

Shanti Yoga Teacher Training
Asana
Supplemental Handout 1

Key Concepts and Terms from Classical (Patanjali), Hatha and Vinyasa Yoga, Asana 1, Hailey June, 2014

Asana offers time-honored techniques for feeling more at home in your body. When you feel better, you not only enjoy asana practice, but you also have the energy necessary to continue your exploration of the Self, which is the soul of yoga. When you approach the poses with an open mind and loving heart, your journey remains fresh and rewarding as you make the poses your own

- Judith Lasater

Asanas are a doorway to the true nectar of yoga. - Patricia Walden

Biologically our bodies are constantly trying to achieve homeostasis in order to survive. Asana challenges, allow our body to find its own homeostasis. (Balance)

Asana is the most well-known aspect of yoga in the West, but is actually just one part of a wider philosophy, the third limb of Patanjali's classical yoga system, the Yoga Sutra (200 BC - 200 CE). The first two limbs, the Yamas and the Niyamas, provide the foundation for the third limb, Asana. It's essential that they're considered when practicing Asana.

Yamas: Ahimsa (nonviolence), Satya (truthfulness), Asetya (non-stealing), Brahmacharya (right use of life energy), Aparigraha (non-grasping, non-greediness).

Niyamas: Saucha (cleanliness), Santosa (contentment), Tapas (heat, discipline), Svadhyaya (self-study), Isvarapranidhanani (Surrender)

Specific asanas, as we know them, were not addressed in the Sutras. It's believed they were mostly seated asanas in preparation for meditation.

Yoga Sutra that relate directly to the process and practice of asana as translated by Bhavani Maki in the Yogi's Road Map

Sutra 1.2 *Yogas chitta vrtti nirodaha* (Yoga is the intentional resolution of all self-limiting, self-defeating thoughts, patterns, and tendencies within our personal energy field) Pg 83

Sutra 1.12 *Abhyasa vairagya bhyam tannirodhah* (The fusion of practice and dispassion are the means of achieving nirodha) pg 132

*Both practice and non-attachment are required for the intentional resolution of internal conflict.

Sutra 1.13 *Tatra sthitau yatno 'bhyasa* (practice is that steadiness of effort) pg 132

Sutra 2.46 *Sthira sukham asanam* (posture is to be cultivated with the two qualities of steadiness and ease) pg 138

Obstacles to the process - the Kleshas and Gunas

Sutra 2.3 *Avidya asmita raga dvesa abhiniveshah pancha klesha* (ignorance, egocentricity, attraction, aversion, and clinging to life are the five root afflictions) pg 112

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Gunas as described in the Bhagavad Gita, Translation by Stephen Mitchell

Sattva- Light of knowledge is apparent, untainted, and free from sorrow, the embodied is bound by attachment to knowledge and joy

Rajas- passion, craving, greed, constant activity, restlessness, the embodied in bound to never ending activity.

Tamas- delusion, ignorance, darkness, dullness, inertia, the embodied is bound by indolence, and sleep

“Sattva causes attachment to joy, rajas to action, and tamas, obscuring knowledge attaches beings to dullness.”

“Sattva prevails when it masters rajas and tamas both; rajas or tamas prevails when it masters the other two.” (pg 159)

The gunas are always working on the gunas. ~ Richard Freeman.

Hatha (Tantric) Asana History

Yoga is skill in action. Yoga Karmasu Kausalam. Bhagavad Gita (600 BC)

Hatha Yoga is the Union of the Ha (sun) & Tha (moon). Hatha Yoga Pradipika (15th Century CE),

The present experience is sacred. Our body is a tool to reach samadhi.

Vinyasa Asana History

Modern, dates to Krishnamacharya (late 19th century to modern times)

Key Terms

Ujayi Pranayama - Victorious Breath

Drishti - Gaze, placement of the eyes for concentration and inner and outer balance

Bandhas -

Mula Bandha - root lock

Uddiyana Bandha - to fly up, lifting of the lower belly

Jalandhara Bandha - chin lock

Dharana - concentration

Dhyana - meditation

Mudra - “seal”, hand or containment of a particular meaning, energetic concentration/bhava

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Navigating the Flow: Questions to help connect the underlying evolution within a practice

Grounding/Stabilizing - Where is the anchor within a pose?

Activation - Where is the pose activate/initiated from?

Elongation - In which direction is the spine elongating?

Relationship - What is the relationship from one pose to the next?

