

UNIT-1

Yoga: Its Origin, History and Development

"YOGA IS NOT AN ANCIENT MYTH BURIED IN OBLIVION. IT IS THE MOST VALUABLE INHERITANCE OF THE PRESENT. IT IS THE ESSENTIAL NEED OF TODAY AND THE CULTURE OF TOMORROW."

-BY SWAMI SATYANANDA SARASWATI

Introduction: Yoga is essentially a spiritual discipline based on an extremely subtle science, which focuses on bringing harmony between mind and body. It is an art and science of healthy living. The word 'Yoga' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'Yuj', meaning 'to join' or 'to yoke' or 'to unite'. As per Yogic scriptures the practice of Yoga leads to the union of individual consciousness with that of the Universal Consciousness, indicating a perfect harmony between the mind and body, Man & Nature. According to modern scientists, everything in the universe is just a manifestation of the same quantum firmament. One who experiences this oneness of existence is said to be in yoga, and is termed as a yogi, having attained to a state of freedom referred to as mukti, nirvana or moksha. Thus, the aim of Yoga is Self-realization, to overcome all kinds of sufferings leading to 'the state of liberation' (Moksha) or 'freedom' (Kaivalya). Living with freedom in all walks of life, health and harmony shall be the main objectives of Yoga practice. "Yoga" also refers to an inner science comprising of a variety of methods through which human beings can realize this union and achieve mastery over their destiny. Yoga, being widely considered as an 'immortal cultural outcome' of Indus Saraswati Valley civilization – dating back to 2700 B.C., has proved itself catering to both material and spiritual upliftment of humanity. Basic humane values are the very identity of Yoga Sadhana.

A Brief History and Development of Yoga:

The practice of Yoga is believed to have started with the very dawn of civilization. The science of yoga has its origin thousands of years ago, long before the first religions or belief systems were born. In the yogic lore, Shiva is seen as the first yogi or Adiyogi, and the first Guru or Adi Guru.

Several Thousand years ago, on the banks of the lake Kantisarovar in the Himalayas, Adiyogi poured his profound knowledge into the legendary Saptarishis or "seven sages". The sages carried this powerful yogic science to different parts of the world, including Asia, the Middle East, Northern Africa and South America. Interestingly, modern scholars have noted and marvelled at the close parallels found between ancient cultures across the globe. However, it was in India that the yogic system found its fullest expression. Agastya, the Saptarishi who travelled across the Indian subcontinent, crafted this culture around a core yogic way of life.

A number of seals and fossil remains of Indus Saraswati valley civilization with Yotic motives and figures performing yoga indicate the presence of Yoga in India. The Number of seals and fossil remains of Indus Saraswati valley civilization with Yogic motives and figures performing Yoga Sadhana suggest the presence of Yoga in ancient India. The phallic symbols, seals of idols of mother Goddess are suggestive of Tantra Yoga. Presence of Yoga is available in folk traditions, Indus valley civilization, Vedic and Upanishadic heritage, Buddhist and Jain traditions, Darshanas, epics of Mahabharat and Ramayana, theistic traditions of Shaivas, Vaishnavas, and

Tantric traditions. In addition, there was a primordial or pure Yoga which has been manifested in mystical traditions of South Asia. This was the time when Yoga was being practised under the direct guidance of Guru and its spiritual value was given special importance. It was a part of Upasana and yoga sadhana was inbuilt in their rituals. Sun was given highest importance during the vedic period. The practice of 'Surya namaskara' may have been invented later due to this influence. Pranayama was a part of daily ritual and to offer the oblation. Though Yoga was being practiced in the pre-Vedic period, the great Sage Maharshi Patanjali systematized and codified the then existing practices of Yoga, its meaning and its related knowledge through his Yoga Sutras. After Patanjali, many Sages and Yoga Masters contributed greatly for the preservation and development of the field through their well documented practices and literature.

Suryanamaskara Historical evidences of the existence of Yoga were seen in the pre-Vedic period (2700 B.C.), and thereafter till Patanjali's period. The main sources, from which we get the information about Yoga practices and the related literature during this period, are available in Vedas (4), Upanishads(108), Smritis, teachings of Buddhism, Jainism, Panini, Epics (2), Puranas (18) etc.

Tentatively, the period between 500 BC - 800 A.D. is considered as the Classical period which is also considered as the most fertile and prominent period in the history and development of Yoga. During this period, commentaries of Vyasa on Yoga Sutras and Bhagawadgita etc. came into existence. This period can be mainly dedicated to two great religious teachers of India – Mahavir and Buddha. The concept of Five great vows – Pancha mahavrata- by Mahavir and Ashta Magga or eightfold path by Buddha - can be well considered as early nature of Yoga sadhana. We find its more explicit explanation in Bhagawadgita which has elaborately presented the concept of Gyan yoga, Bhakti yoga and Karma Yoga. These three types of yoga are still the highest example of human wisdom and even today people find peace by following the methods as shown in Gita. Patanjali's yoga sutra besides containing various aspects of yoga, is mainly identified with eight fold path of Yoga. The very important commentary on Yoga sutra by Vyasa was also written. During this very period the aspect of mind was given importance and it was clearly brought out through Yoga sadhana, Mind and body both can be brought under control to experience equanimity. The period between 800 A.D. - 1700 A.D. has been recognized as the Post Classical period wherein the teachings of great Acharyatrayas-Adi Shankracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhavacharya-were prominent during this period. The teachings of Suradasa, Tulasidasa, Purandardasa, Mirabai were the great contributors during this period. The Natha Yogis of Hathayoga Tradition like Matsyendaranatha, Gorkshanatha, Cauranginatha, Swatmaram Suri, Gheranda, Shrinivasa Bhatt are some of the great personalities who popularized the Hatha Yoga practices during this period.

The period between 1700 - 1900 A.D. is considered as Modern period in which the great Yogacharyas- Ramana Maharshi, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Paramhansa Yogananda, Vivekananda etc. have contributed for the development of Raja Yoga. This was the period when Vedanta, Bhakti yoga, Nathayoga or Hatha-yoga flourished. The Shadanga-yoga of Gorakshashatakam, Chaturanga-yoga of Hathayogapradipika, Saptanga-yoga of Gheranda Samhita, were the main tenents of Hatha-yoga.

