



image or manifestation. In the present chapter we will explore the role of asana in yoga and Ayurveda.

Asana and the Greater System of Yoga

Asana is originally part of the deeper practices of yoga, but can also be done as exercise or as a therapy. Most people in the West perform asanas as exercise. This has become the meaning of yoga for them, which they associate with yoga postures. While asana can be a discipline in its own right, asana as exercise or as therapy should not be confused with the role of asana in classical yoga, which goes beyond this. Yoga should not be reduced to asana, which is only a fraction of the greater system.

Asana is mainly meant to help reduce rajas or the quality of turbulence that disturbs the mind (which is why a too active or assertive performance of asanas is counterproductive from a deeper yogic standpoint). Without proper asana to settle the prana, pranayama cannot proceed smoothly. Without proper asana to settle the senses, pratyahara or control of the senses is almost impossible. Without proper asana to settle the mind, concentration and meditation (dharana and dhyana) are very difficult. Those interested in the deeper stages of yoga should not neglect asana. They may benefit from a period of intense asana practice for a few years as part of physical purification. Then their body will not weigh them down as they seek to go deeper into the mind.

Yoga in the true sense of deep meditation usually occurs when the body is at rest in a sitting posture. When deep meditation happens, concern about asana fades away; the physical body and its position are forgotten. Many great yogis, we should note, were not great asana practitioners. Swami Vivekananda, for example, who first brought yoga to the West around the turn of the last century, was poor at asanas except for a few

sitting postures. Similarly, many people who are good at asana may not be adept at deeper yogic meditational practices.

Of the different yoga paths, the yoga of knowledge (jnana yoga) places the least emphasis on asana. From its point of view, the cultivation of attention is the main thing. Similarly, the yoga of devotion (bhakti yoga) is not asana-oriented either. It emphasizes divine love and the attitude of the heart. Raja Yoga emphasizes meditation and makes asana important only in a preliminary sense. Hatha yoga is the main yoga that uses asana as a primary tool. Yet prana is more important in hatha yoga than asana practice.

Many great yogis learned their asanas from their own awakened prana, not from physical practice. In fact, prana is the original teacher of yoga postures, not mere human instruction. The true teacher of asana does so through awakening the prana of the student, not simply by teaching how to put the body into different poses. We should learn to use the power of prana to direct our asana practice from within, making it a creative process. When prana directs asana, its healing power is much greater. When prana is the focus of the asana practice and the movements (asanas) are placed on the flow of breath (prana) as pearls are placed on a string, then you have the practice of yoga as outlined by Patanjali in the *Yoga Sutras*.

Asana and Ayurveda

Ayurveda recommends asanas as its most important lifestyle recommendation for exercise. It also prescribes asanas as an important treatment measure for various diseases. Half of ayurvedic treatment is what goes into the body, which is mainly food. The other half is what the body does by way of expression, which is mainly exercise. Asana deals with this. Asana and food therefore are the two most important physical treat-



ment measures in Ayurveda.

On the level of prana; herbs are the food and pranayama is the exercise. For these to work properly, the foundation of right posture and right diet in the physical body are necessary. A great variety of asanas is necessary to deal with the exercise and therapeutic requirements of different individual constitutions and their changing imbalances.

Asanas help treat all diseases but are rarely a complete treatment in themselves. Their action is mainly indirect, except in the case of musculoskeletal or structural problems. Asanas work to improve circulation to disease-affected areas in order to release toxins and improve the healing and growth of tissues. This catalyzes the body's healing processes on several levels.

Purpose of Asana

Asana is the main yogic tool for balancing the physical body. It consists of various static postures and physical movements performed to release tension, improve flexibility, maximize the flow of energy, and remove friction. The purpose of asana is to create a free flow of energy in order to help direct our attention within. But this flow of energy can also focus on the body to treat its ailments.

Our physical posture affects our health, vitality and awareness. The mind-body complex consists of various interrelated channels — from those which carry food to those which carry thoughts. These channels are held together on a physical level by the musculoskeletal system, the shape of which is determined by our posture.

Wrong posture creates various stresses, causing contractions that impair or block the proper flow through the channels. It inhibits the circulation of energy and nutrients while allowing toxins and waste materials to accumulate. Such blockages cause



discomfort and reduce functioning, resulting in pain and disease. As mind and body are interconnected, physical blockages intertwine with mental and emotional blockages and hold various addictions, compulsions, and attachments.

