interpreted as:

- By connecting to the Infinite Supreme
- By visualising *Ananta-śeṣa*, the divine serpent who holds upon his hoods the universe while simultaneously offering the coils of his body as a comfortable seat for the divine couple, *Śrīlakṣmīnārāyaṇa*.
- By connecting to the breath, which moves endlessly within us from birth to death.

The KYM approach to the practice of *Āsana* relies greatly on the integration and synchronicity of breath and movement so as to enable the effortless achievement of *Sthiram* and *Sukham*.

It is to be remembered, in any discussion on *Āsana* that *Āsana* must not be perceived as an independent technique comprising many postures of varying complexity that can be done to improve flexibility and strength of the body, but rather that *Āsana* is a very important component within the broader scheme of the *Yoga-āṣṭāṅga*, contributing to developing physical, physiological and psychological resilience.

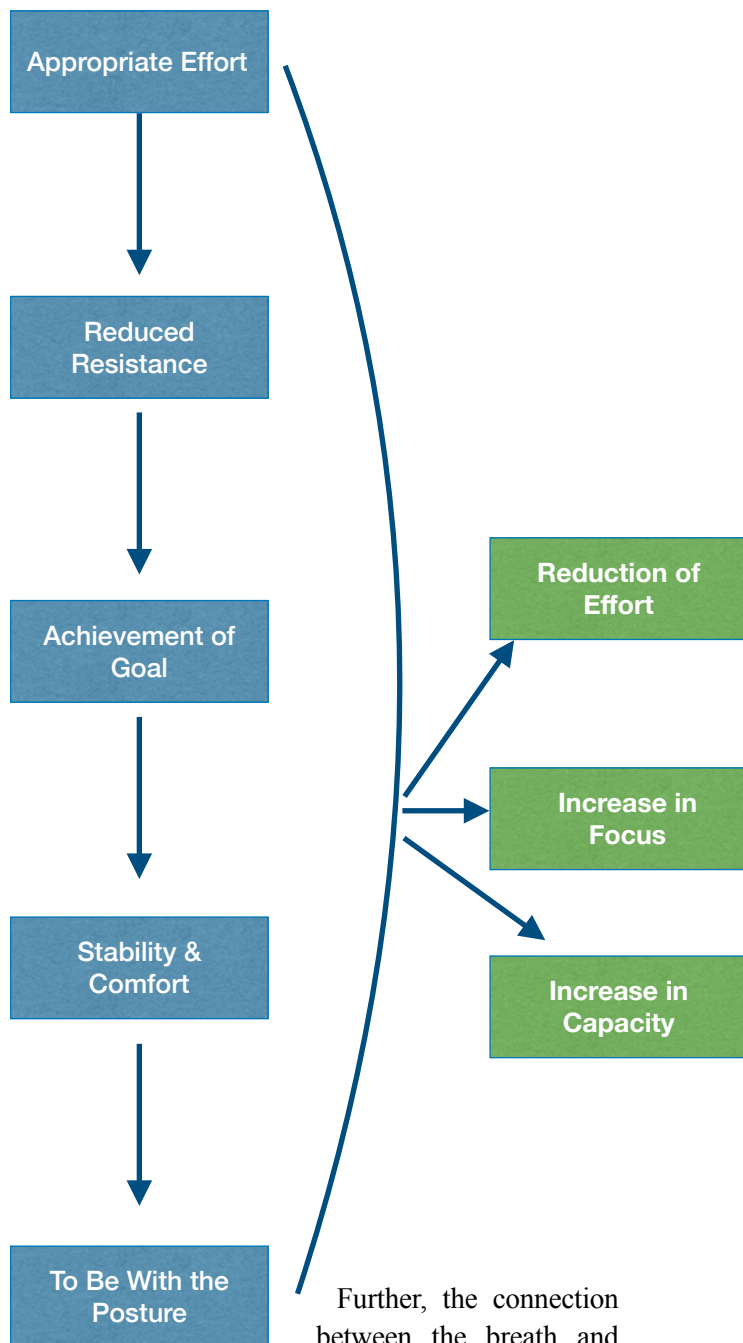
This makes it evident that *Sthiram* and *Sukham*, as indicated by *Patañjali* translates to:

- Stability and comfort at the level of the body
- Alertness and relaxation at the level of the mind
- Long, smooth inhalation and exhalation at the level of the breath

The breath is the vehicle of *Prāṇa* and is one of the most powerful tools at our disposal. The use of breath integrated movements enables smooth and fluid movement while also preventing injury.

The natural link between the movements of the spine and the dynamics of breathing mutually support and enhance each other.

It is for this reason that well-designed practice of *Āsana* when integrated with breathing positively affects the energy, metabolism, feeling of wellness and overall quality of life.



Further, the connection between the breath and mind ensures that as the breath becomes longer and smoother, the restlessness of the mind also eases and concentration improves. It is thus, that *Āsana* is to be seen as a significant catalyst that gives the aspiring practitioner the eligibility to transition into deeper *Sādhana* without restlessness or distraction. This is indicated in the next *Sūtra*, that succinctly summarises the outcome of *Āsana* practice in the context of reducing the effects of *Rajas* and *Tamas* on body and mind.

## Yogasūtra | 2.48

### Tato dvandvānabhighātaḥ ||

- *Tataḥ* - thus, from that
- *Dvandva* – dualities, pairs of opposites
- *Anabhighātaḥ* - not afflicted by

When these principles are correctly followed, *Āsana* practice will help a person endure and even minimise the external influences on the body such as age, climate, diet and work (*Śrī* TKV Desikachar).

### Vyāsabhāṣyam

#### śītoṣṇādibhirdvandvairāsanajayānnābhibhūyate ||

When perfection in *Āsana* is attained, the practitioner is not affected by the opposite conditions like heat, cold etc.

The outcome of *Āsana* practice specifically indicated by *Patañjali* is *Dvandva-anabhighātaḥ*, the achievement of a state of inner and outer neutrality despite all manner of changes and fluctuations that happen in one's life and/or environment.

We see thus, that over and above, being a means for promoting physical and physiological wellness, the practice of *Āsana* offers a more significant benefit which is the transcendence of bodily limitations, thus enabling us to explore and expand the remarkable potential of the human mind. *Āsanajayam*, or the mastery of *Āsana* is therefore, not merely the ability to achieve and stay in a complex contortion or to defy gravity, but more significantly, the development of an inner resilience that helps us to cope with and also align to the diverse changes that occur in our lives, with clarity and equanimity. It is this benefit of *Āsana* that makes it such a valuable tool in the journey towards the *Antaraṅga Śādhana* of Yoga.



# THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ĀSANA

*Dr. Latha Satish & Nrithya Jagannathan*



**A**ccording to *Yoga* and Indian philosophical systems, the body and mind are not two entities. They are always considered together, as two interacting and integrated parts of a complex whole, without distinction.

Every movement of the body, within the body is integrated with movement of the mind. Even if one were to move the little finger, that movement is preceded by an intention or thought before it and vice versa.

The *Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā* tells us

*Cale vāte calaṁ cittaṁ niṣcale niṣcalaṁ bhavet*

While this verse speaks about the quietitude of the mind that follows the regulation and eventual cessation of breath, the same idea may also be equally applied to *Āsana* as well, given the strong synchronicities between body, breath and mind.

*Cale vāte calaṁ śarīraṁ niṣcale niṣcalaṁ bhavet*

thus, will equally hold good.

It is important to look for and observe the functional impact that body and mind have on each other. *Āsana* can be used as a very powerful tool to reach, refine and redirect the mind. Hence, the *Sūtra*, “*Sthiram Sukhamāsanam*” refers not just to the stability and comfort at a physical level but also to the alertness and ease at the psychological level.

We must reach a point at which the body is *Sthiram* while the mind is in *Sukham*. This dual quality of stability and comfort pervades all the dimensions of the human system, thus becoming a viable means for replacing the *Vyutthāna Saṁskāra-s* with *Nirodha Saṁskāra-s*.

## Reversing the Pathway of Duḥkha





Movements of the body, be it through physical exercises, sports, dance, aerobics or any other form of activity serve to enable space and facilitate the free flow of energy. This physical expansion of space and its charging with energy translates as a psychological expansion as well.

It is important to remember in these times when we see *Āsana* being given centre stage in the spectrum of *Yoga* teachings that the purpose of *Āsana* is not merely the mastery of the body but more importantly, the eventual transcendence of the body, so that the body in no way is an impediment to the complete unfolding of the mind's potential. This shift from body awareness and body consciousness to body sublimation and transcendence is an essential transition in the journey of *Yoga*.

One of the core outcomes of a sustained and well designed *Āsana* practice is to reduce the flux of *Rajas* and *Tamas* and enable an increase in and then a domination of *Sattva*. *Sattva* dominance is a desirable quality of the mind, which we see from

the *Yogasūtra*. *Tato dvandva anabhighātaḥ* itself is an outcome of *Sthiram* and *Sukham* in *Āsana*.

The mind space is often referred to as *Mana-ākāsa* and the purpose of *Yoga* is to free it from the *Duḥkha* (all manner of negative content) that pollutes this space and causes us to suffer.

In ancient times, the practice of *Āsana* was prescribed by the sages and *Yogi-s* as a means of lightening the *Tamas* of the body, so that the mind is also made open and attentive to grasp and comprehend the highest Truth that was beyond the reach of the lower sensory and sensual functions.

Increasingly in the present day context, we see physicians and modern healers advocating the practice of *Āsana-s* not just to improve flexibility, stamina and general health but specifically to improve mood, enhance motivation and promote sound mental wellbeing.

The practice of *Āsana-s* can be seen to enhance Behavioural Activation – using/moving different parts of the body as a means of overcoming

depression, anxiety, rumination and lethargy. The ‘activity component’ or ‘active mode’ of *Āsana* facilitates and eventually smoothens engagement with self, others and the world at large.

*Āsana*, singularly, as well as the innumerable combination of *Āsana-s* and *Āsana* sequences done within a practice, have definite impacts on the mind in terms of energising (*Bṛhmaṇa*) or calming (*Laṅghana*).

For instance, in our practical experience, we see that a posture like *Vīrabhadraśana*, which is a back arch that also opens out the chest has a direct and tangible impact in building self confidence and alleviating fear. Such back arches also increase mental alertness.

Similarly, forward bends in general (owing to the nature of the movement that requires a contraction) also serve to inculcate a sense of humility and reverence to something higher. These postures tend to facilitate relaxation and quietness of the mind.

*Āsana Vinyasa-s* such as the *Trikoṇāśana* series or the *Suryanamaskāra* sequence enhance activation of the whole body, thereby enhancing mental energy as well as mental flexibility and adaptability.

Certain lying positions such as *Śavāsana*, *Apānāsana* or *Jaṭharaparivṛtti* promote passivity (essential for those in whom *Rajas* is very high), contributing to acceptance and a relaxed state of mind. The challenge of doing inversions is beyond just the physical for when wisely used, after assessing the capacity of the student, inversions can also be sound ways of building confidence as well as enhancing mental stability.

These subtle psychological implications of postures that on the surface appear to be purely physical, is well worth exploring.