Now in the contemporary times, everybody has conviction about yoga practices towards the

preservation, maintenance and promotion of health. Yoga has spread all over the world by the teachings of great personalities like Swami Shivananda, Shri T.Krishnamacharya, Swami Kuvalayananda, Shri Yogendara, Swami Rama, Sri Aurobindo, Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, Acharya Rajanish, Pattabhijois, BKS. Iyengar, Swami Satyananda Sarasvati and the like.

B.K.S. Iyengar was the founder of the style of yoga known as "Iyengar Yoga" and was considered one of the foremost yoga teachers in the world Clearing Misconceptions:

For many, the practice of yoga is restricted to Hatha Yoga and Asanas (postures). However, among the Yoga Sutras, just three sutras are dedicated to asanas. fundamentally, hatha yoga is a preparatory process so that the body can sustain higher levels of energy. The process begins with the body, then the breath, the mind, and the inner self.

Yoga is also commonly understood as a therapy or exercise system for health and fitness. While physical and mental health are natural consequences of yoga, the goal of yoga is more far-reaching. "Yoga is about harmonizing oneself with the universe. It is the technology of aligning individual geometry with the cosmic, to achieve the highest level of perception and harmony."

Yoga does not adhere to any particular religion, belief system or community; it has always been approached as a technology for inner wellbeing. Anyone who practices yoga with involvement can reap its benefits, irrespective of one's faith, ethnicity or culture. Traditional Schools of Yoga :These different Philosophies, Traditions, lineages and Guru-shishya paramparas of Yoga lead to the emergence of different Traditional Schools of Yoga e.g. Jnana-yoga, Bhakti-yoga, Karma-yoga, Dhyana-yoga, Patanjala-yoga, Kundalini-yoga, Hatha-yoga, Mantra-yoga, Laya-yoga, Raja-yoga, Jain-yoga, Bouddha-yoga etc. Each school has its own principles and practices leading to ultimate aim and objectives of Yoga.

Yogic Practices for Health and Wellness: The widely practiced Yoga Sadhanas (Practices) are: Yama, Niyama, Asana, Pranayama, Pratyahara, Dharana, Dhyana (Meditation), Samadhi /Samyama, Bandhas & Mudras, Shat-karmas, Yukta-ahara, Yukta karma, Mantra japa, etc. Yama's are restraints and Niyama's are observances. These are considered to be pre-requisites for the Yoga Sadhanas (Practices). Asanas, capable of bringing about stability of body and mind

'kuryat-tad-asanam-sthairyam...', consists in adopting various body (psycho-physical) patterns, giving ability to maintain a body position (a stable awareness of one's structural existence) for a considerable length and period of time as well.

The Fundamentals of Yoga Sadhana:

Yoga works on the level of one's body, mind, emotion and energy. ***This has given rise to four broad classifications of Yoga:*** karma yoga, where we utilize the body; bhakti yoga, where we utilize the emotions; Gyana yoga, where we utilize the mind and Intellect; and kriya yoga, where we utilize the energy.

Each system of Yoga we practice would fall within the gamut of one or more of these categories.

Every individual is a unique combination of these four factors. "All the ancient commentaries on Yoga have stressed that it is essential to work under the direction of a Guru." The reason being that only a Guru can mix the appropriate combination of the four fundamental paths, as is necessary for each seeker.

Yoga Education: Traditionally, Yoga Education was imparted by knowledgeable, experienced, and wise persons in the families (comparable with the education imparted in convents in the west) and then by the Seers (Rishis/Munis/Acharyas) in Ashramas (compared with monasteries). Yoga Education, on the other hand, aims at taking care of the individual, the 'Being'. It is presumed that a good, balanced, integrated, truthful, clean, transparent person will be more useful to oneself, family, society, nation, nature and humanity at large. Yoga education is 'Being oriented'. Details of working with 'being oriented' aspect have been outlined in various living traditions and texts and the method contributing to this important field is known as 'Yoga'.

Present days, Yoga Education is being imparted by many eminent Yoga Institutions, Yoga Colleges, Yoga Universities, Yoga Departments in the Universities, Naturopathy colleges and Private trusts & societies. Many Yoga Clinics, Yoga Therapy and Training Centers, Preventive Health Care Units of Yoga, Yoga Research Centers etc. have been established in Hospitals, Dispensaries, Medical Institutions and therapeutical setups.

Different social customs and rituals in India, the land of Yoga, reflect a love for ecological balance, tolerance towards other systems of thought and a compassionate outlook towards all creations. Yoga Sadhana of all hues and colours is considered panacea for a meaningful life and living. Its orientation to a comprehensive health, both individual and social, makes it a worthy practice for the people of all religions, races and nationalities.

UNIT-2

MAHARISHI PATANJALI'S ASTANGA YOGA

Maharishi Patanjali – The Father of Modern Yoga

Patanjali was a great spiritual leader of ancient times who refined the spirit of the spiritual path into the word of wisdom called **Yoga Sutras**. He defined the steps every soul must go through in its journey back to the infinite spirit. As per one legend, he fell from heaven into the hands of a woman (Anjali) in the form of a little snake, thus named Patanjali.

Yoga Sutra of Patanjali

It is said that Patanjali has often been called the founder of the **Yoga Sutra**. The origin of Yoga had been handed down in an oral tradition over thousands of years from ancient times. Patanjali's Yoga is one of the famous darshans of Hindu Philosophy. Patanjali synthesized and organized knowledge about Yoga from much older traditions. The yoga sutra is one of the foundational texts of classical Yoga Philosophy.

Maharishi Patanjali is considered the compiler of the Yoga Sutras and the author of a commentary on Panini's Ashtadhyayi, referred to as Mahabhasya. The Yoga sutras have 196 Sanskrit sutras organized in 4 chapters. The **yoga sutras** were collected sometime between 500 BCE and 200 BCE. All the four chapters of Patanjali's Yoga Sutra are named according to their subjects; **Samadhi Pada, Sadhana Pada, Vibhuti Pada, and Kaivalya Pada**.

