
UNIT 1: INTRODUCTION TO YOGA

UNIT STRUCTURE

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1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- explain the meaning of Yoga
- discuss the importance of the Yoga and its scope
- describe the aims and objectives of Yoga
- clarify the misconceptions on Yoga and
- explain the forms (schools) of Yoga and the characteristics of a Yoga practitioner

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Yoga is the only science which takes care of the all-round development of three essential elements- body, mind and soul together. Yogic Practice is a holistic science which includes the culture of the body,

the mind as well as the spirit. Yoga, not only improves physical and mental health and intellectual ability, but also improves character and behaviour of men by nipping in the bud the devil in them with the help of Yama-Niyama. This provides a strong moral foundation to men's life on which they build their physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual super-structure, and prove themselves to be a man or a woman in the real sense of the term.

This unit which is also the first unit of the theory course on Yoga Education, aims to provide you with a broad foundation for understanding Yoga in general. Besides providing some important definitions on Yoga, this unit discusses the meaning of Yoga, importance of Yoga and its scope, aims and objectives of Yoga, the misconceptions on Yoga, forms (schools) of Yoga and the characteristics of a Yoga practitioner.

1.3 CONCEPT OF YOGA

The word 'Yoga' is not unfamiliar to us. We have some ideas about it, though the ideas may be wrong or right. At one time, yoga was confined to very few dedicated people, initiated to that order by their Gurus, most of whom were ascetics and hermits. The general belief, even among the educated people, was that yoga was meant only for those people who had left their worldly life and started living in hermitage, and not for the householders.

But, after it has been popularised among the masses by yogis like Swami Ramdev, Shri Ravi Shankar and others, through mass-media, particularly through television and mass-yoga-camps, it is now widely practised by the common people, irrespective of gender, religion, caste, birth, age and profession, in order to gain relief from ailments and to lead a healthy, happy and prosperous life.

Much before it was popularised in India, the land of its origin, Yoga had gained popularity in the developed countries of the west and the east. After Yoga has been considered by the United Nations Organisation one of the most essential means for bringing peace and unity among the nations of the world, and with the declaration of International Day of Yoga to be

observed on June 21 every year, Yoga education has gained importance in the academic curriculum of a large number of countries of the world, including India.

1.3.1 Meaning of Yoga

The word 'Yoga' is a Sanskrit word which originated from the root 'YUJ'. Synonym of this Sanskrit word is found in different European languages too. Those are 'yoke' in English, 'youg' in French, 'joch' in German, 'zugos' in Greek, 'jugum' in Latin, 'igo' in Russian and 'yugo' in Spanish.

The meaning of 'yuj' is 'to join', 'to unite' 'to yoke'. As such, yoga means 'to unite together', to act in unison with mutual understanding, co-operation, co-ordination, love and affection, avoiding all differences, conflicts, ill-will and hatred, with one mind, one thought, to arrive at the one and same goal. Yoga initially starts in the body-system with united functioning of the cells, tissues, organs and systems of the body, thereafter it gradually extends to the working in unison of the body and the mind, the members of the family, neighbourhood, village, community, nation, human society, animal and plant kingdom, things and being of the universe, and, at last, the merging of the individual soul with the universal consciousness. This is possible only when one understands and realises his own self. That is why, the ancient philosophers, both in the East as well as in the West, were saying 'know thyself' '*Atmanam Biddhi*'. Dive deep into your inner self and find the mine of wisdom within.

Each individual has immense creative potential within himself. The goal should be to manifest the potentiality within. This can be done by controlling nature both external and internal. There are systems and methods which through devoted, methodical and regular practice, enables an individual to arrive at the desired goal. The goal, as well as, the systems or methods to arrive at the goal, are called Yoga.

1.3.2 Definition of Yoga

Yoga has been defined variously in different scriptures and treatises on yoga. Though the definitions vary, the goal of all the definitions are one and the same, i.e., to know the Self, to unfold the divinity within and to merge the individual self with the universal consciousness, experience the 'Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Absolute' and thereby to free oneself from the pains and sufferings that emerge from mundane life.

Some important definitions of yoga are given below:

1. The '*Yog-Vasistha Ramayana*' mentions two definitions. The first one is on the 'state' and, that is, 'Yoga' is the maintenance of equilibrium between the individual soul and the universal soul (Yoga Samatavastha Jivatma Paaramatmano). The second definition is about the 'method' and, that is, 'Yoga is the means for controlling the mind' (Manah Prasamanopayah Yoga Ityavirdhiyate).
2. The '*Maha-Nirvan Tantra*' defines yoga as 'Union of the individual soul with the universal soul' (Yoga Jivatma Paramatmano Eikyam).
3. In the '*Srimad Bhagawad Gita*' two definitions of yoga can be found. One is – a) 'Maintenance of equanimity or balance is yoga' (*Samattwam Yoga Uccyate*). The other is b) 'Yoga is skill in action' (*Yoga Karmasu Kausalam*).
4. Sage Patanjali in the '*Yoga Sutra*' defines yoga as the inhibition or restraint of modifications of the mind (*Yoga Chitta Vritti Nirodhah*).