It is said, “*Śarīramādhyam khalu dharma sādhanam.*” The fulfilment of all one’s *Dharmic* aspirations is dependent on the wellness of the body and mind. Whatever the activity that one

engages in, whatever the aspirations that one has in life, the means to the end is the body. And further, to be clear about what one’s *Svadharma* is in any context or situation, the mind must be unclouded and clear. The purpose of *Yoga* practice is to achieve both - the resilience of the body as well as the strength and plasticity of the mind. When there is a conflict of any nature in the mind, it manifests through somatisation as bodily consequences. The reverse is true as well. Thus, if we are to align ourselves to our respective individual *Dharma*, we must make a conscious effort to align the body and mind, and the simplest catalyst for this alignment is the breath which responds to and is informed by both physical and psychological triggers.

*Āsana* may also be considered as essential practice to enable *Bāhyaśauca*, the purity and refinement of the body, which when done in the right manner confers *Kāyasāmpat*, the wealth of a body that is abundantly healthy. This, as a cascading force, positively impacts the quality and health of the cognitive and emotional functions of the mind as well. Unfortunately, most modern day research only attempts to document and analyse the physiological parameters as outcomes of *Āsana* practice, ignoring the far more significant psychological parameters of holistic health. It is in this direction that *Yoga* research must be directed towards, for us to fully comprehend the sheer breadth and scope of *Āsana-s* as drivers of not just physiological but holistic well-being.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF *VINYĀSA KRAMA* IN *ĀSANA*

*Sangeetha Kannan*

The practice of *Yoga*, often begins at a place where one is able to experience something at a very gross level, primarily the physical aspect that we see as *Yoga*. This remains so, because we are unable to notice subtler aspects like the breath and how we feel with regard to the breath during a practice. One tends to most often see the flexibility or the strength as we practice, rather than the experience that one gains through a connection between body, breath and mind.

Many principles lie behind the practice of *Āsana-s* and the breath and how they relate to and influence each other and the mind.

*Āsana* is derived from the *Saṃskṛta* root “*As*” which means ‘to stay’ or ‘to be established in a particular position’ with certain qualities that need to be present. The *Yogasūtra* describes these two qualities as *Sthiram* and *Sukham*, representing how the mind as well needs to be.

In the KYM tradition, we use systematically sequenced *Āsana-s* linked by breath as one way of gradually enabling the dual qualities of *Sthiram* and *Sukham*. This sequential linking of *Asana-s* is known as a *Vinyāsa Krama*.

“*Krama*” means a step or sequence and “*Nyāsa*” is to place. The prefix ‘*Vi*’ translates as “in a special way.” Thus, a *Vinyāsa Krama* is “an intelligent arrangement” of *Āsana* steps done in a systematic manner, taking one not only in the right direction but also in the right way. This is the foundation of a correctly designed practice of *Yogāsana*.

*Asana-s* are also considered to be an instrument of purification, which can also mean, the ability to stay in an *Āsana* comfortably and steadily, keeping the mind and senses focused on each movement in that moment.

Our *Ācārya* beautifully brings out the nuances of this system of *Vinyāsa Krama* through his teachings. As we practice many *Āsana-s*, we understand that there are many principles behind the smooth flow of a practice.

When we look at a posture and how it flows from one-point to another we see a natural structure of movement that is happening in a logical and well-planned sequence of movements, be it within a posture, within a flow of many postures or within an evolution of practice that brings about profound changes in the practitioner.

These *Vinyāsa-s* are done using appropriate breathing sequences in the most natural way, enhancing not only the body’s perfection of form but also allowing the breath to guide the flow of movements, thereby optimising the function of every *Āsana* form. Further, the use of *Vinyāsa Krama* naturally draws the involvement of the mind as well.

Now let us examine the different aspects of the idea *Vinyāsa Krama* in *Āsana-s*.

## **The concept of *Vinyāsa Krama* within a posture:**

The body moves in a natural flow of movement from a neutral position (*Samasthiti*) into the final form of the posture, also coming out with the same definite steps back into the neutral position. This is not just a technique but a keen observation of the organic synchronicity between

body and breath, where movement and breath mutually support each other. The close observation of oneself in every transition from step to step facilitates an ongoing awareness of one's readiness for the next step and also anchors the mind in the movement experience.

The breath plays a very central role in the movement from one position to another, enabling the body to respond in a natural way. This helps one to access the present state of the body and breath, allowing the practitioner to verify if he/she is ready to move to the next step. This verification involves the practitioner to be present not only physically within the action but also to be mentally aware of the process that it entails, keeping the mind in a state of *Atha* (**Refer Figure - 1**).

### **Vinyāsa Krama as a Sequence of Postures Linked by the Breath:**

Here, there is appropriate and intelligent mixing and matching of postures to create dynamic sequences of *Āsana* where the breath becomes the central thread of connection and construction.

Numerous postures can be linked one after another, while respecting the fundamental rules of the breath to create sequences of varying degrees of complexities. Every posture plays multiple roles within a sequence from being a preparatory posture to a goal posture or a medium whereby the posture is simply a verification that one is ready to move towards the next.

This kind of structuring can be better understood with the examples presented in **Figure - 2**.

### **The Vinyāsa Krama of a Personal Practice Developed over time:**

Over a period of time, one changes. Our bodily capabilities change, as also our physiological and cognitive capabilities. At every point of a new beginning, our needs are also evolving as we achieve a goal we set out to and therefore, set new goals to be achieved. This is why the design of a personal practice for an individual also

follows a *Vinyāsa Krama* that factors in these changing needs and abilities of the practitioner.

This aspect of change within the *Vinyāsa Krama* of a practice can be clearly seen in the structuring of the practices where there is a clear placement of steps leading towards the goal and a gradual movement from these towards newer goals, where the practice takes on a different purpose.

One needs to remember that the right placement of steps, be it in a posture, in a sequence of many linked postures or in the evolution of a practice, is essential.

This concept of *Vinyāsa Krama* is applicable, not just in *Āsana* but in organising our lives as well. As the *Yogasūtra* indicates in 3.16, what is perceived as a transformation is nothing but a series of micro steps that aggregate to give a significant change or effect. The intelligent use and structuring of *Vinyāsa Krama* help to bring about a sense of balance of the body, breath and mind, allowing the individual to completely integrate with the results achieved through this intelligent application of the tools of *Yoga*.

If one pays attention to these changes, connecting to every movement, every moment, then this itself catalyses *Citta Vṛtti Nirodha*, the undistracted concentration of the mind, which is a fundamental precursor to the experience of the more advanced inner states of *Samādhi*.

*(Please see next page for figures)*



# A GRAMMATICAL EXPOSITION ON ĀSANA-S

(Part - 1)

Dr. M Jayaraman



## Introduction

Over 70 Āsana-s are taught as part of the Yoga Teacher Training Programme at Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram, with several more in the practice repertoire given by Śrī T Krishnamacharya and Śrī TKV Desikachar. The names of Āsana-s of Yoga are in Saṃskṛta. To make the practice of Āsana-s more meaningful, it would be useful to know the components of the nomenclature of Āsana-s and their meanings. All the names of the Āsana-s are compound terms (Samasta-padas). Hence they are explained under the following heads:

- Grammatically accepted Saṃskṛta expression (if the Āsana-s are to be uttered as part of a Sanskrit sentence in the Nominative case, singular)
- Conjunction split
- Compound split and meaning
- Constituents of Compound (meaning)

Though these Āsana nomenclatures can be explained in more detailed manner with cross reference from various textual sources etc, the limited purpose of this article is to give an understanding of the terminologies from a fundamental grammatical perspective to facilitate standard and authentic expression of the terms in day to day teaching learning process.

## Few Points at the Outset

- **Conjunction:** This refers to the fusion of two syllables (two vowels or two consonants or a rarely a vowel and consonant) which might result some modification. It might result in elongation in case of vowels, replacement of the two or one of the conjoining vowels/consonants by another vowel or consonant. Eg: *Ardha* + *utkaṭāsanam* - *Ardhotkaṭāsanam*. It can be seen here that the syllable 'A' at the end of first term and syllable 'U' in the beginning of second term gives rise to a new syllable - *O*.
- **Compound:** This refers to the combining of two words that gives rise to a new word. The combined word will have contribution to meaning by the components. Eg: *Tāḍāsanam* - is a compound where the term *Tāḍa* contributes to the meaning of the term *Āsana*, indicating that it is a posture that resembles a palm tree.
- Though the word *Āsana* is derived from the root "As" to sit, due to convention, positioning of the body becomes *Āsana*. For example, *Śavāsana* – this is a relaxing posture that can be done in the lying position, still it is termed as *Āsana* due to convention.
- Under "Constituents of Compound," the word *Āsana* is not included as it is a default component almost in all nomenclatures.

## The Exposition

S.No	Āsana	Grammatically Accepted Expression in Saṃskṛta	Conjunction Split	Compound Split and Meaning	Constituents of Compound
1	<b>Samasthiti</b>	<i>Samasthitiḥ</i>	None	<i>Samā Sthitiḥ - Samasthitiḥ; A state where there is balance</i>	<i>Sama – balance, Sthiti – state</i>
2	<b>Uttānāsana</b>	<i>Uttānāsanam</i>	<i>Uttāna+ āsanam</i>	<i>Uttanam āsanam - concave posture</i>	<i>Dictionaries of Sanskrit give multiple meanings to the term Uttāna. The closest meaning connected to the posture is concave - <a href="https://bit.ly/37sklr8">https://bit.ly/37sklr8</a></i>
3	<b>Pārśva Uttānāsana</b>	<i>Pārśvottānāsanam</i>	<i>Pārśva+ uttāna+ āsanam</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Uttānam āsanam, Uttānāsanam,</i></li> <li><i>Pārśvam uttānāsanam - lateral concave posture</i></li> </ul>	<i>Pārśva – side/lateral, Uttāna – concave</i>
4	<b>Prasārita Pāda Uttānāsana</b>	<i>Prasāritapādottānāsanam</i>	<i>Prasārita + pāda +uttāna+ āsanam</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Uttānam āsanam, uttānāsanam - concave posture</i></li> <li><i>Prasāritau pādau yasmin tat, prasāritapādām – That in which both the feet are stretched</i></li> <li><i>Prasāritapādām uttānāsanam, prasāritapādottānāsanam – that concave posture in which both the feet are stretched.</i></li> </ul>	<i>Prasārita – stretched, pāda –feet , Uttāna – concave</i>
5	<b>Utkaṭāsana</b>	<i>Utkaṭāsanam</i>	<i>Utkaṭa+ āsanam</i>	<i>Utkaṭam āsanam, Utkaṭāsanam – A posture that is intense/ difficult</i>	<i>Utkaṭa - intense, difficult – (Probably in this posture as one has to balance just on the toes of both the feet, it may have been termed as intense/difficult)</i>