Physical Body

The physical body (*annamaya kosha*) is centered in the digestive tract. If our posture is wrong then movement through the digestive tract gets obstructed. This disturbs or lowers the functioning of agni, the digestive fire, which in turn weakens or deranges digestion, leading to various ailments.

Tightness in the upper back and chest weakens the appetite, which is determined by the prana in the head and mouth. Tightness in the middle back and mid-abdomen weakens the digestive fire in the small intestine, which can become squashed by accumulated tension, causing malabsorption of food. Tightness or weakness in the lower back and abdomen constricts and weakens the colon. This creates gas and distention and upsets elimination, resulting in constipation or diarrhea and other problems of *apana vayu*.

Pranic Body

The pranic body (*pranamaya kosha*) works mainly through the respiratory and circulatory systems of the physical body. Oxygen, the physical counterpart of prana, is carried through the blood to energize all the tissues. If our posture is wrong then the lungs get impaired in their function. The breath becomes shallow and oxygen absorption is reduced. Mucus and stagnant air build up in the lungs, leading to congestion, infections and allergies. Resistance to air-borne pathogens is lowered along with poor immune function. Naturally, the posture of the upper and middle back strongly affects the lungs and circulation, particularly *vyana vayu*. *lead → never.*

Shallow → open profound, superficial.



Wrong posture prevents the natural upward power of prana (udana vayu) through which we stand straight, feel happy and positive, and strive to grow and evolve in life. It causes apana, the downward energy, to increase along with feelings of heaviness, depression and lowering of energy.

Mind/Nervous System

The mental body works mainly through the head, brain and nervous system. If our posture is wrong then nerve impulses are disturbed. Tension in the neck reduces blood flow to the head and lowers mental energy. This contributes to headaches and sinus allergies, as well as other problems not only of the mind but of the pranic body.

The nervous system is closely connected with the skeletal system and, in ayurvedic thought, nerve tissue develops from bone tissue. Prana is held in the nerves and apana in the bones. The nervous system connects specifically to vata dosha, the biological air humor, which is the chief or guide of the other two doshas.

Wrong posture therefore aggravates vata primarily and disturbs the entire mind-body complex. Vata accumulates as cold and dryness in the bones and joints, leading either to stiffness and reduced movement or to tremors and disturbed movements. This tension gets transferred to the nerves, leading to insomnia, anxiety and emotional instability. The nervous system is governed by the spine, so all distortions of the spine will cause corresponding nerve tension and problems, mainly of a vata nature. By loosening the joints through yoga postures, the accumulated vata gets relieved, improving health and awareness on all levels. We can easily observe how fear and stress cause the body to tighten up. Such emotions get held in the bones and prevent our energy from moving freely.



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Importance of Asana

Asana has tremendous therapeutic effects on body, prana and mind, on our physical structure, vital energy and creative intelligence. Unfortunately most of us today neglect our posture and do little to develop flexibility. Whatever exercise we do is usually of a strained or stressful type — aerobic exercises like running or weight lifting that cause further tension to accumulate and at best bring about only a one-sided development.

Anyone who works sitting at an office desk, particularly in the computer world of today, will tend to bad posture. Anyone who does a job that requires only one type of physical activity will have a posture that gets distorted in the direction of their work. Often our most comfortable lounging chairs also distort our posture during hours of resting or watching television.

Intellectual people, who are commonly vata in nature, neglect their bodies and hold them in stiff positions which makes flexibility decline. This can cause them to become hypersensitive owing to the accumulated vata in the bones. Traveling also aggravates vata for those who have jobs that require frequent flying or driving.

Yet even people who perform asanas on a daily basis may do so in a way that is not optimal. Asanas done forcefully or focused on the goal rather than on the process or journey — attempting to place the body in some ideal posture that is not natural to it — can result in tension or injury. Asana done without a cultivation of detachment, even if helpful on a physical level, can lead to an increased fixation on the body and rigidity of the mind and emotions.

Too much emphasis on asana also is not good. It can increase body consciousness and enhance the physical ego. If we really want to go into the full system of yoga, the time we spend doing asanas should not substitute for that spent in deeper



practices of pranayama, mantra and meditation.