1. **Samadhi Pada:** The first chapter of Patanjali's Yoga Sutras provides a definition and the purpose of Yoga. Various approaches that can be used to achieve the objectives of Yoga are included.
2. **Sadhana Pada:** The second chapter includes the practical approach to attaining the goals of Yoga. It also stated about eight limbs of Yoga called **Ashtanga yoga**.
3. **Vibhuti Pada:** It is about the results, power, and manifestation acquired by Yoga.
4. **Kaivalya Pada:** The last chapter of the Patanjali Yoga sutra includes the path of devotion, the path of Karma, and the path of knowledge.

Astanga Yoga

According to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, there is an eight-fold path leading to liberation, known as the '**Ashtanga Yoga System**' or 'Eight Limbs of Yoga' (the word 'ashta' means 'eight' and 'anga' means 'limb').

- 1. YAMA – Restraints, moral disciplines or moral vows
- 2. NIYAMA – Positive duties or observances
- 3. ASANA – Posture
- 4. PRANAYAMA – Breathing Techniques
- 5. PRATYAHARA – Sense withdrawal
- 6. DHARANA – Focused Concentration
- 7. DHYANA – Meditative Absorption
- 8. SAMADHI – Bliss or Enlightenment

1. YAMA – Restraints, moral disciplines or moral vows

This first limb, Yama, refers to vows, disciplines or practices that are primarily concerned with the world around us, and our interaction with it. While the practice of yoga can indeed increase physical strength and flexibility and aid in calming the mind, what's the point if we're still rigid, weak and stressed-out in day-to-day life? There are five Yamas:

- Ahimsa (non-violence),
- Satya (truthfulness),
- Asteya (non-stealing),
- Brahmacharya (right use of energy), and
- Aparigraha (non-greed or non-hoarding).

Yoga is a practice of transforming and benefitting every aspect of life, not just the 60 minutes spent on a rubber mat; if we can learn to be kind, truthful and use our energy in a worthwhile way, we will not only benefit ourselves with our practice, but everything and everyone around us.

In BKS Iyengar's translation of the sutras 'Light On The Yoga Sutras', he explains that Yamas are '*unconditioned by time, class and place*', meaning no matter who we are, where we come from, or how much yoga we've practised, we can all aim to instil the Yamas within us.

2. NIYAMA – Positive duties or observances

The second limb, Niyama, usually refers to duties directed towards us, but can also be considered with our actions towards the outside world. The prefix 'ni' is a Sanskrit verb which means 'inward' or 'within'.

There are five Niyamas:

- saucha (cleanliness),
- santosha (contentment),
- tapas (austerities, burning of desire),
- svadhyaya (self-study or self-reflection, and study of spiritual texts), and
- isvarapranidhana (surrender to God).

Niyamas are traditionally practised by those who wish to travel further along the Yogic path and are intended to build character. Interestingly, the Niyamas closely relate to the Koshas, our 'sheaths' or 'layers' leading from the physical body to the essence within. As you'll notice, when we work with the Niyamas – from saucha to isvarapranidhana – we are guided from the grossest aspects of ourselves to the truth deep within.

3. ASANA – Posture

The physical aspect of yoga is the third step on the path to freedom, and if we're being honest, the word *asana* here doesn't refer to the ability to perform a handstand or an aesthetically impressive backbend, it means 'seat' – specifically the seat you would take for the practice of meditation. The only alignment instruction Patanjali gives for this asana is ***“sthira sukham asanam”***, the posture should be steady and comfortable.

While traditional texts like the Hatha Yoga Pradipika list many postures such as Padmasana (lotus pose) and Virasana (hero pose) suitable for meditation, this text also tells us that the most important posture is, in fact, ***sthirasukhasana*** – meaning, *‘a posture the practitioner can hold comfortably and motionlessness’*.

The idea is to be able to sit in comfort, so we're not 'pulled' by aches and pains of the body, or restlessness due to an uncomfortable position.

4. PRANAYAMA – Breathing Techniques

The word *Prana* refers to 'energy' or 'life source'. It can be used to describe the very essence that keeps us alive, as well as the energy in the universe around us. *Prana* also often describes the breath, and by working with the way we breathe, we affect the mind in a very real way. Perhaps one of the most fascinating things about Pranayama is the fact that it can mean two totally different things, which may lead us in two totally different directions at this point on the path to freedom....

Pranayama can be understood as either 'prana-yama' which would mean 'breath – control' or 'breath restraint', or it could be understood as 'prana-ayama' which would translate as 'freedom of breath', 'breath expansion' or 'breath liberation'.

The physical act of working with different breathing techniques alters the mind in a myriad of ways – we can choose calming practices like Chandra Bhadana (moon piercing breath) or more stimulating techniques such as Kapalabhati (shining skull cleansing breath).

Each way of breathing will change our state of being, but it's up to us as to whether we perceive this as 'controlling' the way we feel or 'freeing' ourselves from the habitual way our mind may usually be.

5. PRATYAHARA – Sense withdrawal

Pratya means to 'withdraw', 'draw in' or 'draw back', and the second part *ahara* refers to anything we 'take in' by ourselves, such as the various sights, sounds and smells our senses take in continuously. When sitting for a formal meditation practice, this is likely to be the first thing we do when we think we're meditating; we focus on 'drawing in'. The practice of drawing inward may include focussing on the way we're breathing, so this limb would relate directly to the practice of pranayama too.

The phrase 'sense withdrawal' could conjure up images of the ability to actually switch our senses 'off' through concentration, which is why this aspect of practice is often misunderstood. Instead of actually losing the ability to hear and smell, to see and feel, the practice of pratyahara changes our state of mind so that we become so absorbed in what it is we're focussing on, that the things outside of ourselves no longer bother us and we're able to meditate without becoming easily distracted. Experienced practitioners may be able to translate pratyahara into everyday life – being so concentrated and present to the moment at hand, that things like sensations and sounds don't easily distract the mind.