S.No	Āsana	Grammatically Accepted Expression in Saṃskṛta	Conjunction Split	Compound Split and Meaning	Constituents of Compound
6	<b>Adho Mukha Śvānāsana</b>	<i>Adhomukhaśvānāsanaṃ</i>	<i>Adhaḥ+ mukha+ śvāna+ āsanaṃ</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Adhaḥ mukhaṃ yasya saḥ - adhomukhaḥ - the one who is facing downwards</i></li> <li>• <i>Adhomukhaḥ śvānaḥ - adhomukhaśvānaḥ - the dog that is facing downwards</i></li> <li>• <i>Adhomukhaśvānasya āsanaṃ iva āsanaṃ - adhomukhaśvānāsanaṃ – a posture that resembles the posture of a downward facing dog.</i></li> </ul>	<i>Adhaḥ - downwards, mukha - face, śvāna- dog</i>
7	<b>Tāḍāsana</b>	<i>Tāḍāsanaṃ</i>	<i>None</i>	<i>Tāḍaḥ iva āsanaṃ – A posture that resembles a palm tree</i>	<i>Tāḍa – palm tree</i>
8	<b>Ardha Uttānāsana</b>	<i>Ardhottānāsanaṃ</i>	<i>Ardha+ Uttāna+ āsanaṃ</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Uttānaṃ āsanaṃ, uttānāsanaṃ - the Concave posture</i></li> <li>• <i>Ardham uttānāsanaṃ, ardhottānāsanaṃ, the half concave posture</i></li> </ul>	<i>Ardha – half, uttāna – concave</i>
9	<b>Ardha Utkaṭāsana</b>	<i>Ardhotkaṭāsanaṃ</i>	<i>Ardha+ utkaṭa+ āsanaṃ</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Utkaṭam āsanaṃ, utkaṭāsanaṃ – An intense posture</i></li> <li>• <i>Ardham utkaṭāsanaṃ, ardhotkaṭāsanaṃ – Half intense posture</i></li> </ul>	<i>Ardha – half, utkaṭa – intense/difficult</i>
10	<b>Ūrdhva Mukha Śvānāsana</b>	<i>Ūrdhvamukhaśvānāsanaṃ</i>	<i>Ūrdhvaṃ mukhaśvāna+ āsanaṃ</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ūrdhvaṃ mukhaṃ yasya saḥ, ūrdhvamukhaḥ - The one who is facing upwards</i></li> <li>• <i>Ūrdhvamukhaḥ śvānaḥ, ūrdhvamukhaśvānaḥ - The dog that is facing upwards</i></li> <li>• <i>Ūrdhvamukhaśvānasya āsanaṃ iva āsanaṃ – Posture that resembles the dog that facing upwards</i></li> </ul>	<i>Ūrdhva - upwards, mukha- face, śvāna- dog</i>

S.No	Āsana	Grammatically Accepted Expression in Saṃskṛta	Conjunction Split	Compound Split and Meaning	Constituents of Compound
11	<b>Vīrabhadrāsana (A&amp;B)</b>	Vīrabhadrāsanaṃ	Vīrabhadra + āsanaṃ	Vīrabhadrasya āsanaṃ iva āsanaṃ – vīrabhadrāsanaṃ - a posture that resembles the posture of vīrabhadra	Vīrabhadra - name of an army general of Lord Śiva
12	<b>Caturaṅga Daṇḍāsana</b>	Caturaṅgadaṇḍāsanaṃ	Catuḥ+ aṅga+ daṇḍa+ āsanaṃ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daṇḍaḥ iva āsanaṃ, daṇḍāsanaṃ – A posture that resembles a stick</li> <li>• Catvāri aṅgāni yasmin tat, caturaṅgam – that in which four limbs are involved</li> <li>• Caturaṅgaṃ daṇḍāsanaṃ, caturaṅgadaṇḍāsanaṃ – a posture that resembles a stick which involves four limbs</li> </ul>	Catvāri (catuḥ/r) – four; aṅga– limbs, daṇḍa– stick,
13	<b>Bhagīrathāsana</b>	Bhagīrathāsanaṃ	Bhagīratha + āsanaṃ	Bhagīrasthasya āsanaṃ iva āsanaṃ - Bhagīrathāsanaṃ - the posture that resembles the posture of Bhagīratha	Name of an ancient king, who is portrayed in sculptures as the one who stood in one leg, with palms joined above and did penance
14	<b>Vasiṣṭhāsana</b>	Vasiṣṭhāsanaṃ	Vasiṣṭha+ āsanaṃ	Vasiṣṭhasya āsanaṃ, Vasiṣṭhāsanaṃ (the posture of (taught by) Vasiṣṭha)	Vasiṣṭhā – name of a sage, termed as a Muni in Haṭhayogapradīpikā (1.18) (who might have taught this posture)
15	<b>Utthita Trikoṇāsana - Pārśva Bheda &amp; Parivṛtti Bheda</b>	Utthitatrikoṇāsanaṃ	Utthitatrikoṇa+ āsanaṃ	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trayah Koṇāḥ Yasmin Tat Trikoṇam – That Which Has Three Angles</li> <li>• Trikoṇam Āsanaṃ, Trikoṇāsanaṃ – the Posture That Has Three Angles</li> <li>• Utthitasya Trikoṇāsanaṃ, Utthitatrikoṇāsanaṃ – the Posture of a Standing Person That Has Three Angles</li> </ul>	Utthita – the One Who Is Standing, Trikoṇam – Triangle, Pārśva – Side/ Lateral, Parivṛtti – Twist Bheda – Variation

S.No	Āsana	Grammatically Accepted Expression in Saṃskṛta	Conjunction Split	Compound Split and Meaning	Constituents of Compound
16	<b>Utthita Pārśva Koṅāsana - Pārśva Bheda &amp; Parivr̥tti Bheda</b>	Utthitapārśvakoṅāsanam	Utthitapārśvak oṅa+āsanam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pārśve koṅaḥ yasmīn tat pārśvakoṅam – that which has an angle on one side</li> <li>• Pārśvakoṅam āsanam, pārśvakoṅāsanam – an asana that has an angle at one side</li> <li>• Utthitasya pārśvakoṅāsanam, utthitapārśvakoṅāsanam – an āsana of a person who is standing that has an angle at one side</li> </ul>	Utthita – the one who is standing, Pārśva – side/lateral, Koṅa – angle, Parivr̥tti – twist Bheda – Variation
17	<b>Śavāsana</b>	Śavāsanam	Śava+āsanam	Śavaḥ iva āsanam śavāsanam – that posture that resembles the posture of a corpse	Śava – corpse
18	<b>Apānāsana</b>	Apānāsanam	Apāna+ āsanam	Apānasya āsanam, apānāsanam – the posture (related to) of apāna	Apāna – a division of Vāyu in the body; the place of which is stated as anus region
19	<b>Ūrdhva Prasṛta Pādāsana</b>	Ūrdhvasprasṛtapādāsanam	Ūrdhvasprasṛta pāda+āsanam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ūrdhvaṃ prasṛtau, ūrdhvasprasṛtau – the two that are extended above</li> <li>• Ūrdhvasprasṛtau pādau yasmīn tat, ūrdhvasprasṛtapādām – that in which the two feet are extended above</li> <li>• Ūrdhvasprasṛtapādām āsanam, ūrdhvasprasṛtapādāsanam – that posture in which the two feet are extended above</li> </ul>	Ūrdhva – above, Prasṛta – extended, Pāda – feet
20	<b>Supta Eka Pādāṅguṣṭhā sana</b>	Suptaikapādāṅguṣṭhāsana	Supta+ekapāda +aṅguṣṭha+āsanam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ekaḥ Pādau, Ekapādau - One Foot</li> <li>• Ekapādasya Aṅguṣṭhaḥ Ekapādāṅguṣṭhaḥ – the Toe of a Foot</li> <li>• Ekapādāṅguṣṭhasya Āsanam, Ekapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam – the Posture of Toe of a Foot</li> <li>• Suptasya Ekapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam, Suptaikapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam – the Posture of Toe of the Foot of the One Who Is in the Lying Position.</li> </ul>	Supta – the One Who Is in a Lying Position, Eka – One, Pāda – Foot, Aṅguṣṭha – Toe

S.No	Āsana	Grammatically Accepted Expression in Samskṛta	Conjunction Split	Compound Split and Meaning	Constituents of Compound
21	<b>Supta Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana</b>	<i>Suptapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam</i>	<i>Suptapāda+ aṅguṣṭha +āsanam</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pādāyoh aṅguṣṭhau pādāṅguṣṭhau - the two toes of the two feet</li> <li>• Pādāṅguṣṭhayoh āsanam, pādāṅguṣṭhāsanam - the posture related to the two feet and the two toes</li> <li>• Suptasya pādāṅguṣṭhāsanam, suptapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam – the posture related to the two feet and the two toes of a person in a lying position.</li> </ul>	<i>Supta – the one who is in a lying position, pāda – foot, aṅguṣṭha – toe</i>
22	<b>Supta Prasārita Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana</b>	<i>Suptaprasāritapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam</i>	<i>Suptaprasāritapāda+ aṅguṣṭha+ āsanam</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prasāritau pādau prasāritapādau - the two stretched feet</li> <li>• Prasāritapādāyoh aṅguṣṭhau prasāritapādāṅguṣṭhau - the two toes of the two stretched feet</li> <li>• Prasāritapādāṅguṣṭhyoh āsanam, prasāritapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam – the posture of (related to) two stretched feet and the two toes</li> <li>• Suptasya prasāritapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam, suptaprasāritapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam - the posture of (related to) two stretched feet and the two toes of person in a lying posture</li> </ul>	<i>Supta – the one who is in a lying position, prasārita – stretched, pāda – foot, aṅguṣṭha – toe</i>
23	<b>Supta Pārśva Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana</b>	<i>Suptapārśvapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam</i>	<i>Suptapārśva pāda+ aṅguṣṭha+ āsanam</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pādasya aṅguṣṭhaḥ pādāṅguṣṭhaḥ – the toe of the foot</li> <li>• Pādāṅguṣṭhasya āsanam , pādāṅguṣṭhāsanam – the posture of foot and the toe</li> <li>• Pārśvam pādāṅguṣṭhāsanam, pārśvapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam – the posture of the foot and the toe on a side</li> <li>• Suptasya pārśvapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam , suptapārśvapādāṅguṣṭhāsanam - the posture of the foot and the toe on a side of a person in a lying position</li> </ul>	<i>Supta – the one who is in a lying position, Pārśva – side/lateral, pāda – foot, aṅguṣṭha – toe</i>