Asana and Age

Babies are naturally flexible and can do movements that adults, even those possessing great flexibility, are incapable of. Children are naturally physically active and athletic and like to play and run, exploring all the potentials of bodily movement. Childhood is the stage of life to begin asana practice to create a life-long foundation of right posture and flexibility.

Old age, beginning around the age of sixty-five, is the age of vata. Our bodily fluids gradually dry out along with declining vitality. The joints begin to stiffen, with loss of flexibility leading to arthritis. Asana is one of the best remedies for countering the effects of the aging process and for preventing vata from accumulating.

Movement-oriented asanas (vinyasas) are mainly for the young in whom the quality of rajas or action prevails. They need to develop their bodies and their minds are as yet immature. After the age of twenty-four, such movement asanas should gradually be replaced with a more internal form of asana practice emphasizing the development of the mind, particularly the study of spiritual teachings. After the age of forty-eight, one moves into the period when the inner mind develops as physical energies withdraw. During this time, one's meditation becomes more important than asana. After seventy-two, the mind develops yet further and physical energy begins to decline. This should be a period of deep meditation, yet it is necessary to continue asana to counter the aging process. It should be an integral part of our lifestyle regimen at any stage of life, even when it ceases to be our main concern in yoga.



Asana and Massage

Massage is an important tool for clearing toxins from the musculoskeletal system. Oil massage loosens the joints and nourishes the bones and nerves. Massage-related therapies like steam therapies, saunas and sweat lodges improve flexibility and remove toxins through the skin. After oil massage, asanas are easier to perform. Combined oil massage and steam therapies are a good aid to asana practice. A complete program of ayurvedic detoxification through pancha karma, using these procedures can take our asana practice to new level. However, massage can never substitute for asana. Regular asanas are essential to long term health. They are like giving oneself a massage and can be done more regularly and for longer periods of time.

Asana and Constitution

Asana is useful for all constitutions, though in different ways, and done right works to balance all the doshas. Everyone should practice at least half an hour a day of asana to prevent doshic excesses from developing. Asana is most needed by vata types, who are most prone to postural distortions. Kapha types, who tend to be sedentary and move slowly, benefit from more active forms of exercise, including more rajasic movement-oriented Asanas (vinyasas) or jumpings. Pitta types mainly need asanas to cool down their fiery and focused temperaments.

Which Asana to Do or How to Perform Asanas?

There are two main factors to consider in the practice of asana. The first is the manner and attitude with which the asanas are performed. The second is the particular asanas chosen. The first factor is the most significant. It is more important how we perform an asana than which particular asanas we do. The right



asana done in the wrong way will not be helpful. On the other hand, an asana that may not be the best for a person's constitution, if done in the right manner and as part of a complete system of asana practice, can be beneficial.

We may get the impression from ayurvedic books that the nature of the particular asana is the main thing, rather than how it is done. They list various asanas for different constitutions or diseases, as if one merely did the appropriate asana for the condition to be corrected. While specific asanas do relate to particular constitutions, they must be done correctly for their benefits to accrue.

Sometimes ayurvedic books recommend asanas that can be very difficult to do except for an advanced practitioner. The level of the student must not be forgotten in such instances. A beginner can get into a trouble trying to perform a difficult posture that is supposed to be good for their constitution but that they are not flexible enough to do properly. Our bodies need to be prepared for the new movements and different muscle loads we apply when doing asanas unfamiliar to us. For instance, the headstand, which has very valuable benefits, can be dangerous if done incorrectly or if the body is not properly prepared. Trying to force oneself into asanas is unwise.

Asana is not merely a simple matter of constitution. For example, the headstand is generally good for kapha, but a kapha person who is overweight and has a weak neck may be harmed by it. The particularities of individual bodily structure and organic condition cannot be forgotten. It is better to prescribe asanas according to the individual's condition and modify them according to ayurvedic considerations rather than to prescribe asana based upon ayurvedic constitution as the deciding factor.

In addition, individuals of one doshic constitution can suffer from diseases owing to another dosha. A vata person may have a kapha condition like a common cold, for example. Or a

pitta person may come down with a vata condition, like insomnia, from too much traveling and overwork. In these instances, treatment aims at the dosha out of balance rather than at the person's constitutional type.