6. DHARANA – Focused Concentration

Dharana means ‘focused concentration’. *Dha* means ‘holding or maintaining’, and *Ana* means ‘other’ or ‘something else’. Closely linked to the previous two limbs; dharana and pratyahara are essential parts of the same aspect. In order to focus on something, the senses must withdraw so that all attention is put on that point of concentration, and in order to draw our senses in, we must focus and concentrate intently. *Tratak* (candle gazing), visualisation, and focusing on the breath are all practices of dharana, and it’s this stage many of us get to when we think we’re ‘meditating’.

7. DHYANA – Meditative Absorption

The seventh limb is ‘meditative absorption’ – when we become completely absorbed in the focus of our meditation, and *this* is when we’re really meditating. All the things we may learn in a class, online or from a teacher are merely techniques offered to each person in order to help them settle, focus and concentrate, the actual practice of meditation is definitely not something we can actively ‘do’, rather it describes the spontaneous action of something that happens as a result of everything else. Essentially; if you are really meditating, you won’t have the thought ‘oh, I’m meditating!’.... (sound familiar?)

8. SAMADHI – Bliss or Enlightenment

Many of us know the word *samadhi* as meaning ‘bliss’ or ‘enlightenment’, and this is the final step of the journey of Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras. After we’ve re-organised our relationships with the outside world and our own inner world, we come to the finale of bliss.

When we look at the word *samadhi* though, we find out that ‘enlightenment’ or ‘realisation’ does not refer to floating away on a cloud in a state of happiness and ecstasy.... Sorry.

Breaking the word in half, we see that this final stage is made up of two words; ‘sama’ meaning ‘same’ or ‘equal’, and ‘dhi’ meaning ‘to see’. There’s a reason it’s called *realisation* – and it’s because reaching Samadhi is not about escapism, floating away or being abundantly joyful; it’s about *realising* the very life that lies in front of us.

The ability to ‘see equally’ and without disturbance from the mind, without our experience being conditioned by likes, dislikes or habits, without a need to judge or become attached to any particular aspect; *that* is bliss.

Just as the theologian Meister Eckhart used the word *istichheit* meaning ‘is-ness’ as referring to the pure knowledge of seeing and realising just ‘what is’, this stage is not about attaching to happiness or a sensation of ‘bliss’, but instead it’s about seeing life and reality for exactly what it is, without our thoughts, emotions, likes, dislikes, pleasure and pain fluctuating and governing it. Not necessarily a state of feeling or being, or a fixed way of thinking; just pure ‘I – am-ness’.

There’s just one catch though – Samadhi isn’t a permanent state.... Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras importantly tell us that unless we are completely ready, without ‘impressions’ such as attachment, aversion, desires and habits, and with a completely pure mind, we will not be able to maintain the state of Samadhi for long.

Once the mind is pure and we truly do experience a state of Samadhi we can keep hold of, we attain *moksha*, also known as *mukti*, meaning a permanent state of being liberated, released and free.

UNIT-3

YOGASANAS

“Sthirasukhamasanam” (II Sūtra 46)

sthira = steady; *sukham* - comfortable; *asanam* - posture.

That posture which is steady and comfortable is *āsana*.

- Patañjali Yoga Sutra 2.45

What is *āsana*? *Sthira sukham āsanam*. That which is steady and which is comfortable is *āsana*. When we are comfortable, we are not steady. We are not sitting erect. But when we are erect, we are so stiff. We are not comfortable. Do you get it? You are erect, steady and, at the same time, comfortable. *Sthira sukham āsanam*.

You know, when you are happy, you are so up and when you are unhappy, you are so down. Your mind swings up and down, up and down. You are too excited or you put yourself down. This is called *dwandwa* or duality. *Āsana* is that which enables us to maintain equanimity. *Āsana* is not just doing exercise. Whichever posture brings you comfort and stability that is *āsana*. Now what is comfort? You have to define this. This is a very delicate issue. What is comfort is very different for different people. The smaller your comfort zone, the more miserable you are. This is because life is vast. But you are comfortable only in a limited sphere. Then, your life becomes miserable.

Your happiness depends on the extent of your comfort zone. So *āsana* is something that depends on your comfort zone. If you are comfortable sitting on a chair, then that is your comfort zone. If you have to squat on the floor, it is a little different. Now, if you practice sitting on the floor, if you practice bending your limbs, using every part of your body, then your comfort zone increases.

If you just observe a baby from the time it is born to the age of three, a baby would have done all the yoga *āsanas*. A baby is born with *ādi-mudra* and when it sleeps, it sleeps in *chinmaya mudra*. Have you seen babies sleep? They do not sleep with their palms open like adults. They put on *chinmaya mudra*. You can examine a baby anywhere in the world, whether it is Mongolia, Africa, South America, Russia, Asia everywhere, all the babies do *yogāsanas*. So, you have no choice but to be a yoga expert from birth. The *āsana* is only a reminder for us to reinvent, reuse those postures which we were doing in the past as a baby. When your body becomes flexible, your mind also becomes lighter and flexible.

You know, there is something called body language. If someone walks like this (with stiff and elevated shoulders), look at the body language. There is so much ego in that person, so much stiffness that the person has never seen his/her tummy. The neck is always up. The person has

never seen his/her feet. When people walk like this, it shows that there is something wrong inside. They are not comfortable with people. They twist their neck and walk in a particular manner.

TYPES OF ASANAS

❖ STANDING ASANAS

1. Tadasana (palm tree pose)

Stand with the feet together or about 10cm apart, and the arms by the sides.

Steady the body and distribute the weight equally on both feet. Raise the arms over the head. Interlock the fingers and turn the palms upward.

Place the hands on top of the head. Fix the eyes at a point on the wall slightly above the level of the head. The eyes should remain fixed on this point.

Inhale and stretch the arms, shoulders and chest upward. Raise the heels, coming up on to the toes. Stretch the whole body from top to bottom, without losing balance. Hold the breath and the position for a few seconds.

Lower the heels while breathing out and bring the hands to the starting position. This is round, practice rounds.