S.No	Āsana	Grammatically Accepted Expression in Saṃskṛta	Conjunction Split	Compound Split and Meaning	Constituents of Compound
24	<b>Supta Baddha Koṇāsana</b>	<i>Suptabaddhakoṇāsana</i>	<i>Suptabaddhakoṇa+ āsanam</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Baddhaṃ koṇaṃ yasmin tat baddhakoṇam - that in which the (region making the) angle is bound</i></li> <li>• <i>Baddhakoṇa āsanam, baddhakoṇāsana- that posture in which the (region making the) angle is bound</i></li> <li>• <i>Suptasya baddhakoṇāsana, suptabaddhakoṇāsana –that posture of the person who is in a lying position in which the (region making the) angle is bound</i></li> </ul>	<i>Supta – the one who is in a lying position , Baddha – bound, Koṇa – angle</i>
25	<b>Dvipāda Pīṭha</b>	<i>Dvipādapīṭham</i>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Dvau pādau yasmin tat dvipādam. That in which there are two legs (involved)</i></li> <li>• <i>Dvipādaṃ pīṭham, dvipādapīṭham – that posture in which the two legs are involved</i></li> </ul>	<i>Dvi – Two, Pāda – Leg, Pīṭha – Posture</i>
26	<b>Ūrdhva Dhanurāsana</b>	<i>Ūrdhavadhanurāsana</i>	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ūrdhvaṃ dhanuḥ ūrdhavadhanuḥ - the upward facing bow</i></li> <li>• <i>Ūrdhavadhanuḥ iva āsanam, ūrdhavadhanurāsana – the posture that resembles the upward facing bow</i></li> </ul>	<i>Ūrdhva – Upwards, Dhanuḥ - Bow</i>
27	<b>Supta Parvatāsana</b>	<i>Suptaparvatāsana</i>	<i>Suptaparvata+āsanam</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Parvataḥ iva āsanam, parvatāsana – the posture that is like a mountain</i></li> <li>• <i>Suptasya parvatāsana, suptaparvatāsana – the posture that is like a mountain of the one who is in the lying position</i></li> </ul>	<i>Supta – the One Who Is in a Lying Position Parvata – Mountain</i>
28	<b>Jaṭhara Parivṛti (Pārśva Bheda/ Eka Pāda Parivṛti Bheda/ Parivṛti Bheda)</b>	<i>Jaṭharaparivṛtiḥ</i>	None	<i>Jaṭharasya parivṛtiḥ, Jaṭharaparivṛtiḥ - the twist of the abdomen</i>	<i>Jaṭhara- the abdomen, Parivṛti – twist, Pārśva – side/lateral Bheda – division, Eka – one Pāda – foot/leg Parivṛti – twist</i>

S.No	Āsana	Grammatically Accepted Expression in Saṃskṛta	Conjunction Split	Compound Split and Meaning	Constituents of Compound
29	<b>Vīparītākaraṇī</b>	<i>Vīparītākaraṇī</i>	None	<i>Vīparītā karaṇī,</i> <i>Vīparītākaraṇī – the action of inversion</i>	<i>Vīparītā – inversion,</i> <i>karaṇī – the act</i>
30	<b>Sālambda Sarvāṅgāsana</b>	<i>Sālambda sarvāṅgāsana</i>	<i>Sālambda sarvāṅga+ āsanam</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Sarvāṅi aṅgāni, sarvāṅgāni – all limbs</i></li> <li>• <i>Sarvāṅgānām āsanam, sarvāṅgāsana – posture of all limbs</i></li> <li>• <i>Ālambena saha vartate iti – sālambda – that which is with a support</i></li> <li>• <i>Sālambdaṃ sarvāṅgāsana, sālambda sarvāṅgāsana – that posture for all limbs which is (done) with a support</i></li> </ul>	<i>Ālambda – Support, Saha – With, Sarva – All, Aṅga – Limb</i>
31	<b>Eka Pāda Ākuñcanāsana</b>	<i>Ekapādākuñcanāsana</i>	<i>Ekapāda+ākuñcana + āsanam</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ekaḥ pādah ekapādah - one leg</i></li> <li>• <i>Ekapādasya ākuñcanam yasmin tat, ekapādākuñcanam – that in which there is contraction/folding of one leg</i></li> <li>• <i>Ekapādākuñcanam āsanam, ekapādākuñcanāsana – the posture where there is folding/contraction of one leg</i></li> </ul>	<i>Eka – One, Pāda – Leg, Ākuñcana – Contraction/ Folding</i>
32	<b>Ākuñcanāsana</b>	<i>Ākuñcanāsana</i>	<i>Ākuñcana+āsana</i>	<i>Ākuñcanasya āsanam, ākuñcanāsana – the posture of contraction</i>	<i>Ākuñcana – Contraction/ Folding</i>

S.No	Āsana	Grammatically Accepted Expression in Saṃskṛta	Conjunction Split	Compound Split and Meaning	Constituents of Compound
33	<b>Eka Pāda Sarvāṅgāsana</b>	<i>Ekapādasarvāṅgāsanam</i>	<i>Ekapādasarva + aṅga + āsanam</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ekaḥ pādah, ekapādah</i> - one leg</li> <li>• <i>Sarvāṅi aṅgāni, sarvāṅgāni</i> – all limbs</li> <li>• <i>Sarvāṅgānām āsanam, sarvāṅgāsanam</i> – the posture of all limbs</li> <li>• <i>Ekapādena sarvāṅgāsanam, ekapādasarvāṅgāsanam</i> – the posture of all limbs by one leg</li> </ul>	<i>Eka – one, pāda – leg, Sarva - all, aṅga - limb</i>
34	<b>Halāsana</b>	<i>Halāsanam</i>	<i>Hala + āsana</i>	<i>Halāḥ iva āsanam, halāsanam</i> – a posture like a plough	<i>Hala – Plough</i>

*This article will continue in the next edition of Darśanam.*

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*Āsana Sāmrāt*

*The King of Postures*

*An Exploration*

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# ŚĪRṢĀSANA AS A VIPARĪTAKARAṆĪ MUDRĀ

TKV Desikachar



In the scheme of *Haṭhayoga* where the harnessing and the channelising of one's life energy is the goal, the *Viparīta Karaṇī Mudrā* occupies a special place. A person's full potential is realised when this energy moves to the top of the head. There are various techniques that the ancient seers had formalised to remove the obstacles in the path of this energy and to aid its movement. All these techniques culminated in the *Viparītakaraṇī Mudrā*, the principle of inversion, one form of which is the *Śīrṣāsana*.

Śrī TKV Desikachar explains this concept starting with the most basic requirements of the practice and moving step-by-step through the various techniques, all of which are used in *Śīrṣāsana*.

Our ancients understood human life as being governed by *Prāṇa*. The force that goes everywhere. They visualised this *Prāṇa* flowing in the human body through 72000 *Nāḍi-s*.

The *Nāḍi-s* are special channels or pathways for the flow of *Prāṇa*. Among these 72,000 *Nāḍi-s*, there are three *Nāḍi-s* which are very important. These are the *Iḍā*, the *Pīṅgala* and the *Suṣūmnā Nāḍī*. Reference to these *Nāḍī-s* can be found in the *Upaniṣad-s*, the *Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā*, the *Gheraṇḍa Saṃhitā* and the *Yoga-yajñavalkya-saṃhitā*.

The *Suṣūmnā Nāḍī* forms a straight line running from the base of the spine to the top of the head. As can be seen from the illustration, the *Iḍā*, and *Pīṅgala Nāḍī-s* also begin at the base of the spine from either side of the *Suṣūmnā Nāḍī* and symmetrically weave their way around it. At the points where these two *Nāḍī-s* begin and end, and at the points where they cross each other, are situated the *Cakra-s*. Starting from the bottom, the six *Cakra-s* are *Mūlādhāra*, *Svādhiṣṭhāna*, *Maṇipūra*, *Anāhata (Hṛdaya)*, *Viśuddhi* and *Ājnā*. At the very end of the *Suṣūmnā Nāḍī*, at the top of the

head, is situated the highest and most important *Cakra*, the *Sahasrāra Cakra*.

The *Iḍā* and the *Pīṅgala* are also known as the "*Ha*" and "*Ṭha*" *Nāḍī-s*. *Haṭhayoga* is the *Yoga* directed towards the union of the energies of these two *Nāḍī-s* in the *Suṣūmnā*. This is as defined in the *Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā*.

The *Prāṇa* is often dissipated throughout the 72,000 *Nāḍī-s* due to an improper lifestyle and lack of discipline of body and mind. This leads to an imbalance in the system which could result in illness.

The highest and the ideal situation is where the *Prāṇa* is flowing through the *Suṣūmnā*. Preventing this flow into *Suṣūmnā* is the *Kuṇḍalīni*. The *Kuṇḍalīni*, which is the nucleus of the imbalance in the body, sits somewhere between the *Mūlādhāra* and the *Svādhiṣṭhāna Cakra-s* blocking the passage of the *Prāṇa* further up the *Suṣūmnā Nāḍī*.

When a person gets the *Prāṇa* to enter the *Suṣūmnā*, that person is called a *Yogi*. He is in perfect balance and is said to have mastered nature. Through their experience, these *Yogi-s* evolved three steps in the practice of *Haṭhayoga*. These three steps are *Āsana*, *Prāṇāyāma* and *Mudrā*. The practice of *Āsana-s* removes the physical obstacles on the path to this union. Through *Prāṇāyāma*, the obstacles in the *Nāḍī-s* are removed. This is indicated in the name of the most important type of *Prāṇāyāma*, *Nāḍīsuddhi Prāṇāyāma*. *Nāḍīsuddhi* means purification of the *Nāḍī-s* and especially the purification of the *Iḍā* and *Pīṅgala*. *Prāṇāyāma* is possible only if the person can sit and breathe deeply for a length of time. *Āsana-s* help prepare a person to meet these requirements and are therefore, a necessary preliminary practice for *Prāṇāyāma*.

Once a person has practised *Āsana* and *Prāṇāyāma* over a length of time, he can then begin the third step of *Haṭhayoga*, the *Mudrā-s*. To understand the significance of *Mudrā*, one must appreciate the role of exhalation in breathing. Breathing has two parts, inhalation and exhalation. During inhalation, the *Prāṇa* is brought towards the *Mūlādhāra Cakra*. It is on exhalation that the *Prāṇa* is taken up the *Suṣūmnā* towards the *Sahasrāra Cakra*. The *Prāṇa* must first ascend through the initial six *Cakra-s* and only then reach the highest point, the *Sahasrāra*. This is why we are instructed, right from the beginning, both in *Āsana* and *Prāṇāyāma*, to master the exhalation. Without this, our practice is meaningless. T Krishnamacharya, when designing an *Āsana* course, would lay great emphasis on postures like *Paścimatānāsana*, *Mahāmudrā* and *Upaviṣṭakoṇāsana*, which aid exhalation. Exhalation is therefore, the first step in the attempt to move the *Prāṇa* from the *Mūlādhāra* towards the *Sahasrāra*.

Another important aspect of the breath is the *Kumbhka Balam*, the ability to hold the breath. There are two types of *Kumbhaka-s*, *Antaḥkumbhaka* and *Bāhyakumbhaka*. *Antaḥkumbhaka* is the ability to hold the breath after inhalation. *Bāhyakumbhaka* is the ability to hold the breath after exhalation. Though both are important, *Bāhyakumbhaka* is the more important of the two. It is *Bāhyakumbhaka* which corrects the problems of the *Tamoguṇa*, which through the heaviness of the *Apāna* pulls every thing downward. Even the *Mūlādhāra Cakra* can be pulled down from its normal position. This can result in various illnesses like obesity, haemorrhoids, piles, constipation and prolapsed uterus. When the *Mūlādhāra* is pulled down it becomes more difficult for the *Prāṇa* to enter the *Suṣūmnā*. Exhalation and the holding of breath after exhalation perform two functions: moving the *Prāṇa* from the *Mūlādhāra* to the *Sahasrāra* as well as moving the *Mūlādhāra* itself towards the *Sahasrāra*.