It is more important how we move into and maintain an asana than any technical perfection of form that we may be able to hold while in it. The main thing is to use the asana as a vehicle for directing the prana to the part of the body that one is seeking to benefit. Prana has the healing affect, not the asana by itself! For the prana to come into the posture requires linking the breath with the posture, which generally requires moving upon exhalation.

Moving into and adjusting an asana position while maintaining a strong focus on the breath creates a much deeper practice than simply focusing on body technique. This requires moving with prana, which means having one's attention focused on the free flow of energy, not on holding the body forcefully in a particular pose. Static asanas should arise through relaxation of effort, not through artificially holding a pose.³⁵

The same asanas can be adjusted for different doshic types. Asanas done slowly, steadily and gently will generally reduce vata. Those done with coolness, diffusion of energy and relaxation will reduce pitta. Those done with quickness, heat and effort will reduce kapha. We can apply different forms of pranayama relative to asanas to either make them more heating or cooling, more building or reducing, further modifying their impact on the doshas. The application of asanas relative to different doshic types, therefore, requires adaptation and cannot be reduced to rigid rules.

Asanas are seldom done singly but as part of a sequence. During a sequence of asanas one can do various asanas for their benefits of exercising different muscles and joints, even if not all the asanas performed may be ideal for the constitutional



type. The sequence as a whole should reduce the dosha. For example, pittas can do some heating asanas, even a headstand, but should do a practice dominated by and ending with cooling asanas. A complete practice will cover the full range of bodily motions and all main types of asanas, though each doshic type will require emphasizing some asanas more than others and doing them all in a manner that reduces their dosha.

Yoga Postures for Vata Constitution

Vata types are generally slight in built, with small bones and thin frames. They have a great deal of flexibility and agility when young but lack energy and stamina. They easily develop stiffness and rigidity as they age. Vata rules over the bones so vata types suffer most from arthritis, particularly after the age of fifty. They tend to be cold, with dry skin and cracking joints, along with poor circulation. Vata types are nervous and fearful. They commonly adapt a protective posture with raised shoulders and hunched back. They are also prone to scoliosis. Asana is a must for vata types. Without it they are unlikely to be healthy or have the stillness to meditate.

If we look at different asana practitioners, we will find that both the best and the worst will be mainly vata types. Vatas who maintain their flexibility through life-long physical activity will be the best (though they can suffer from too much flexibility, which causes instability if they over-exercise). It is important for vatas to remember to keep their spines flexible. Vata types who neglect their bodies and get too focused in their minds are likely to be the worst at asana practice. Vatas, being somewhat brittle and prone to excessive movement, are also most likely to be injured by wrong practice and too strong asanas. Vatas must approach asana carefully as they can easily hurt themselves.



Vatas need to perform asanas in a way that reduces vata, starting with the right mental attitude. They should never rush or hurry into asana practice. They should first put their minds in a calm space and place their emotions in a condition of rest. They should slow down and deepen their breath before beginning any postures. Vatas should warm up their bodies gradually, improving their circulation and loosening their joints. They should be aware of overexertion or of attempting postures before their bodies are ready. They should exercise to the point of a mild sweat only and make sure to have good fluid intake during the exercise period. A gentle attitude and gradually flowing movements are best for them.

Asana practice for vata types should emphasize the pelvic region and colon, the main sites of vata. They should aim at releasing tension from the hips, lumbar spine and sacroiliac joints. In general their asanas should restrict movement in order to counter vata's tendency to excess activity. Too much movement and stretching can cause them to overstretch their ligaments and lose strength. However, when vata leads to rigidity, then asana practice should work to increase movement and pranic flow into the stiffened areas, but in a gradual and steady manner.

Sitting postures are good for vata, particularly those that create strength and stillness in the lower abdomen like siddhasana (lotus pose) and vajrasana. These postures help develop calm, increase groundedness and control apana vayu.

Since vata tends to accumulate in the spine, making it stiff, vatas should focus on keeping the spinal column supple by practicing spinal bending in every direction. Spinal twists like matsyedrasana are excellent, removing vata from the nervous system. Yet twists are good only as long as the breath is full — when the breath is reduced even a little by the partial shutting down of one lung that can happen during twists, vata increases at a fast rate.