Benefits: Develops physical and mental balance. The entire spine is stretched and loosened, helping to clear up congestion of the spinal nerves at the points where they emerge from the spinal column. It helps to increase height by stretching the muscles and ligaments, enabling growing bones to grow longer. Tadasana stretches the rectus abdominis muscles and the intestines, and is useful during the first 6 months of pregnancy to keep the abdominal muscles and nerves toned.

2. Kati Chakrasana

Stand with the feet about shoulder width apart and the arms by the sides. Raise the arms to shoulder level, then twist the body to the right.

Bring the left hand to the right shoulder and wrap the right arm around the back, bringing the right hand around the left side of the waist. Look over the right shoulder as far as is comfortable.

Keep the back of the neck straight and imagine the top of the spine is the fixed point around which head turns. Hold for 2 seconds, accentuate the twist, gently stretching the abdomen.

Return to starting position. Repeat on the other side to complete 1 round.

Relax the arms and back as much as possible throughout the practice. Do not strain.

Practise 5 to 10 rounds.

Benefits: This asana tones the neck, shoulders, waist, back and hips. It is useful for correcting back stiffness and postural problems. The relaxation and twisting movements induce a feeling of lightness and may be used to relieve physical and mental tension at any time during the day.

3. Trikonasana (Triangle pose)

Variation 1: Stand erect with the feet more than shoulder width apart. Turn the right foot to the right side. Stretch the arms sideways and raise them to shoulder level so that they are in one straight line.

Bend to the right, taking care not to bring the body forward. Knees should be slightly bend.

Place the right hand on the right foot, keeping the two arms in line with each other. Turn the left palm forward. Look up at the left hand in the final position. Return to the upright position with the arms in a straight line.

Repeat on the other side, bending the left knee slightly. This completed 1 round.

Practice 5 to 10 rounds.

Variation 2: Repeat the basic form, but instead of keeping the upper arm vertical in the final position, lower it over the ear until it is parallel to the floor with the palm facing down. Try not to bend forward, but to keep the body in one vertical plane. Look up at the hand. Slowly return to the starting position. Practice 5 to 10 rounds.

Variation 3: Stand with the feet more than shoulder width apart and the toes facing forward. Gaze directly in front. Place the palms of the hands on each side of the waist with the fingers pointing downward.

Slowly bend to the right from the hips while sliding the right hand down along the outside of the right thigh as far as is comfortable.

Do not strain and do not bend forward in an effort to achieve the final position in which the right hand reaches the foot. Flexibility will come with practice.

Stay in the final position for a few seconds. Raise the trunk to the upright position, returning the right hand to the waist.

Repeat on the left side to complete one round. Practice 10 rounds.

Variation 4: Stand erect with the feet more than shoulder width apart and raise the arms sideways to shoulder level.

Bend forward. Twist the trunk to the right, bringing the left hand to the right foot. The right arm should be stretched vertically so that both arms form a straight line. Look up at the right hand.

Hold the final position for a few seconds, feeling the twist and stretch of the back.

Return to the centre forward position. Raise the body to the starting position, keeping the arms outstretched to the sides. Repeat to the other side. This is one round. Do not lower the arms. Practice 5 to 10 rounds.

- ✖ Contra-indications: This variation should not be performed by those suffering from the back conditions.

Benefits: This series affects the muscles on the sides of the trunk, the waist and the back of the legs. It stimulates the nervous system and alleviates nervous depression. It improves digestion. It also strengthens the pelvic area and tones the reproductive organs. Regular practice will help to reduce the waistline fat.

4. Utkatasana (Chair pose):

Stand straight with your feet together and arms by your side.

Take a deep breath and raise your arms straight up. Your palms should be facing each other, your elbows should not be bent.

Now exhale and bend your knees, so your thighs are almost parallel to floor.

Straighten your back and push your tailbone to the ground to get into the final position.

Try to stay in this pose for 15-20seconds.

While inhaling, come back to the starting position.

Benefits: Chair Pose improves balance and can build cardiovascular health and resilience. It primarily strengthens your core, thighs, and ankles.

- ✖ Contra-indications:

Do not practice this yoga posture if you have chronic knee pain, arthritis, sprained your ankle; any knee problem or damaged ligaments; headache or insomnia (sleeplessness).

Take special care and proceed gently with this yoga posture during menstruation or if you have pain in the lower back.

❖ SEATED ASANAS

1. Dandasana (Staff pose):

Begin seated with your legs extended forward.

Bring your hands alongside your hips and straighten your arms.

Touch your big toes together and keep a small amount of space between your heels.

Flex your ankles, drawing your toes back.

Press forward with your big toe mounds. Rotate your inner thighs in and down and press down with your femurs.

Extend your sternum away from your navel and broaden your collarbones.

Draw the heads of your upper arms back while softening your front ribs.

To exit the pose, release your arms and shake out your legs.

Benefits: This seated posture strengthens the back muscles and improves your posture. It also stretches your upper body, including your shoulders and chest.

2. Paschimottanasana:

Begin in Dandasana (Staff Pose), keeping hands on the knees. Inhale.

While exhaling, slowly bend forward from the hips, sliding the hands down the legs, keeping the spine straight.

Try to grasp the big toes with the fingers and thumbs. If this is possible, hold the heels, ankles or any part of the legs that can be reached comfortably.

Move slowly without forcing or jerking.

Hold the position for a few seconds. Relax the back and leg muscles, allowing them to gently stretch. Keeping the legs straight and utilizing the arm muscles, not the back muscles, begin to bend the elbows and gently bring the trunk down towards the legs, maintaining a firm grip on the toes, feet or legs.

Try to touch the knees with the forehead. Do not strain. This is the final position.

Hold the position for as long as is comfortable and relax. While inhaling, slowly return to the starting position. This is one round.

✕ Contra-indications: People who suffer from slipped disc, sciatica or hernia should not practice this asana.

Benefits: This asana stretches the hamstring muscles and increases flexibility in the hip joints. It tones and massages the entire abdominal and pelvic region, including the liver, pancreas, spleen, uro-genital system, kidneys and adrenal glands. It helps to remove excess weight in this area and stimulates circulation to the nerves and muscles of the spine.