To increase the effect of exhalation and the hold after exhalation, the ancients introduced certain *Mudrā-s*. Chief among these are the *Uḍḍīyānabandha* and the *Mūlādhārabandha Mudrā*. *Uḍḍīyāna* means to lift up. In *Uḍḍīyānabandha*, the person not only exhales and holds the breath after exhale, but also consciously moves the *Mūlādhāra* towards the *Sahasrāra* by pulling the stomach up. *Mūlādhārabandha* is the fixing of the *Mūlādhāra Cakra* at the right position.

With the heaviness of the body removed by *Āsana* practice, with the *Nāḍī-s*, especially the *Idā* and the *Piṅgala*, cleansed and purified by *Nāḍīsuddhi Prāṇāyāma*, with the development of the power of exhalation and *Bāhya Kumbhaka* and with the use of *Uḍḍīyāna* and *Mūla Bandha*, the *Prāṇa* is helped in its journey up the *Suṣūmnā Nāḍī*.

The ancients also visualised an *Agni*, a fire, burning in the region of the stomach. With every inhalation, this fire is directed down towards the *Apāna*, the accumulated impurities, that lie below the *Mūlādhāra*. Through *Antaḥ Kumbhaka*, the hold of breath after inhalation, the fire that is directed to the *Apāna* is retained in that direction for a length of time. It is through *Antaḥ Kumbhaka* that the *Apāna* and slowly the *Kuṇḍalini* are eliminated. This is the importance of *Antaḥ Kumbhaka* in *Prāṇāyāma*. *Bāhya Kumbhaka* also helps in the elimination of the impurities. When doing *Bāhya Kumbhaka* with *Uḍḍīyāna Bandha*, the seat of the impurities is brought closer to the fire.

To help in moving the *Mūlādhāra* further up towards the *Sahasrāra*, the ancient masters took advantage of the natural tendency of the *Tamoguṇa*. The *Tamoguṇa* is associated with heaviness and always pulls everything downward. In an inverted posture, the *Tamoguṇa* would, in the exercise of its natural tendency, help bring the *Mūlādhāra* closer to the *Sahasrāra*. To this end, they devised the *Vīparītakarāṇi Mudrā*, a form of which, is the *Śīrṣāsana*. In this posture, one can perform both *Bāhya* and *Antaḥ Kumbhaka* and can also adopt *Uḍḍīyāna* and, thereby using all the techniques available to achieve the goal. It is for this reason that *Śīrṣāsana* is considered the crown of all *Āsana-s*.

There is yet another benefit of doing *Śīrṣāsana*. The ancients had visualised the existence of an *Amṛtam*, life giving nectar, in the region of the *Ājñā Cakra*. This *Amṛtam* is constantly falling, drop by drop, from the head into the fire below and is consumed by it. It is through this process that we age. In *Śīrṣāsana* the head is below the rest of the body and so the *Amṛtam* is preserved in the *Ājñā Cakra*. In this way, we can, for a short period, arrest the continual downward flow of this precious life-giving nectar. Finally, there is the nature of fire to always burn upward. When the body is inverted, the fire which originally had the *Apāna* below it, will now be burning the *Apāna*. What was sought to be achieved (the elimination of the *Apāna*)

through breathing, is now achieved through posture. We therefore see that, when in *Śīrṣāsana*, the goal of getting the *Prāna* into the *Suṣūmnā* is greatly helped by:

- First, a good exhalation is possible in this posture through which alone it is possible for the *Prāna* to move from the *Mūlādhāra* to the *Sahasrāra Cakra*.
- Second, the use of *Bāhya Kumbhaka*, hold of breath after exhalation, which further helps the movement of *Prāna* from the *Mūlādhāra* to the *Sahasrāra Cakra* and also helps to correctly position the *Mūlādhāra Cakra* making it easy for the *Prāna* to enter.
- Third, the use of *Uḍḍīyāna* and *Mūlabandha Mudrā-s*, further help the *Mūlādhāra Cakra* to be in the correct position.
- Fourth, inhalation and *Antaḥ Kumbhaka*, hold of breath after inhalation, which draw the fire towards the *Apāna* and help eliminate both the impurities and the *Kuṇḍalini*.
- Fifth, the inversion, whereby the *Tamogunṇa* is used to draw the *Mūlādhāra Cakra* towards the *Sahasrāra*.
- Sixth, the nature of fire is to always burn upward and so, in an inverted posture, it burns the *Apāna* which is now right above it.

*Śīrṣāsana* is not just an *Āsana* but a form of the *Viprītakaraṇī Mudrā*, which is considered the most important among the *Mudrā-s*. Great though the benefits of this posture are, it must not be done without adequately preparing the system over a period of time. Even when the system has been prepared and is ready for the posture, and even if the person regularly practices *Śīrṣāsana*, it must never be done as the first part of the practice. To do otherwise could result in problems. It is also absolutely essential that the person learns the posture under the guidance of an experienced teacher.

Before doing *Śīrṣāsana* one must first take care of the *Dhātu-s* (tissues) in the body. *Āsana-s* should be practiced which will help the *Prāna* centre itself in the *Idā* and the *Pīṅgala*. This should be followed by *Prāṇāyāma* and then by *Bandha-s*. Only then can the *Viprītakaraṇī Mudrā* be introduced. *Śīrṣāsana* is the highest point of the practice.

It is equally important that the practice should not end with *Śīrṣāsana* but should gradually taper down. The

ancients had an interesting sequence of practice. In the *Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā* (chapter 2, verse 48) there is quoted an important text called *Kūrma Purāṇa*. In this quotation, *Śiva* describes how *Āsana-s* should be practiced. The order described is; *Āsana*, *Prāṇāyāma*, *Samkalpa* (visualisation and offering) to *Ādiśeṣa*, *Āsana*, *Śavāsana* and then the *Viprītakaraṇī Mudrā*. This is followed by *Prāṇāyāma* in *Siddhāsana*. The order is significant. The practice did not stop with *Śīrṣāsana* but something more was done. The practice was long and done in the *Brahmamuhūrta*, early morning, all of which is referred to in the *Kūrma Purāṇa*.

Through *Śīrṣāsana*, the obstacles to the movement of the *Prāna* into the *Suṣūmnā* are removed. It should be remembered that if the person cannot do proper *Prāṇāyāma*, *Śīrṣāsana* will not be useful. Another necessary requirement is *Sama-kaya-sarīra*, proper alignment of the body. That is why an *Āsana* course contains a range of *Āsana-s*, forward bends, twists, back-arches and side stretches. All these help to keep the spine in its proper axis and precede the initiation into the *Viprītakaraṇī Mudrā*.

*Āsana* practice is not just to reduce heaviness but also to properly align the spine and the body. If there is a misalignment in a normal posture, this could be aggravated by the practice of *Śīrṣāsana*.

According to T Krishnamacharya, different *Āsana-s* bring *Caitanya* (consciousness) to different *Cakra-s*. When in an *Āsana*, the mind focuses on the part most used. In *Paścimatānāsana*, the focus is on the lower back and so the *Mūlādhāra Cakra* is influenced. In *Sarvāṅgāsana*, the focus is the *Jālandharabandha*, as the chin is locked and so the *Viśuddhi Cakra* is influenced. Among *Āsana-s*, *Śīrṣāsana* is the only one where the focus is in the region of the *Sahasrāra Cakra*.

It must be remembered that *Śīrṣāsana* is one form of the *Viprītakaraṇī Mudrā*. For those who cannot do *Śīrṣāsana* or any other inverted posture, alternatives do exist. *Mahāmudrā* is one such alternative which would yield similar benefits. More about these can be known from a study of the third chapter of the *Haṭha-yoga-pradīpikā*.

# THE BIOMECHANICS OF ŚĪRṢĀSANA

Raghu Ananthanarayanan



A lot has been written and debated about Śīrṣāsana and it is surprising that it continues to fascinate and offer itself for exploration. One of the most interesting things about this Āsana is that it seems so simple - just standing on one's head! Yet it is called the King of Āsana-s and epitomises the idea of Yoga itself. In Dhyāna, one turns one's self inside out and in Śīrṣāsana one goes upside down!

The body is composed of bones, soft internal tissue and muscle. The bones provide the structure to the body, But, this is not a rigid mono-block. There are a number of bones linked through joints. Muscles attached to the bones (on either side of the bones) connect the bones together and create the ability of the parts of the body to flex and extend. Ligaments give the joints stability. A posture is maintained through the dynamic balance between many opposing groups of muscles.

When a person stands straight, he does not stand still. He actually sways forward and back very slightly. This is because the muscles that flex and extend the legs, ankles, back, head and neck are in dynamic balance. This balance is finely tuned across a number of joints.

The backbone in particular is composed of several small bones. The person standing is, therefore, like a chain held straight by a set of symmetrical, well balanced rubber bands which are strapped diametrically across it. Good posture is developed over many years of practice. If over the years there is, due to wrong techniques, an asymmetrical development of these muscles, it shows up as bad posture. Also, to achieve this erect posture and the considerably effortful activities of walking, running and jumping, the muscles of the leg and torso need to be very strong. The backbones of the lumbar area are very thick, and the lower back is strongly muscled. The neck, however, is designed only to

hold the head. Therefore, it is much less strongly muscled than the other parts of the body. The entire effort of balancing on one's head, therefore, requires a lot of re-learning by the muscles of the body. The legs which carry the body and provide stability, are up in the air and the neck and shoulders take the strain of carrying the much heavier torso and legs.

The two factors - the blood rushing to the head (not the brain) and the practice of getting the neck and shoulders to balance the body, need preparation. To stay in Śīrṣāsana is easier than getting into the posture and out of it. Both these processes put a greater strain on the neck and shoulder. Within a few seconds, the body and legs must be lifted off the ground, swung into position and stabilised. For this period of time, the effort on the neck and shoulder muscles is very great, particularly because the head is not a flat clear base like the feet.

Though this movement is small, the biomechanical effort required is very great. Considering only the weight of the legs, this movement implies 720 Kg-cms of moment to be balanced and overcome by the neck and shoulders.

'Moment' refers to the force required to rotate an object about an axis. As can be seen from the illustration, the legs have to be rotated about the hip and the effort to achieve this has to be made from the hip.

The force will be transmitted all along the torso with the neck bearing a significant portion of the effort.