Forward bends afford immediate relief for excess vata, producing calm and stillness. They are excellent for releasing vata in the back where it builds up as stiffness and tension. They remove excess vata out of the body through the joints. But they cannot remove all vata unless combined with backbends.

Backbends are excellent for reducing vata but must be done gently and slowly to be effective. Vata commonly causes kyphosis and curvature of the shoulders. This stiffness, if attacked too aggressively, can cause pain or injury. Strong backbends are sympathetic stimulation — flight or fight action in the body's chemistry — and so have a 'spacing-out' effect. Backbends, if well grounded and done moderately, strengthen the vata's feelings of centeredness and have a warming effect, strengthening apana and the colon. Small backward bends, like cobra and locust, are the safest in this regard. More complete backbends can be done once proficiency in these is gained.

Standing postures that emphasize strength, stability and calm are very good for vata, particularly those that aim at developing stillness and balance like the tree pose (*vrksasana*). But vatas need to develop patience and concentration in order to appreciate them.

Vata people require gentle yoga procedures that do not exhaust them. They should only exert themselves moderately. They should follow any movement asanas with longer periods of sitting postures. To control vata they should practice pranayama and meditation in those postures.

After asana practice, vatas should make sure to rest and relax through the practice of the corpse pose. They should not end their practice abruptly or hurry off into any disturbing activity. Vatas should come away from asana practice feeling stable, warmed and calm, with tension released from the lower abdomen. Their minds should feel peaceful and emotions steady and grounded, with both space and energy for meditation.



Yoga Postures for Pitta Constitution

Pitta types have medium or average builds. They are neither too tall nor too short in height, neither too heavy nor too thin in weight. They usually possess a good musculature and flexibility owing to their good circulation and the oily quality of pitta that lubricates the joints. When they dedicate themselves to asana practice, pittas become quite good at it. Still they may lack the ability of long-boned vata types to do certain postures. They can also make their joints too loose from excessive practice, which can create problems just as significant as too much stiffness in the joints.

Psychologically, pittas are aggressive and like to excel and shine at what they do. They may take their high achievement mentality into asana practice where it is not appropriate. This can make them good at the technical side of asana but in the process they can lose the spiritual effect of practice, which depends upon peace of mind. Pitta people are often overly ambitious, irritable or driven. Yoga postures should be used to cool them down both on the physical and emotional levels. This helps them direct their intelligence within, where they can use it to understand themselves.

Pittas should perform asanas in a way that is cooling, nurturing, expansive and relaxing. This requires relaxing breaths and quiet sitting between strong asanas to release any stress that is developing. They should be careful not to turn their practice into a strong workout in which additional heat is generated in the body or in which too much sweating occurs. They should avoid overheating the blood or bringing too much heat to the head. This does not mean that they cannot do any strong practice but that they should make sure to compensate for any heat created by ending with cooling postures and cooling pranayama.



According to the yogic understanding of the body, the solar principle is centered around the navel, the place of the digestive fire that brings heat to the body. The lunar principle is located in the region of the soft palate, where salivary secretions constantly take place that have a cooling and moistening effect. The upward moving heat of the sun in the navel works to reduce the activity of the moon in the soft palate. Putting the body regularly into the shoulder stand or plow pose protects the lunar principle from the depleting heat of the solar principle and creates coolness. Such postures help reverse the positions of the sun and the moon in the body, bringing balance. This is naturally beneficial for pittas. Spinal twists, like Matyendrasana, are also very good for protecting the lunar principle without reducing agni or the power of digestion.

Pitta people are benefited by postures that aim at releasing tension from the mid-abdomen, the small intestine and liver, where pitta accumulates. Such are the bow pose, cobra pose, boat pose, and fish pose. These postures allow excess pitta to be eliminated from the body, particularly to flow downward through the digestive tract. Headstands create pitta and should not be done unless one knows how to balance out the heat that they create.