3. Sukhasana (easy pose):

Sit with the legs straight in front of the body. Bend the right leg and place the foot under the left thigh.

Bend the left leg and place the foot under the right thigh. Keep the head, neck and back upright and straight, but without strain.

Close the eyes. Relax the whole body. The arms should be relaxed and not held straight.

Benefits: Sukhasana is the easiest and most comfortable of the meditation postures. It can be utilised without ill effect by persons who are unable to sit in the more difficult meditation postures. It facilitates mental and physical balance without causing strain or pain.

4. Vajrasana (thunderbolt pose):

Kneel on the floor. Bring the big toes together and separate the heels.

Lower the buttocks onto the inside surface of the feet with the heels touching the sides of the hips.

Place the hands on the knees, palms down. The back and head should be straight but not tense.

Avoid excessive backward arching of the spine. Close the eyes, relax the arms and the whole body. Breathe normally and fix the attention on the flow of air passing in and out of the nostrils.

Practise vajrasana as much as possible, especially directly after meals, for at least 5 minutes to enhance the digestive function. In cases of acute digestive disorder, sit in vajrasana and practise abdominal breathing for 100 breaths before and after food.

Benefits: Vajrasana alters the flow of blood and nervous impulses in the pelvic region and strengthens the pelvic muscles. It is a preventative measure against hernia and also helps to relieve piles. It increases the efficiency of the entire digestive system, relieving stomach ailments such as hyperacidity and peptic ulcer. It reduces the blood flow to the genitals and massages the nerve fibres which feed them, making it useful in the treatment of dilated testicles and hydrocele in men. It assists women in labour and helps alleviate menstrual disorders. Vajrasana is a very important meditation posture because the body becomes upright and straight with no effort. It is the best meditation asana for people suffering from sciatica and sacral infections. It stimulates the vajra nadi, activates prana in sushumna and redirects sexual energy to the brain for spiritual purposes.

- If there is pain in the thighs, the knees may be separated slightly while maintaining the posture. Beginners may find that their ankles ache after a short time in vajrasana. To remedy this, release the posture, sit with the legs stretched forward and shake the feet vigorously one after the other until the stiffness disappears. Then resume the posture. A folded blanket or small cushion may be placed between the buttocks and the heels for added comfort.

× Contra-indications:

Injured Ankles or Knees Ligaments: This pose can be hard on the knees and the ankles if one is not flexible with these muscles and joints. This pose should not be practiced if one is suffering from injured ligaments at the ankles or at the knees.

Hernia or Ulcers: Those suffering from hernia or intestinal ulcers should take medical advice and guidance before practicing this and should perform this pose with a trained yoga teacher. The pressure on the anus in this pose may bring unwanted pressure to the intestine.

Runners with Hamstring or Calf Injury: Runners should avoid this if they have injury in their hamstrings or the calves.

Arthritis in Knees: Not to be practiced by people who have severe arthritis of the knees.

5. Marjari-asana (cat stretch pose):

Sit in vajrasana. Raise the buttocks and stand on the knees.

Lean forward and place the hands flat on the floor beneath the shoulders with the fingers facing forward. The hands should be in line with the knees; the arms and thighs should be perpendicular to the floor. The knees may be together or slightly separated. This is the starting position.

Inhale while raising the head and depressing the spine so that the back becomes concave. Expand the abdomen fully and fill the lungs with the maximum amount of air. Hold the breath for 3 seconds.

Exhale, while lowering the head and stretching the spine upward.

At the end of exhalation contract the abdomen and pull in the buttocks. The head will now be between the arms, facing the thighs. Hold the breath for 3 seconds, accentuating the arch of the spine and the abdominal contraction. This is one round.

Benefits: This asana improves the flexibility of the neck, shoulders and spine. It gently tones the female reproductive system. It may be safely practised up to the sixth month of pregnancy; forceful contraction of the abdomen, however, should be avoided after 3 months. Women suffering from menstrual disorders and leucorrhoea will obtain relief by doing marjari-asana and it may be practised during menstruation for relief of cramps.

✖ Contra-indications: Avoid in case of:

Injury of the shoulders, wrists, neck, hip, knee and the back, Migraine, Spondylitis, Arthritis of the knee and wrists.

❖ SUPINE POSITION ASANAS

1. Pawanmuktasana:

Lie flat on the back with the legs together and straight. The arms should be by the sides and palms flat on the floor.

Bend both knees and bring the thighs to the chest. Interlock the fingers and clasp the hands on the shin bones just below the knees.

Inhale deeply. Holding the breath, raise the head and shoulders and try to place the nose in the space between the two knees. Hold the breath in the raised position for a few seconds, counting mentally.

Slowly lower the head, shoulders and legs while breathing out. Practise this 3 times.

✕ Contra-indications:

Not to be performed by persons suffering from high blood pressure or serious back conditions, such as sciatica and slipped disc.

Benefits: Pawanmuktasana strengthens the lower back muscles and loosens the spinal vertebrae. It massages the abdomen and the digestive organs and is, therefore, very effective in removing wind and constipation. By massaging the pelvic muscles and reproductive organs, it is also useful in the treatment of impotence, sterility and menstrual problems.

2. Naukasana (boat pose):

Lie flat on the back, palms down. Keep the eyes open throughout. Breathe in deeply. Hold the breath and then raise the legs, arms, shoulders, head and trunk off the ground.

The shoulders and feet should be no more than 15 cm off the floor. Balance the body on the buttocks and keep the spine straight.

The arms should be held at the same level and in line with the toes. The hands should be open with the palms down.

Look towards the toes. Remain in the final position and hold the breath. Count to 5 mentally (or for longer if possible).

Breathe out and return to the supine position. Be careful not to injure the back of the head while returning to the floor. Relax the whole body. This is one round. Practise 3 to 5 rounds.

Relax in shavasana after each round, gently pushing out the abdomen with inhalation to relax the stomach muscles.

✕ Contra-indications:

Must be avoided if there is recent abdominal surgery as there is a lot of pressure on the abdomen.