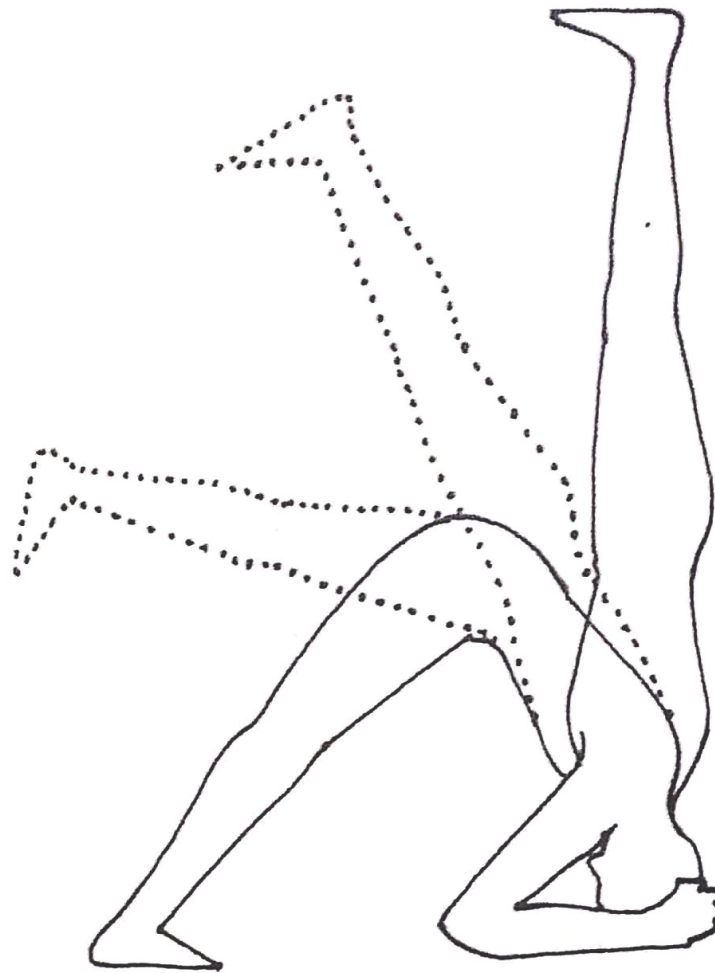
[The figure of 720 Kg-cm of moment is arrived at using specifications relating to a standard individual as is normally done in biomedical engineering calculations. The weight of the person was assumed to be 65 Kgs].

The neck normally carries the head balanced exactly over its neck bones – i.e head movements normally imply overcoming a very small internal resistance.

The difference between the two efforts required is considerable. Therefore, the way the neck and shoulder are prepared becomes crucial to the success of the posture.

To summarise, three major changes occur in the body when *Śīrṣāsana* is performed – inversion of blood flow patterns, new dynamics of balance and the great load on the neck when putting the body into (and helping it out of) the posture.

It is vitally important that a person should be tested for his ability to undergo these changes and the corresponding strain and is led to the practice of *Śīrṣāsana* through careful preparation.



the stage of *śīrṣāsana* where there is the greatest strain on the neck

# A NEUROSURGEON ON ŚIRŚĀSANA

*An Interview With Dr. B Ramamurthi*



**Many people advise against the practice of Śirśāsana saying that the excessive rush of blood to the brain in an upside down posture is harmful. Others cite the same reason as being the benefit of the posture. Could you, as a neurosurgeon, tell us what actually happens?**

The head contains the brain. The brain is the single most important organ in the human body. We must therefore analyse the effects on the brain, when a person adopts a posture where the head is below the heart. There is a popular misconception that when in Śirśāsana, the blood supply to the brain is increased. This is not true. The brain is a very heavily protected organ. It is protected mechanically, structurally, physiologically, chemically and immunologically. Many immune diseases that affect the body, do not affect the brain. Nature has protected the brain enormously.

When the head-down posture is adopted, due to the force of gravity, there will be an increase in the flow of blood towards the head. However, the blood vessels of the brain will immediately contract so as to allow only as much blood as is needed by the brain at a particular moment. So, the posture adopted has no bearing on the blood supply to the brain. The blood flow to the brain is determined by its need. All this is in relation to a person whose systems are functioning optimally. There may be persons whose system cannot withstand the strain that the blood vessels and system undergo in an upside down posture, their mechanisms for the protection of the brain may be inadequate. In this condition, the brain is already in a state of alert and the regulatory mechanisms are in operation. The adopting of an upside down posture in this condition can introduce too many factors leading to a lapse in the regulatory mechanism. This can result in anything ranging from a severe headache to a severe stroke. In a normal condition, however, there is no validity to the notion of increased blood supply to the brain.

**Is there any benefit from the practice of Śirśāsana?**

Yes, When, as in Śirśāsana, the body is placed in an unnatural position, various centres go on alert to protect against any adverse repercussions. In this process the hypothalamus gets activated and it is this which leads to the contraction of the blood vessels to the brain and the regulation of blood supply to it. If this does not happen, it can have disastrous consequences. In this which leads to the contraction of the blood vessels to the brain and the regulation of blood supply to it. The emotions, blood pressure, temperature, sweating, cooling, metabolism, oxygen intake and a host of other activities are controlled by the hypothalamus. Due to the activation of the hypothalamus, the various functions that it controls, all perform at their optimal levels. This leads to the efficient functioning of the system as a whole and thereby contribute to the feeling of well-being which results from the correct practice of Śirśāsana.

In addition, the performance of Śirśāsana will cause a change in the neurotransmitters released by the brain. Neurotransmitters are chemicals released by the brain and every action of the entire human system is controlled by them. The right choice of the neurotransmitter released according to the requirement of situation, is important. This is helped by the increased state of alertness, efficiency and response brought on by the practice of Śirśāsana.

**There are some persons who, after doing Śirśāsana for many years, suddenly develop a problem due to its practice. Why does this happen?**

There is more than one reason why this can happen. As a person grows old, he/she may develop spondylitis. This has become an almost natural consequence of old age, like baldness and grey hair. When this happens, the space between the vertebra becomes smaller leaving less and less space for the nerves to pass. When doing

*Śīrṣāsana* in this condition, the weight of the entire body presses down on the cervical area, further reducing the vertebral space. Over time, a critical stage is reached, beyond which the blood supply to the posterior brain gets affected. When this happens, some people develop problems.

High blood pressure can also develop with age and the dangers of doing *Śīrṣāsana* in this condition have been described earlier.

Another situation where the practice of *Śīrṣāsana* can lead to problems is when a person has arteriosclerosis i.e. thickening of the arteries. During *Śīrṣāsana*, such blood vessels cannot react quickly and this may result in problems.

Finally, with age, the physiological mechanisms become weak and do not always react instantaneously or in the required manner. The blood vessels to the brain may not immediately contract on assuming an upside down posture, thereby allowing excessive blood flow to the brain. This can result in a multitude of problems. After a certain age, it is better to get oneself properly examined and know one's actual condition and capacity before beginning or even continuing with this posture.

#### **Are there any thumb rules by which to know whether to do *Śīrṣāsana* or not?**

If a person's neck movements and blood pressure are normal and if his blood vessels have not thickened, the person can continue to do *Śīrṣāsana*. This is dependent, not so much on chronological age, as on the person's physiological age. Persons who lead an active life, even when old, will continue to have young blood vessels. There are, on the other hand, young persons with sedentary lifestyles who in addition, do not have their minds engaged in stimulating thought.

The physiological age of these two types would be quite different from their chronological age.

The person must be able to turn the neck to either side and keep it there for a few moments without resulting in giddiness. If he can do this, it means that the blood vessels are quite supple and he/she can continue with the practice of *Śīrṣāsana*.

The person should also not have developed ocular tension-glaucoma. The more than normal flow of blood to the head and thereby, to the eyes, can increase the pressure in this region leading to problems.

To repeat, if the blood vessels have not thickened, if the neck is supple and if the person does not suffer from glaucoma, he can continue to practice *Śīrṣāsana*.

#### **Is there any relation between emotion and headstand?**

*Śīrṣāsana* should not be done when in an emotional state. No *Āsana* should be done when one is angry or upset. As mentioned earlier, all aspects of the human system are controlled by chemical releases from the brain called neurotransmitters.

When in the grip of an extreme emotion, certain special chemicals are released. In such a state, if a person were to do *Śīrṣāsana*, which itself triggers the release of certain neurotransmitters, confusing signals may be received by the brain.

#### **Is it alright for young children to do *Śīrṣāsana*?**

It is perfectly alright for young children to do *Śīrṣāsana*. In fact, it is better to start them young, so that by the time they become more self-analytical, they can do it automatically. They can then be introduced to meditation or visualisation when in the posture. There are much greater benefits to be obtained by this combination.

#### **When we teach *Śīrṣāsana*, we don't just ask the person to stand on his head right away. Preparatory postures are first done, then the headstand is done and this is followed by postures that help relieve the strain on the neck. Does this seem logical?**

This is the correct approach. The preparatory postures would serve to test whether the person and especially his/her neck is fit enough, on that day, to perform *Śīrṣāsana*. It would also help prepare the person for the posture.

# *Vyutpatti*

# VYUTPATTI

## THE ETYMOLOGY OF YOGA

*Dr. Jayaraman Mahadevan*



In line with the theme of this issue of *Darśanam*, in this seventh part of *Vyutpatti*, words related to *Āsana-s* with etymological, lexical and textual references are analysed and presented. The terminologies taken up for discussion are:

- *Sthira*
- *Sukha*
- *Āsana*
- *Aṅga*

### 1. *STHIRA*

#### Etymology

*Ṣṭhā + kirac* - the word *Sthira* is derived by adding the suffix, *Kirac* to the root *Ṣṭhā*. The meaning of the root *Ṣṭhā* is *Gatinivṛtti* – to stay or to stand. The meaning of the Suffix *Kirac* is the doer.

The derivation of the word is *Tiṣṭhati iti sthiraḥ*, that which his/ the one who stays/is steady.

Lexicon - The term *Sthira* is not found in *Amarakośa*.

#### Lexicon

The term *Sthira* is not found in *Amarakośa*.

### USAGE IN YOGA TEXTS (*BHAGAVADGĪTĀ/ YOGASŪTRA/ HATHAYOGAPRADĪPIKĀ*)

#### *Bhagavadgītā:*

There are eight occurrences of the term in this text. They are described in brief :

- Chapter 5 Verse 20 - *Sthirabuddhirasammūḍho brahmaidbrahmaṇi sthitaḥ*. Here the steadiness of the intellect is spoken as a necessity to be able to abide in *Brahman*.
- Chapter 6 Verse 11 - *Śucau deśe pratiṣṭhāpya sthiramāsanamātmanaḥ*. Here for the purpose of meditation it is stated that the seat on should be steady on which one sits and meditates.
- Chapter 6 Verse 13 - *Samam kāyaśirogrīvaṃ dhārayannacalam sthiraḥ*. This verse also occurs in the context of meditation. But here the practitioners is expected to be steady.
- Chapter 6 Verse 26 - *Yato yato niścarati manaścañcalamasthiram ...* The word *Asthira* is used which opposed to *Sthira*. Guidelines to the meditator is given to manage the unsteady mind.
- Chapter 6 Verse 33 - *...Etasyāham na paśyāmi cañcalatvāsthitim sthirām*. Here inability to follow the practice of *Yoga* of *Samattva* advocated by *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* is expressed by Arjuna as the mind is fickle and unstable.