Forward bends are generally good for pitta because they bring more energy to the mid-abdomen and have a cooling and grounding effect if done in a gentle manner. Backbends tend to be heating and so should be done only with moderation and followed by cooling postures. Seated twists help clear the liver, detoxifying pitta. Pittas should come away from asana practice feeling cool, content and calm, with tension released from the mid-abdomen. Their minds should be clear and relaxed, their emotions at rest, with no feelings of competitiveness or irritation. Their awareness should be in a meditative mood, slightly diffused and not overly sharp.



Yoga Postures for Kapha Constitution

Kapha types possess stocky builds and hold weight easily. They are generally shorter than average in height but sometimes are tall. Their frame, however, is always bulky with short bones and generally poor flexibility. For this reason kaphas should not try to force themselves into positions like the lotus pose, which are not appropriate for the type of joints that they have, or they can get hurt. Kapha people should not imagine themselves as tall skinny yogis. That is not their body type and it is not possible for them to maintain that build, even if they should be able to achieve it temporarily.

Kapha women may be thin when young but easily gain weight when they get older, particularly after childbirth. This often disturbs them and causes them to pursue weight loss programs, including through yoga postures, at which they are seldom successful. They must learn to accept their builds and not try to force their bodies into a shape that is unnatural to them. However, kaphas must strive to avoid overweight, which is to hold a moderate body weight, not to try to starve themselves.

Overweight in kapha types results in accumulation of fat, particularly in the stomach and thighs. This shifts the center of gravity downward, causing stooped shoulders and other postural problems. Kapha also creates mucus in the region of the chest which then moves to different sites in the body, particularly downward. It inhibits movement through the channels by its heavy and damp quality. It increases fat along the joints and the surface of the body. It builds up in the joints as an excessive synovial fluid. Such excess kapha causes swollen glands, benign cysts, and bone spurs. Many kaphas develop arthritis as a complication of such overweight or poor circulation.

Kapha types tend to be sedentary and seldom are physically active unless stimulated or prodded to do so, particularly after



childhood. More active exercise is required for them, stimulating their metabolism and increasing circulation. However, kaphas should increase their exercise in a slow and incremental manner, particularly if they are severely overweight. As kaphas are prone to heart disease and high cholesterol, care must be taken not to overstrain their hearts in any exercise program.

Kapha is like a frozen river. Its movement is inhibited by cold. As heat is applied through exercise and deep breathing, the ice begins to melt. It then breaks off in chunks and flows downstream. Such kapha, as it moves out of areas of stagnation, can cause problems elsewhere if it is pushed out too forcefully.

Kaphas benefit by exercise that causes them to sweat, even profusely, and pushes them beyond what they think is the limit of their exertion (unless they are severely overweight, in which case caution is required). Generally kaphas should be made to do stronger exercise than they like and must be taught to challenge themselves.

Sitting asanas, like any condition of reduced movement, causes kapha to increase. Kaphas easily feel tired or fall into daydreaming when holding seated postures. To benefit by sitting postures, which is necessary for meditation, kaphas must practice pranayama of a warming nature.

Vinyasas, like the sun salutation with its constant activity, are stimulating to the kapha constitution. Standing postures in general are good for them, particularly as combined with movement and stretching. Virabhadrasana and its variations are good, particularly aimed at opening the chest, the place in the body where kapha accumulates. Backward bends are generally good for kaphas because they open the chest and increase circulation to the head, where mucus easily builds up for them, blocking the senses and dulling the mind. Forward bends, which tend to contract the chest, are not as good for them except when they are caught up in emotional distress and seek some short



term calming influence.

Kapha people usually have slow digestion and low metabolism. To stimulate the digestive capacity, procedures having an action on the navel region (where agni is situated) are very useful (like nauli). The bow pose is the one of most beneficial of yoga postures for them because of this. To counter kapha congestion or stagnation, the right yoga postures combined with pranayama are excellent. This brings more circulation to both body and mind so that they can change their lives in a positive direction. The plow pose is one of the best for opening the lungs for kapha.

Kaphas should come away from asana practice feeling invigorated, warm and light, with their circulation energized, their chest and lungs open. Their mind and senses should be sharp and clear, with emotional heaviness released and forgotten.

Good Asanas for the Doshic Types

The following are generally good postures for the different doshic types, but again remember that the particularities of an individual's body structure and organic condition are more important than the doshic type in asana practice.