Asana (“Seat”, to sit)

Categories of Asanas:

- Purvatana - backbending, spinal extension, energizing
- Pascimatana - forwardbending, spinal flexion, calming
- Parivrtti - twisting
- Parsva - asymmetrical/lateral bending
- Viparita - inverted
- Visesa - unusual postures (pompous, particular, specific, peculiar) Arm and leg balances
- Samakaya - Balance to the body (Samasthihi)

Viniyoga and asana, adapted from Yoga for Wellness, by Gary Kraftsow

American Viniyoga founder Gary Kraftsow was trained in the Viniyoga lineage of T.Krishnamacharya, and T.K.V. Desikachar.

The Viniyoga tradition is a therapeutic based style of yoga (Asana), with the intention of balancing physical, mental and emotional dis-ease. It is usually done one on one. In my opinion all Asana should be done to optimize balance in all aspects of the embodied. Therefore, with proper intention, attention, alignment, and understanding all asana can and should be therapeutic.

Proper practice? What is it and what will it look like?

Proper practice will not break down the physical, mental, and spiritual state of the embodied.

Non injurious

Non ego based,

Not too much of any one guna, (no attachment)

Proper practice will look different in each individual body and will change from practice to practice. For this reason it is important to develop the awareness to assess

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your present state, evaluate and set appropriate goals, and develop an appropriate practice.

Always keep in mind that just because someone has achieved the classical form of an asana, doesn't always mean that they have achieved the function or intention of the asana.

Adaptation and modification often play important roles in a proper practice.

Repetition vs Stay

“According to the Viniyoga tradition, the most significant, musculoskeletal and neuromuscular transformation occurs through repetitive movement.” (pg 5)

“On the other hand, the most significant inner purification physiological transformation occurs through holding postures for extended periods of time.” (pg 5)

A person's specific conditions: overweight, tight, hypermobile, etc, need to be considered when deciding for a “repetitive” or a “staying” practice or to decide when and how to modify. If this isn't considered there is a chance of increasing stress, reinforcing poor existing conditions, and increase chance of injury.

How do we avoid these undesirable outcomes?

“Linking our awareness to the spine through our breath”(pg 6)

Knowing and understanding the intentions/functional aspects of the pose, and being aware of and able to block the release valves that will lessen or maybe even lock us out of the intentions.

“Release Valves are compensatory mechanisms that occur when we are unable to stabilize a part of the body because of excessive mobility, or restriction (weakness/tightness), habitual movement patterns, or lack of understanding and/or attention.”(pg 5)

There are numerous release valves in any pose, our ability to identify, and stop them from happening is essential to achieving the benefits of the asana.

Categories of poses, and related intentions and release valves.

Forward folds

Primary intention - stretch structures of lumbo-sacral spine.

Secondary intention - to stretch posterior structures above lumbo-sacral spine including thoracic, cervical spine and shoulder girdle, and to stretch posterior musculature below the lumbo-sacral spine, including pelvic girdle and legs.

Key to the technique- controlling the relationship between flattening or reversing the lumbar curve and the anterior rotation of the pelvis using the breath.

Release valves

- Pelvis in excessive anterior rotation
- Collapsing chest over belly
- Pivoting from lumbar spine when coming up (lifting a telephone pole from one end)

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- Leading with chin, limits benefits full stretch of upper back can create tension in neck and shoulders
- Excessive internal or external rotation of legs prevents full stretching

Backward bends

Primary intention- stretch and expand the frontal structures of the chest and shoulders to stretch anterior muscles of belly, hips and thighs. Primary intention may be more specifically front of upper body or lower body or balanced throughout depending on backbend.

Secondary intention- Strengthen muscles in the back

*However in prone backbends strengthening back is primary, stretching front is secondary.

Key to the technique- controlling proportional relationship between flattening thoracic spine and deepening the lumbar curve. Avoiding tendency to excessively curve the lumbar by using the breath to initiate and support belly strength. Open the chest on the inhale while maintaining the core support that was achieved on exhale.

Release valves

- Excessive lumbar arch
- Collapsing neck backward
- Leading with head (backbend initiated by neck muscles)
- Shoulders to ears when bearing a significant amount of body weight on the arms
- Rounding shoulders forward, no chest opening.
- Hyper flexing the shoulder joints (down dog)

Twists

Primary Intention - To rotate the spine.

Secondary Intention - To adjust the relationship between the shoulder and pelvic girdles and the spine.

Key to the technique- being able to control the spinal twist from the strength of the abdomen, not through the leverage of the shoulder or pelvic girdle muscles. Leverage may increase the twist but should not generate it. The breath will support this process.