- Chapter 12 Verse 9 - *Atha cittam samādhātum na śaknoṣi mayi sthiram...* Here *Abhyāsayoga* is advocated for the one who is unable to fix his mind steadily on *Śrī Kṛṣṇa*.
- Chapter 12 Verse 19 - *Aniketah sthiramatirbhaktimānme priyo narah ..* This is about a devotee who is dear to Lord. Being endowed with a steady mind is also enlisted as one of the qualities that endears a person to the God.
- Chapter 17 Verse 8 - *...Rasyāḥ snigdhaḥ sthirā hr̥dyā āhārāḥ sātṭvikapriyāḥ*. Being *Sthirā* (steady) is presented as one among the qualities of a *Sātṭvik* food. *Ācārya Śaṅkara* describes *Sthirā* as *Cirakālasthāyinaḥ dehe*, food that stay in the body for a long time (and give energy).

### Yogasūtra

In this text the term appears in just one occasion in Chapter 2, *Sūtra* 46: *Sthirasukhamāsanam*.

It could be seen that the term *Sthira* is one among the characteristics of *Āsana*. The following is a set of views of the *Saṁskṛta* commentators on the word *Sthira*:

- **Commentaries** - *Tattvavaiśārādī, Yogavārttikam, Maṇiprabhā, Yogasiddhāntacandrikā*  
- **Meaning – Niścalam – motionless**
- **Commentary** - *Bhojavṛtti, Candrikā*  
- **Meaning - Niṣkampam – non shaking/trembling**
- **Commentaries** - *Yogasudhākara - Dehacalanarāhityalakṣaṇaṁ sthairyam*  
- **Meaning - the steadiness characterised by nonmoving of the limbs**
- **Commentary** - *Vivaraṇam*  
- **Meaning - Manogātrāṇāmupajāyate sthiratvam – the steadiness of the body and the mind**

Almost all commentators concur on the views of each other. But it can be noted that all shades of steadiness are brought out in the commentaries such as non-moving, non-shaking, non-trembling, steadiness of both the body and the mind.

### Haṭhayogapradīpikā:

There are six occurrences of the term *Sthira* in this text. A brief description of the same is given hereunder:

- *Ekam pādāṁ tathaikasmin vinyasedūruṇi sthiram – vīrāsanaṁitīritam* | 1.21. In describing *Vīrāsana* it has been stated that one foot has to be placed on the thigh firmly.
- *Matsyendrapūṭham ... candrasthiratvaṁ ca dadāti pumsām* || 1.27. As a benefit of the practice of *Matsyendrāsana* - steadiness of *Candra* is stated. It is known in the *Haṭha* tradition that when the *Candra* (life energy) melts a human being moves (gradually) towards mortality. A *Yogin* who makes *Candra* steady lives long.
- *Hṛdaye kṛtvā hanuṁ susthiram ... siddhāsanaṁ procyate* || 1.35. In describing *Siddhāsana*, it has been stated that the chin has to be placed firmly in the chest.
- *Ardhonmīlitalocanaḥ sthiramanā ...* ||4.41. This is a verse in the context of describe the practice of *Śāmbhavī Mudra*, where it has be prescribed that “having half closed the eyes, the chin has to be placed firmly in the chest etc”
- *Svasthāne sthiratāmeti pavano ...* || 4.51. This portion is from the practice of *Khecari* where by the practice the *Pavana* (*Prāṇa*) becomes steady in the *Suṣumnānāḍī*.
- *Tatra cittam sthīrikuryāt yāvat sthirapadaṁ vrajet* || 4.82. This verse occurs in the context of describing the practice of *Nādānusandhāna* through the process of *Pratyāhāra*. The expression *Sthirapada* is worth noting. The commentary *Jyotsnā* clarifies that *Sthirapada* refers to the fourth state of awareness (*Turyā*). By practicing the *Nādānusandhāna* this fourth state is attained.

## 2. SUKHA

### Etymology

The etymology to the term is given in two ways:

- Derivation from the root with a suffix
- Compound word and it's split.

#### Derivation from the root with a suffix:

*Sukha+ac* - when the suffix 'ac' is added to the root *Sukha* – the word *Sukha* is attained. The meaning of the root is *Tatkriyāyām* – to make happy, to be happy. The meaning of the suffix 'ac' is *Bhava* (action). This suffix is added based on the rule of Sage *Pāṇini* - *Bhāve'c* (*Aṣṭādhyāyī* 3.3.56)

Then the derivations statement would be *-Sukhyate iti Sukham*, the act of being happy.

#### Compound word and it's split:

*Śobhanāni khāni yena tat - Sukham* |

Alternatively, as could be seen above, the word *Sukha* is also seen as a compound word. The compound analysis was presented above. It means, that by which the spaces (*Khāni*) become beautiful (*Śobhanāni*).

What might be the space referred to here? The space may refer to the space of the heart, that by which the mind space/space of the heart becomes beautiful (pleasant experience). The space could also point the spaces outside or the world outside. This may mean that, if a person is happy within he sees happiness/pleasantness/beauty all around.

### Lexicon

In this, we find the following terms used as synonym for *Sukha*:

*Syādānandathurānandaḥ śarmaśātasukhāni ca –*  
*1.4.25*  
*ānandathu, ānanda, śarma, śāta and Sukha*  
(are synonyms)

## USAGE IN YOGA TEXTS

### (*BHAGAVADGĪTĀ/ YOGASŪTRA/* *HATHAYOGAPRADĪPIKĀ*)

#### *Bhagavadgītā:*

There are 39 occurrences of the term *Sukha* in this text. As the occurrences are numerous they are summarised Chapter wise.

- Chapter 1 – Verses 32, 33, 37, 45. It is interesting to see that all these four verses are spoken by Arjuna, who overcome by the vision of impending suffering and lack of clarity states for the greed of happiness and pleasure we have started this war and tries to convey that he wants to shun these pleasures and stop the war.
- Chapter 2 – Verses 14, 15, 32, 38, 46, 66. These five verses are spoken by *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* where he says sensory pleasures are transient, a courageous person is the one who sees comfort and sorrow in a balanced manner, that warriors are lucky (*Sukhi*) who have a win-win situation where if killed in war attain heaven if survive and win the war the attain kingdom, fight with a sense of equanimity to pleasure and suffering, *Sthitaprajña* is the one who is not attached to pleasures.
- Chapter 4 – Verse 40. Here it is stated that a person who is doubtful does not attain *Sukha*.
- Chapter 5 – Verse 3, 13, 21, 23, 24. In these five occurrences it is stated that a person who neither hates nor is attached easily (*Sukha*) is freed from bondage, a person who renounces from his mind exists happily, endless pleasure is attained by turning inwards, a person who is able to control the urge created by desire and anger is happy, a person who is internally happy is the one who is liberated.
- Chapter 6 – Verse 7, 21, 27, 28 – In these four occurrences it is stated that *Paramātmān* (supreme being) is attained by the one who has equanimity in happiness and sorrow, an exalted state of happiness is achieved when a person is firmly established in the awareness of consciousness, a person with a peaceful mind attains great happiness.

- Chapter 9 – Verses 2, 33. In these two occurrences it is stated that the *Rājavidyā* that will be spoken in the chapter is very easy (*Susukha*) to practice and *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* advises this world is full of unpleasant experiences be devoted to me.
- Chapter 10 – Verse 4. It is stated here that the one who is devoted the Lord attains happiness among other noble experiences.
- Chapter 12 – Verses 13, 18. In these two occurrences it is stated that among other qualities that lead to liberation from worldly life – having equanimity in pleasure and pain is one & a person with equanimity in pleasure and pain is dear to *Śrī Kṛṣṇa*.
- Chapter 13 – Verse 6, 20. In these couple of occurrences it can be seen that *Sukha* (pleasure) is an aspect of the *Kṣetra* (the field/matter and not consciousness) and interestingly it is stated that in experiencing sorrow and happiness - *Puruṣa* is the cause.
- Chapter 14 – Verse 6, 9, 24. In these three occurrences it has been stated that *Sattva* binds with *Sukha*, *Sattva* leads to *Sukha* and to transcend the three *Guṇa-s* one should have a state of equanimity in the experiences of pain and pleasure.
- Chapter 15 – Verse 5. In this solitary reference we again see that they attain liberation who are free from the dualities of happiness and pain.
- Chapter 16 – Verses 14, 23. In these two reference see that the one who declares (to the envy of others) that I am happy etc., is endowed with demonic quality and the one who violates the *Śāstra* (injunctions on traditional way of life) does not attain *Sukha*.
- Chapter 17 – Verse 8. It is indicated that a *Sāttvik* food that which is also pleasing (grants *Sukha*).
- Chapter 18 – Verses 36, 37, 38,39. In these four references we see *Sātvika*, *Rājasika* and *Tāmasika* *Sukha-s* being defined.

## Yogasūtra

In *Yogasūtra*, we see five occurrences of the term *Sukha* – 1.33, 2.5, 2.7, 2.42, 2.46.

*maitrīkaruṇāmuditopekṣāṇām  
sukhaduḥkhaḥpunyāpunyaviśayāṇām  
bhāvanātaścitaprasādanam (1.33)*

Four types of *Bhāvana-s* (visualisations) are mentioned in this *Sūtra* for attainment of state of peace of mind. One among them is having an attitude of friendliness towards those who are in a state of happiness (and not envy their happiness).

*nityāśuciduhkhānātmasu  
nityāśucisukhātmakhyātiravidyā (2.5)*

This *Sūtra* defines *Avidyā* as wrong knowledge, among other kinds of misapprehensions, perceiving a source of suffering as pleasure is also one.

*Sukhānuśayī rāgaḥ (2.7)*

The *Rāga* - passion is defined here. It is that affliction that which follows a pleasurable experience.

*Santoṣādamuttamaḥ sukhālābhaḥ (2.42)*

This *Sūtra* states that by practicing contentment (*Santoṣā*) great happiness is attained.

*Sthirasukhamāsanam (2.46)*

*Āsana* is defined as that which is steady and comfortable.

## Haṭhayogapradīpikā:

There are ten occurrences of the term *Sukha* in this text. The gist of the context of their occurrences is conveyed chapter wise.

- Chapter 2 – Verses 41, 48, 66, 69, 70, 72 – In these six occurrences of the term *Sukha* in the in the chapter on *Prāṇāyāma*, it has been stated that by systematic practice of regulation of breath. *Prāṇa* enters *Suṣumnā* comfortably/easily (*Sukhād*), a *Yogin* should be seated in a comfortable (*Sukhada*) seat for the practice of *Prāṇāyāma*. *Bhastrika* practice grants

comfort/happiness (*Sukhada*), the practice of *Mūrccā Prāṇāyāma* grants *Sukha*, by the practice of *Plāvinī Prāṇāyāma* one easily (*Sukhāt*) floats on the surface of the water and *Kevalakumbhaka* is defined as the comfortable (*Sukha*) retention of breath that does not follow inhalation or exhalation.

- Chapter 3 – Verses 119. It is stated that by the practice of *Śakticālana* one should awaken *Kuṇḍalinī* that is comfortably (*Sukha*) asleep.
- Chapter 4 - Verses 38, 78, 111. In these three verses, it has been stated that by *Śāmbhavīmudrā* & *Khecarīmudrā* one experiences of the bliss of consciousness (*Citsukha*), in the state of *Rājayoga* bliss is experienced, in the state of *Samādhi* neither pleasure nor pain is experienced.