Vata

Key Words for Practice

- Calm, slow, steady, grounding, strengthening and consistent

Asanas

- Sitting poses like Lotus Pose (Siddhasana), Diamond Pose (Vajrasana), Lion Pose, Virasana.
- Sun Salutation done slowly and consciously.
- Standing poses like the Vrksasana (Tree Pose), Trikonasana



- (Triangle), Virabhadrasana (Warrior Poses), Parighasana (Gate Pose) and all standing forward bends.
- Inverted poses like Headstand, Viparitakarani (a relaxing inversion).
 - Cobras and Locusts (simple back bending), done consciously and carefully.
 - Forward bends of all types, especially Janu Sirsasana (head-knee forward bend) and Paschimottanasana (full forward bend).
 - Fetal position, Kurmasana (Tortoise), Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana (turning head-knee), Navasana (Boat Pose), Yoga Mudra (Yogic Seal).
 - Spinal twists, especially lying twists, Bharadvajasana II (Sage Twist), Pasasana (Noose twist).
 - Corpse pose: vatas need to do a long and comfortable relaxation of at least 20 minutes.

Pitta

Key Words for Practice

- Cooling, relaxing, surrendering, forgiving, gentle, diffusive

Asanas

- Sitting postures in general, except Lion Pose.
- Moon salutation (Chandra Namaskar).
- Standing poses, especially hips open poses like the Tree Pose, Trikonasana (Triangle Pose), and Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon).
- Legs open standing forward bends like Prasarita Padottanasana I (extended spread legs).
- Shoulder stand, Viparitakarani, Boat Pose, Fish Pose, Cobra



Pose, Bow Pose, Fetal Pose

- All sitting forward bends, especially Upavista Konasana, and Kurmasana (Tortoise), Paschimottanasana.
- Twists like Ardha Matsyendrasana II and Maricyasana.
- Yoga Mudra (Yogic Seal), Corpse Pose.

Kapha

Key Words for Practice

- Stimulating, moving, warming, lightening, energizing, releasing

Asanas

- Lion pose or sitting poses with pranayama.
- Sun salutation, strong vinyasas or 'jumpings.'
- Virabhadrasana, Uthita Hasta Padangusthasana (extended hand toe), Urdhva Prasarita Ekapadasana (extended foot above), Ardha Chandrasana (Half Moon),
- Downward Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana), Upward Dog (Urdhva Mukha Svanasana).
- Full inverted balancing poses like handstand (Adho Mukha Vrksasana), Pinca Mayurasana (Peacock Feather pose).
- Headstand and shoulder stand with variations.
- Plow pose, all backbends like Upward Bow Pose, Camel Pose (Ustrasana), and Locust Pose, Jathara Parivartanasana (Alligator Twist) or Maricyasana followed by a short Savasana.

Description of Particular Asanas

The following descriptions are intended mainly for those who already know the asanas in order to help them to orient

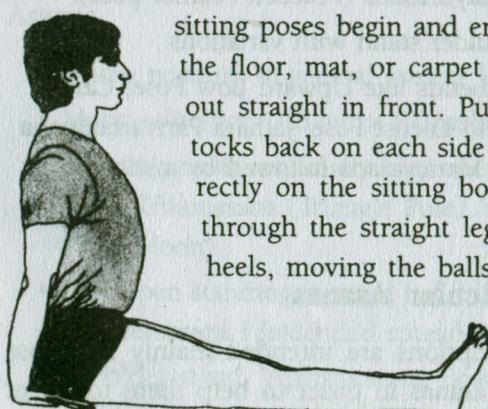


their practice in an ayurvedic light. For those unfamiliar with the asanas, please consult yoga books and teachers for a more complete description of how to do them. When in doubt, do not attempt any movements that may cause strain or stress. The ayurvedic indications for the asanas are only general. As much depends upon the manner and sequence in which the asana is performed as the nature of the asana itself. In some instances there are several variations on the posture, not all of which will be equally good for each individual. I have tried to avoid listing postures that are hard to do or advanced.

I. SITTING POSES

Sitting postures are the most important in yoga. All other postures are to bring us to the point of being able to hold sitting poses. Classical yoga, with its prime aim of meditation, emphasizes four sitting asanas: lotus pose, siddhasana, vajrasana, and lion pose. These are good for pranayama and meditation. Any comfortable sitting posture on a chair or on the floor can be used in place of these.