Anyone suffering from hernia or piles should avoid this asana.

Pregnant women should not practice this asana.

Do not practice this yoga pose if you have low blood pressure, severe headache, migraine, or if you have suffered from some chronic diseases or spinal disorders in the recent past.

Asthma and heart patients are advised to avoid this pose.

Benefits: This asana stimulates the muscular, digestive, circulatory, nervous and hormonal systems, tones all the organs and removes lethargy. It is especially useful for eliminating nervous tension and bringing about deep relaxation. It may be performed before shavasana in

order to attain a deeper state of relaxation. If practised upon waking it immediately restores freshness.

3. Shavasana/Mritasana (corpse pose)

Lie flat on the back with the arms about 15 cm away from the body, palms facing upward. A thin pillow or folded cloth may be placed behind the head to prevent discomfort. Let the fingers curl up slightly.

Move the feet slightly apart to a comfortable position and close the eyes. The head and spine should be in a straight line. Make sure the head does not fall to one side or the other.

Relax the whole body and stop all physical movement. Become aware of the natural breath and allow it to become rhythmic and relaxed.

Begin to count the breaths from number 27 backwards to zero. Mentally repeat, "I am breathing in 27, I am breathing out 27, I am breathing in 26, I am breathing out 26", and so on, back to zero. If the mind wanders and the next number is forgotten, bring it back to the counting and start again at 27. If the mind can be kept on the breath for a few minutes the body will relax.

Benefits: This asana relaxes the whole psycho-physiological system. It should ideally be practised before sleep; before, during and after asana practice, particularly after dynamic exercises such as surya namaskara; and when the practitioner feels physically and mentally tired. It develops body awareness. When the body is completely relaxed, awareness of the mind increases, developing pratyahara.

4. Kandharasana (shoulder pose):

Lie flat on the back. Bend the knees, placing the soles of the feet flat on the floor with the heels touching the buttocks. The feet and knees may be hip width apart. Grasp the ankles with the hands. This is the starting position.

Raise the buttocks and arch the back upward. Try to raise the chest and navel as high as possible, pushing the chest up towards the chin and head without moving the position of the feet or shoulders. Keep the feet flat on the floor.

In the final position, the body is supported by the head, neck, shoulders, arms and feet. Hold the pose for as long as is comfortable and then lower the body to the starting position. Release the ankles and relax with the legs outstretched.

- ✕ Contra-indications: People suffering from peptic or duodenal ulcers, or abdominal hernia should not practise kandharasana. It is generally recommended that women in the advanced stages of pregnancy should raise the buttocks more than 15cm when practising this pose.

Benefits: This asana may be utilised to realign the spine, eliminating rounded shoulders and relieving backache. It massages and stretches the colon and abdominal organs, improving digestion. It tones the female reproductive organs and is especially recommended for women who have a tendency to miscarry. Kandharasana is used in yoga therapy for the management of menstrual disorders, prolapse, asthma, and various bronchial and thyroid conditions.

❖ PRONE POSITION ASANAS

1. Bhujangasana (cobra pose):

Lie flat on the stomach with the legs straight, feet together and the soles of the feet uppermost.

Place the palms of the hands flat on the floor, below and slightly to the side of the shoulders. The fingers should be together and pointing forward. The arms should be positioned so that the elbows point backward and are close to the sides of the body. Rest the forehead on the floor and close the eyes. Relax the whole body, especially the lower back.

While inhaling, slowly raise the head, neck and shoulders. Straightening the elbows, raise the trunk as high as possible. Use the back muscles more than the arm muscles. Be aware of using the back muscles first while starting to raise the trunk. Then use the arm muscles to raise the trunk further and arch the back.

Gently tilt the head backward, so that the chin points forward and the back of the neck is compressed. In the final position, the pubic bone remains in contact with the floor and the navel is raised a maximum of 3 cm. If the navel is raised too high, the bend tends to be in the knees and not in the back. The arms may or may not be straight; this will depend on the flexibility of the back.

Hold the final position. To return to the starting position, while exhaling, slowly bring the head forward, release the upper back by bending the arms, lower the navel, chest, shoulders and finally the forehead to the floor. Relax the lower back muscles. This is one round.

- ✖ Contra-indications: People suffering from peptic ulcer, hernia, intestinal tuberculosis or hyperthyroidism should not practise this asana without expert guidance.

Benefits: This asana can relocate slipped disc, remove backache and keep the spine supple and healthy. A stiff spine interferes with all nervous impulses sent from the brain to the body and vice versa. By arching the spine, improving circulation in the back region and toning the nerves, better communication between the brain and body results. This asana tones the ovaries and uterus, and helps alleviate menstrual and other gynaecological disorders. It stimulates the appetite, alleviates constipation and is beneficial for all the abdominal organs, especially the liver and kidneys. The adrenal glands, situated on top of the kidneys, are also massaged and stimulated to work more efficiently. The secretion of cortisone is maintained and the thyroid gland is regulated.

2. Sarpasana (snake pose):

Lie flat on the stomach with the legs straight and the feet together. Interlock the fingers and place the hands on top of the buttocks. Place the chin on the floor. This is the starting position.

Using the lower back muscles, raise the chest as far as possible from the floor. Push the hands further back and raise the arms as high as possible. Imagine the arms are being pulled from behind.

Raise the body as high as possible without straining. Squeeze the shoulder blades together and look forward. Hold for as long as is comfortable.

Slowly return to the starting position and relax the whole body. Release the hands and relax the arms by the sides of the body. Turn the head to one side. This is one round.

✕ Contra-indications:

People with heart conditions and high blood pressure should take care not to strain while performing this asana.

People suffering from peptic ulcer, hernia, intestinal tuberculosis or hyperthyroidism should not practise this asana without the proper guidance.

Benefits: Basically, the same as for bhujangasana with increased influence on the chest. In the final position the body weight is supported on the abdomen, pushing the diaphragm towards the chest. This, in turn, pressurises the air within the lungs and helps to open out inactive alveoli, improving both the removal of carbon dioxide and the intake of oxygen. The heart is toned and strengthened by the massage it receives due to the increased pressure within the chest cavity. Sarpasana is very useful for asthmatics. It also helps to release blocked emotions.