### 3. ĀSANA

#### Etymology

*Ās+lyuṭ* - The word *Āsana* is derived by adding the suffix *lyuṭ* to the root “*Ās.*” The meaning of the root is “to sit” and the meaning of the suffix is *Bhava* – the act. This addition of the suffix to the root is based on the rule of Sage *Pāṇini* (*Aṣṭādhyāyī - Lyuṭ Ca 3.3.115*).

The derivation statement based on this would be - *Āsyate iti Āsanam* – the act of being seated.

#### Lexicon

There are three occurrences of the term in *Amarakośa* of which the first one is what is closer to the context of *Yoga*. The other meanings are also given for information.

***Pīṭhamāsanam***  
***pīṭha and āsana are synonyms (2.6.138)***  
**To indicate seat**

#### ***Sandhirnā vighraho yānamāsanam dvaidhamāśrayaḥ***

*Sandhi, Vighraha, Yāna, Āsana, Dvaidha, and Āśraya* are the six types of war strategies. *Āsana* generally is being seated or staying put awaiting an opportunity to

attack. There are many types in *Āsana* strategies. (2.8.18)

#### ***Āsanam skandhadeśaḥ syāt***

*Āsana* is a terminology to indicate the shoulder region of an elephant. (2.8.31)

### USAGE IN YOGA TEXTS

#### Usage in *Yoga Texts (Bhagavadgītā/ Yogasūtra/ Haṭhayogapradīpikā)*

##### ***Bhagavadgītā:***

There are three occurrences of the term in this text.

- Chapter 6 Verse 11 - *śucau deśe pratiṣṭhāpya sthīramāsanamātmanah*

One should establish a firm seat in a clean place (for meditation). Though in the verse *Āsana* is used to mean a seat – a couple of verses later in verse 6.13 we see that without using the word *Āsana* – description of body posture for meditation being mentioned (*Samam kāyaśirogrīvam dhārayannacalam sthīrah*) – the body, head and the neck has to be held straight and steady etc.

- Chapter 11 verse 15 - *brahmāṇamīśam kamalāsanastham*

This verse is uttered by Arjuna on seeing the cosmic form of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa*. He says in that cosmic form I see various gods including *Brahmā*, the creator, seated in a lotus seat etc.

- Chapter 11 verse 42 - *Yaccāvahāsārtham asatkṛto'si vihāraśayyāsanabhojaneṣu*

This verse is also part of Arjuna's statement. Here he says that without realising your cosmic nature Oh *Kṛṣṇa* considering you just as my cousin I have playfully insulted you during our wanderings, during sleep, when we were seated (*Āsana*), and during our meal together. (I seek apologies).”

## Yogasūtra-s:

The word *Āsana* occurs twice in this text.

Chapter 2 *Sūtra* 29

*yamanīyamāsanaprāṇāyāmapratyāhāra  
dhāraṇādhyānasamādhayo'ṣṭāvāṅgāni*

In this *Sūtra*, *Āsana* is enlisted as one among the eight limbs of *Yoga*.

Chapter 2 *Sūtra* 46

*sthīrasukhamāsanam*

This *Sūtra* defines *Āsana* as that (posture) which is steady and comfortable.

## Haṭhayogapradīpikā:

In this text the word *Āsana* occurs in 31 verses of which most of the references (24) comes from the first chapter as it is a chapter on *Āsana-s*.

- Chapter 1 – Verses in which the term *Āsana-s* occurs – 17,18,21, 22, 23,25, 26,29, 31-33, 35-38, 40, 43,44,47, 48, 52, 54-56 – 15 *Āsana-s* are mentioned in these 24 verses with their nomenclature, benefits and the method of practice.
- Chapter 2 - The term *Āsana* occurs in five verses in the chapter.
- Verse 1- *Athāsane dṛḍhe yogi...* – The verse conveys that - On attaining firmness in the practice of *Āsana*, a *Yogin* should practice *Prāṇāyama*...
- Verse 26 - *Nābhīdaghnajale pāyau nyastanālotkaṭāsanaḥ ... vastikarma tat.* In this verse that describes the practice of *Vasti-kriyā*, it has been stated that a *Yogin* should be seated in navel deep waters – in *Utkāṭāsana* having inserted a tube in his anus region...etc.
- Verse 48 - *Āsane sukhade yogī badhvā caivāsanam tataḥ.* While commencing the description of *Sūryabhedana* technique of *Prāṇāyama*, it is stated that, in a comfortable seat, having assumed a posture etc.
- Verses 59 & 60 - *Padmāsanaṁ bhavedetat... & samyak padmāsanaṁ baddhvā ...* these two verses

occur in the context of describing *Bhastrikā Prāṇāyama* - a *Yogin* is instructed to assume *Padmāsana* for the practice of this technique.

- Chapter 3 - There is a just one reference to *Āsana* in this chapter.
- Verse 124 ... *Ma dhya m ā n ā ḍ ī ... āsanaprāṇasamyāmād mudrābhiḥ saralā bhavet.* It is stated that by the practice of *Āsana-s*, *Prāṇāyama-s* and *Mudra-s* the *Suṣumnā nāḍī* becomes free from impurities.
- Chapter 4 - This chapter also has a singular reference to the term *Āsana*.
- Verse 10 - *Vividhairāsanaḥ... prabuddhāyām mahāsaktau prāṇaḥ sūnye pralīyate.* The tone of this verse echoes the reference in the third chapter. By the practice of various *Āsana-s* etc *Kuṇḍalinī-śakti*. Is awakened and thereby *prāṇa* enters *Suṣumnā nāḍī*.

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*Questions on Yoga Answered by*

*Śrī TKV Desikachar*

**This segment features questions on *Yoga* raised by various readers of *Darśanam*, when it was being published in the early 90's. Over 23 years have gone by since *Darśanam* was last published, but our questions haven't changed. Śrī TKV Desikachar's answers, given in his own inimitable style, are no less relevant either. Some of these questions and answers have been reproduced here. Names of people asking these questions have been intentionally withheld.**

**“*Āsana-s* should not be done on a bare floor.” Please comment**

Our body has certain parts which are hard and certain parts which are soft. For example, the head is hard and the back is soft. Standing postures can be done on the bare floor. In fact, we suggest doing standing postures only on the bare floor to have a firm grip. When we have to lie down or do back bending and lying *Āsana-s*, we must use a carpet. For example, when you do *Dvipādapātham*, all the weight goes to the head - it is not very comfortable if you are on the bare floor.

In a tropical climate like Madras, when you are lying down to do *Āsana-s* on a bare floor - there will be a lot of sweat on the back. The sweat becomes cool as the bare floor is cold. This will contract the muscles and so here and there you will get a "catch." Some people, when they sleep on the bare floor, after strenuous exercise, cannot get up in the morning. There was a wrestler, who liked to sleep on the bare floor. He wanted to sleep on the cool floor. One day he slept and he just could not get up! I had to go and see him. I advised them to pour some warm water on the floor. When the muscles became a little warm, he could get up. So, on a bare floor, muscles tend to get a catch. The more muscles you have, the more will be the muscular catch. Even a small cotton sheet helps so that the sweat will be absorbed.

In ancient times, the *Śāstra-s* advised that the bare floor is to be avoided. Their advice was that one should spread Darbha grass and then deer skin and then a white (usually cotton) cloth on top of it and then to sit on it. My father often used to say "Don't sit on the bare floor. It will affect your *Agni*." But the reason was entirely different. Those days in villages, they used cow dung to scrub and smear the floor. When this is done, the place becomes a little wet. Soil by its nature will usually have some wetness. So when you are on that floor, what happens is, that part of the body will become very cold and it curbs the blood circulation.

That could be the reason. That is why they used deer skin - it is not only to protect from wetness, but also to insulate us.

**Is it necessary that one should practice *Āsana-s* only while facing East or West?**

It is a question of sentiment. Some of us offer our prayer to the Sun – facing the East in the morning and again facing the West in the evening. But, imagine if it is a Muslim – he faces Mecca for his prayers. From here, Mecca may be westward but for someone in the United States it would be the other way.

Many Indians however believe two things. Firstly, they do not want to face the South. Secondly, they will not “Show” their feet in a direction that may have the idol of God or their teacher. So, this depends on the sentiments and varies with one's background and culture. Since people from various cultures and religions practice *Yoga* we have to respect this variation. Hence, this rule is not absolute.

**Why is it emphasised that exhalation must be longer than inhalation?**

It is a very technical question but I will try to make it simple. Basically, the technique in *Yoga* is elimination. You think of the *Kleśa-s* – it is elimination. So also the *Mala-s*. So, basically the strategy is elimination. Exhalation represents it beautifully. We have removed something so that we can acquire something.

**There are some of us who are involved every day in the practice of *Yoga*, meditation, physical exercises, puja etc. What is the sequence in which these should be practiced and for how long should we practice them?**

It is better to segregate physical exercise and *Yoga*. It is better to do *Yoga* first. *Yoga* will help the person to do

*Pūjā* better. It helps to concentrate better and even to sit better.

**You advocate the performance of a counter pose, after the practice of various *Āsana*-s. Would this not annul (i.e. undo) the effect of the *Āsana* practice?**

When we do a particular *Āsana*, the idea is, we may go to some extreme positions like *Vaśiṣṭhāsana* - standing on one hand. There is so much weight on one hand in *Vaśiṣṭhāsana*, If we don't do a *Pratikriyāsana* - counter pose, probably it will reduce the good effects of this asana - because I may not even be able to move my arms! If I do the *Pratikriyāsana*, I can reduce the strain on the shoulder; the counter pose is meant to counter only the negative effects; not all effects will be nullified. When some action is done, that action has to have its effect. However, there are also some undesirable effects. That is why, if a person prepares for an *Āsana* very well and very systematically, the need for the *Pratikriyāsana* is reduced. If the preparation is not good, there is greater need for the counter pose.

**Different schools of Yoga advocate different starting points for *Āsana* practice. Some start with *Sarvāṅgāsana*, some with *Śirṣāsana*, some with standing, sitting postures etc. Which is correct? Is there any particular order in which *Āsana*-s are to be done?**

*Āsana*-s are to be done in a progressive way. The position from which we are used to - to the position we are aiming at. Usually, we are used to sitting, lying and standing. We are not used to head stand or shoulder stand in our normal life activities. Therefore, usually the practice is, we start with seated, lying and standing postures. Whether we want to start with seated, lying or standing postures depends upon what we want to do ultimately. Suppose we are trying to do *Prāṇāyāma* and our goal is only to do seated *Prāṇāyāma* - we don't have to do *Sarvāṅgāsana* or *Śirṣāsana*. We have to do something which will make us comfortable in doing *Prāṇāyāma*. So we start with some seated postures - something to strengthen and straighten the back is adequate. But it is definitely not a good idea to start with postures which we are not used to, as part of our normal routine activity-such as the head stand (*Śirṣāsana*), *Sarvāṅgāsana* etc.



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