Release Valves

- Not sufficiently engaging ab muscles, and relying on the musculature of the pelvic and shoulder girdle, to initiate twist. This limits rotation of the spine.
- Displacing the stabilized part of the body while twisting. ie In standing twists displacing feet, ankles, knees or hips. In supine

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twist, displacing shoulder. However some displacement may be necessary to allow for any movement or to keep the movement more safe.

- Collapsing chest over the belly

Lateral bends

Lateral bends are grouped into 2 distinct classes which determine the primary and secondary intentions.

Class 1: Torso is bent to the side as in Parhigasana

(gate pose)

Primary intention - to laterally stretch the side body from shoulder to hip, and to laterally bend the spine.

Secondary intention - stretch and strengthen the muscles of the shoulder girdle, hip joints, front of pelvis and inner thighs. Pelvic opening.

Class 2: one leg is abducted, externally rotated and held by a hand or a strap creating a fixed frame. As in Anantasana (couch pose)

Primary Intention - Pelvic opening, stretch and strengthen front of pelvis, hip joints, groin, and inner thighs.

Secondary Intention - stretch lateral torso and shoulders.

Key to the technique- ability to control the proportional relationship between pure side bend and natural displacement either twisting or rolling shoulders forward, hips back using the breath.

Release valves

- Rotating hip forward
- Displacing hips backward or laterally
- Rotating shoulder forward
- Displacing shoulder forward
- Overarching lumbar spine
- Collapsing chest, increasing upper back curve
- Internally rotating ankle or knee, collapsing arches

Axial extension

Lengthening and straightening the spine while forward, backward, side bending and twisted are limited.

Primary intention - to decompress the spine while integrating the natural curves, bringing spine into maximum vertical alignment.

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Secondary intention - is to extend the arms and legs augmenting the spinal extension, and creating more space in the joints of the shoulders and hips which in turn increases circulation.

Key to the technique - Initiate the inhale in the upper chest to lift and expand the ribcage, slightly displace head back and tuck chin to. On exhale engaging the belly and the low back muscles to both take the ASIS in and up the front of the spine, while also drawing the front of the sacrum in and up.

Release Valves

- Excessive anterior or posterior rotation of the pelvis
- Collapsing the chest over the belly
- Chin jutted forward, or head collapsed backward
- Shoulders rounded forward
- Hyper flexing shoulders (Down dog)

Inversions

In viniyoga, an inversion is defined as, a posture that provides the Viparita effect, also called the active reversal effect, or when the effect of gravity is reversed on the tissues of the body. This happens to some degree anytime the legs are raised above the head or the head goes below the waist.

Primary Intention - to achieve the active reversal effect

Secondary Intention - Strengthen muscles in the torso, improve posture, and deepen breathing

Key to the technique - in order to achieve active reversal effect, an inverted posture must be held without any stress to the structure for some length of time. Axial extension of the spine is also necessary to find optimal vertical alignment over the base of the pose. This is supported by the breath.

In regards to headstand and shoulder stand the benefit/risk ratio needs to be carefully considered. If a person hasn't had a long term commitment to the practice or lacks awareness of their current condition, these inversions should be avoided in order to reduce risk of strain to muscles, ligaments, and nerves, in the neck, and/or intervertebral compression.

Release valves (inversions)

- Misalignment
- Displaced weight

Contraindications to head and shoulder stand

- Severe skeletal imbalances such as scoliosis
- Weakness, strain, stiffness, in neck, shoulder, upper back
- Chronic head forward/excessive cervical curve posture
- Flattened cervical curve (could be supported with blankets)

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- Long neck combined with a weak upper back
- Small upper torso, large lower torso
- Excessive lumbar curve
- Disc issues
- High Blood Pressure
- Glaucoma
- Obesity
- Head cold/ sinus blockage ??
- Menstruation ??
- Pregnancy ??

Balance

Balance postures, known as “peculiar accomplishments” to the ancient yogis come in 2 distinct varieties. Leg balances and arm balances.

Primary Intention - to focus the mind

Secondary Intention - is the strength and structural integrity

Leg balances- improve body's overall strength and structural integration, particularly in the feet and legs, and they refine how we move our bodies in space.

Arm balances- also work to integrate the body, particularly in hands, arms, shoulders, and core.

Key to the technique - Essentially physics, balancing on an unstable base, using displaced body weight as a counterbalance, this always demands strength, and most often some degree of flexibility.

Leg balance release valves

- Displacing hips back or laterally
- Collapsing chest
- Twisting the torso
- External or internal standing leg rotation
- Leading with chin or collapsing head backward

Arm Balance release valves

- Collapsing chest
- Shoulders lifted to ears
- Sinking pelvis on the arms, bakasana, Parsva bakasana
- Excessive lumbar curve, Pinchamayurasna