STAFF POSE (Dandasana)



Dandasana is the basic sitting pose. All of the sitting poses begin and end in dandasana. Sit on the floor, mat, or carpet with the legs stretched out straight in front. Pull the flesh of the buttocks back on each side so that you may sit directly on the sitting bones. Inhale and extend through the straight legs and out through the heels, moving the balls of the feet toward the face. Place the hands on the floor beside the back of the hips



(fingers facing forward) and push down to lift the chest up and forward. The spine is straight with the back lifting upward on each exhalation. The hands remain in the same place, but now take the weight off the hands and keep lifting the torso up and extending the legs out. Maintain this posture, breathing comfortably.

The staff pose is especially good for calming vata and pitta, and also reduces kapha. It helps strengthen udana in particular.

EASY POSTURE (Sukhasana)

Sit in dandasana with the legs stretched out in front. Then bend the legs and cross the right shin over the left, folding the feet under the legs. In this easy 'crossed-legs' position, keep your spine erect. Rest your hands (separated) on your knees. Or cup the left hand (palms up) in the right hand, thumbs touching, and rest them on your lap.

This posture is for those who cannot do more difficult seated postures. It has similar benefits for facilitating pranayama and meditation.



LOTUS POSTURE (Padmasana)

Sit in sukhasana. With both hands, lift the right foot and ankle and gently place them on top of the left thigh with the right heel near the left groin. Then take the left foot and ankle and lift them over the right leg, gently placing them on the right thigh. The soles of the feet are turned upward as the tops of the feet rest on the thighs. Keep the spine erect and close the eyes. Place the palm of the left hand on the palm of the right



hand, keeping the hands together between the heels.

The lotus pose regulates vata, controls apana vayu and allows for the prana to move into the sushumna. It is the best posture for pranayama and pratyahara, and excellent for meditation.

SIDDHASANA

Sit on a mat with legs stretched out. Bend the right knee and place the heel of the right foot under the perineum. Now bend the left leg, placing the left heel on top of the right heel and against the pubic bone. Keep the head, neck and back straight. Fix the gaze at the third eye. With the tops of the hands on the knees, make jnana mudra (sign of knowledge) by touching the thumb with the index finger. Keep the other three fingers straight, palms facing upward.

Siddhasana is perhaps the best posture for concentration and meditation and promotes spiritual knowledge. It calms vata, controls apana and keeps prana moving upward. It does not aggravate the other doshas.

DIAMOND POSE (Vajrasana)

Sit down on bent knees so that the calves touch the thighs. Place both heels close to each other and then sit on the heels. Place the palms over the respective knees. Keep the body straight and look straight forward.

Diamond pose is excellent posture for pranayama, particularly of the heating type like right nostril breathing, bhastrika, and kapalabhati. It helps awaken prana and kundalini and is excellent for stimulating pranagni.

LION POSE (Simhasana)

Sit down placing the left foot beneath the right hip and the right foot beneath the left. Spread the fingers like the claws of a



lion and place them on the knees. Draw the stomach inward and spread the chest forward. Open the mouth wide and stick out the tongue as much as possible. With open eyes gaze at the third eye.

Lion pose increases agni and pitta on all levels, energizing the head, eyes, throat and digestive system. It reduces kapha and vata, countering cold and low energy.

II. STANDING POSES

MOUNTAIN POSE (Tadasana)

Tadasana is the basic standing posture. It is the position that each standing pose begins from and returns to when completed. Stand upright with feet hip-distance apart and parallel. Be aware of both feet evenly contacting the floor and balance the weight evenly on the balls and heels of the feet (toes remain relaxed). Strengthen the muscles in the legs and pull the knees up. Lift the hips up away from the legs. Continue the lift by stretching the spine upward from the tailbone through the top of the head. The shoulders are relaxed back and down. The arms and hands hang relaxed at the sides.

Tadasana is a grounding pose that balances all doshas if performed in the right manner. The right posture for standing sets the basic tone of our bodily posture, particularly for movement.



TRIANGLE POSE (Trikonasana)

Stand in tadasana. Spread the feet 3-4 feet apart. Turn the right foot, knee and leg 90 degrees to the right. Turn the left