3. Shalabhasana (locust pose):

Lie flat on the stomach with the legs and feet together and the soles of the feet uppermost. The arms may be placed either under the body or by the sides, with the palms downward or the hands clenched.

Stretch the chin slightly forward and rest it on the floor throughout the practice. Close the eyes and relax the body. Deeply inhale. This is the starting position.

While restraining the breath slowly raise the legs as high as possible, keeping them straight and together. The elevation of the legs is produced by applying pressure with the arms against the floor and contracting the lower back muscles. Hold the final position for as long as is comfortable without strain.

Exhale and slowly lower the legs to the floor. This is one round. Return to the starting position and relax the body with the head turned to one side. Allow the respiration and heartbeat to return to normal.

Contra-indications: Shalabhasana requires a great deal of physical effort, so it should not be practised by people with a weak heart, coronary thrombosis or high blood pressure. Those suffering from peptic ulcer, hernia, intestinal tuberculosis and other such conditions are also advised not to practise this asana.

Benefits: The parasympathetic nerves are particularly prominent in the regions of the neck and pelvis. Shalabhasana stimulates the whole autonomic nervous system, especially the parasympathetic outflow. It strengthens the lower back and pelvic organs, and tones the sciatic nerves, providing relief for those with conditions such as backache, mild sciatica and slipped disc as long as the condition is not serious. It tones and balances the functioning of the liver and other abdominal organs, alleviates diseases of the stomach and bowels, and stimulates the appetite.

4. Dhanurasana (bow pose):

Lie flat on the stomach with the legs and feet together, and the arms and hands beside the body. Bend the knees and bring the heels close to the buttocks. Clasp the hands around the ankles. Place the chin on the floor. This is the starting position. Inhale during this position.

Hold the breath or practice slow, deep breathing so that the body rocks gently in unison with the breath.

Tense the leg muscles and push the feet away from the body. Arch the back, lifting the thighs, chest and head together. Keep the arms straight. In the final position the head is tilted back and the abdomen supports the entire body on the floor.

The only muscular contraction is in the legs; the back and arms remain relaxed. Hold the final position for as long as is comfortable and then, while exhaling, slowly relaxing the leg muscles, lower the legs, chest and head to the starting position. Release the pose and relax in the prone position until the respiration returns to normal. This is one round.

Contra-indications: People who suffer from a weak heart, high blood pressure, hernia, colitis, peptic or duodenal ulcers should not attempt this practice. This asana should not be practised before sleep at night as it stimulates the adrenal glands and the sympathetic nervous system.

Benefits: The entire alimentary canal is reconditioned by this asana. The liver, abdominal organs and muscles are massaged. The pancreas and adrenal glands are toned, balancing their secretions. The kidneys are massaged and excess weight is reduced around the abdominal area. This leads to improved functioning of the digestive, eliminative and reproductive organs and helps to remove gastrointestinal disorders, dyspepsia, chronic constipation and sluggishness of the liver. It is recommended in yoga therapy for the management of diabetes, incontinence, colitis, menstrual disorders and, under special guidance, cervical spondylitis. It improves blood circulation generally. The spinal column is realigned and the ligaments, muscles and nerves are

given a good stretch, removing stiffness. It helps correct hunching of the thoracic area of the spine. Dhanurasana is useful for relieving various chest ailments, including asthma, and for freeing nervous energy in the cervical and thoracic sympathetic nerves, generally improving respiration.

5. Shashankasana (pose of the moon or hare pose):

Sit in vajrasana, placing the palms on the thighs just above the knees. Close the eyes and relax, keeping the spine and head straight.

While inhaling, raise the arms above the head, keeping them straight and shoulder width apart.

Exhale while bending the trunk forward from the hips, keeping the arms and head straight and in line with the trunk. At the end of the movement, the hands and forehead should rest on the floor in front of the knees.

If possible, the arms and forehead should touch the floor at the same time. Bend the arms slightly so that they are fully relaxed and let the elbows rest on the floor. Retain the breath for up to 5 seconds in the final position.

Then, simultaneously inhale and slowly raise the arms and trunk to the vertical position. Keep the arms and head in line with the trunk. Breathe out while lowering the arms to the knees. This is one round. Practise 3 to 5 rounds.

Contra-indications: Not to be performed by people with very high blood pressure, slipped disc or those who suffer from vertigo.

Benefits: This asana stretches the back muscles and separates the individual vertebrae from each other, releasing pressure on the discs. Often nerve connections emanating from the spinal cord are squeezed by these discs, giving rise to various forms of backache. This posture helps to relieve this problem and encourages the discs to resume their correct position. It also regulates the functioning of the adrenal glands. It tones the pelvic muscles and the sciatic nerves and is beneficial for women who have an underdeveloped pelvis. It helps to alleviate disorders of both the male and female reproductive organs. Regular practice relieves constipation. When practised with ujjayi pranayama in the final position, it helps to eliminate anger and is very cooling for the brain.

UNIT 4

PRANAYAMA

Pranayama is generally defined as breath control. Although this interpretation may seem correct in view of the practices involved, it does not convey the full meaning of the term. The word pranayama is comprised of two roots: prana plus ayama.

Prana means 'vital energy' or 'life force'. It is the force which exists in all things, whether animate or inanimate. Although closely related to the air we breathe, it is more subtle than air or oxygen. Therefore, pranayama should not be considered as mere breathing exercises aimed at introducing extra oxygen into the lungs. Pranayama utilises breathing to influence the flow of prana in the nadis or energy channels of the pranamaya kosha or energy body.

The word *yama means 'control'* and is used to denote various rules or codes of conduct. However, this is not the word which is joined to prana to form pranayama; the correct word is ayama which has far more implications than the word yama. Ayama is defined as 'extension' or 'expansion'. Thus, the word pranayama means 'extension or expansion of the dimension of prana'. The techniques of pranayama provide the method whereby the life force can be activated and regulated in order to go beyond one's normal boundaries or limitations and attain a higher state of vibratory energy.