In order to arrive at the final stage of yoga, as mentioned in the first two definitions of yoga, it is required to keep the mind in a state of equilibrium, free from all modifications where the self remains in its original pure state. The seer gets a clear vision of his/her unpolluted self. At all other states, the self mingles with the modifications. Stopping the process of modification is defined as Yoga. For that purpose, some sort of systematic, physical and mental cultures are prescribed. These systems are also called Yoga.

1.4 IMPORTANCE OF YOGA

In Indian civilisation and culture, yoga occupies a highly esteemed place, from time immemorial. In the ancient times, the practitioner of yoga was regarded thousand times superior to the house-holder and the celibate, and hundred times superior to the hermit. Because of its importance felt by the people in different ages, the practice of yoga is being continued since the pre-historic days to the present day. Day by day, its importance and popularity is increasing, and now, it has become a universal phenomenon.

Our worldly lives are always full of pain and suffering. We give in our endless efforts in order to gain or overcome relief from such sufferings and also to gain happiness. And as a result of our efforts, pleasure comes to our lives, although for a temporary period. The universal importance of yoga lies in the fact that its regular practice with sincerity and devotion **drives away worldly pains and sufferings for good** and the practitioner enjoys permanent peace and bliss.

In the present-day world, the diseases of psycho-somatic origin, such as hyper-tension, heart-diseases, asthma, diabetes, insomnia are increasing very fast and the modern medical science has failed to cure these diseases. After a lot of scientific experiments done on patients undergoing yogic treatment, it has been found to be the most effective treatment for all these ailments. Here lies the importance of yogic practice. It is found to be the **best means of leading a tension-free life, which keeps men free from physical, mental, as well as, psycho-somatic disorders.**

Yoga education is a holistic education which includes physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, moral, spiritual, social as well as environmental education, due to which the practitioner of yoga becomes healthy in the true sense of the term. Other than yoga, there is no such system which prepares a man holistically and therein lies the importance of yoga.

Yogic practices, not only improve health but also **increase mental**

concentration, due to which memory-power increases. Moreover, due to an achievement of tranquility of mind and increase of power of concentration, analytical power develops and the practitioner understands things quickly and better. His/her latent talents start unfolding. S/He learns quickly the skill to perform efficiently whatever work s/he takes up and attains excellence in the same.

In the present-day the atmosphere of intolerance, animosity and corruption prevailing in the human society, the need of practicing yoga is increasing tremendously, as it is the only means which can save the world from these state of affairs. The very first requisite for a practitioner of yoga is to practice non-violence, truthfulness, honesty, kindness for others, fellow-feeling, magnanimity, piousness and tolerance which are the basic tenets of yoga.

Yoga has proved to be the best **method for attaining super-normal powers**, realisation of individual self and merging of the self with divine consciousness.

1.5 SCOPE OF YOGA

The scope of yoga is not limited to some physical postures called *asana*, breathing techniques called *pranayama*, mental exercises called *dhyana* or manipulation of internal organs called *bandha* and *mudra*; it extends to **cover all aspects of life** as a way of life as well as, a life-style.


Yoga is a **holistic education** which includes within its range 'physical education' to take care of physical health, 'mental education' to make a man mentally sound, 'moral education' to eradicate immoral activities from the society, 'spiritual education' to develop the divine potentialities within, 'social education' in order to bring mutual understanding, develop fellow-feeling and tolerance among the members of the society and 'environmental education' to make the atmosphere free from pollution.

In the present-day world, the scope of yoga has extended to **cover the field of medical science**. Now, throughout the world yoga has gained importance as a science of therapy alternative to allopathic treatment.

The range of yoga has **extended to all the fields of human activity**.

Due to its capability to enhance efficiency at work, it has now become a very popular and essential practice in the world of business organisations, multi-nationals, sports and games, dance and music, cinema and other fields of human activity.

The Ministry of Human Resource Development through the National Institutes of Education, NCERT has further informed that the affiliated schools of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), have already been advised to provide compulsory yoga for at least 2 periods per week (90-120 minutes/ week). The Board offers yoga for secondary schools as a compulsory part of its curriculum which include 80% practical and 20% theory.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Fill up the blanks:

- i) The word 'Yoga' is originated from a root Sanskrit word
- ii) 'Yoga' is the maintenance of between the individual soul and the universal soul.
- iii) The offers yoga for schools as a compulsory part of its curriculum.

1.6 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF YOGA

Yoga has diverse range of things to offer mankind. Hence, the aims and objectives for practising yoga may be varied and may vary from person to person, depending upon their basic disciplines, trades and professions, needs and requirements and problems they face in their walks of life.

Broadly, the objectives are –

- i) To bring peace and tranquility of mind, freeing it from all stress and strains, worries and anxieties;
- ii) To bring balance and harmony in the body-mind-soul complex;
- iii) To explore and unfold the latent talents, by controlling nature both external and internal, annihilating the evils within;
- iv) To gain sound health;

- v) To train the body and mind in a way to avoid rigidity and bring flexibility;
- vi) To develop immunity and resistance power;
- vii) To master the secrets of doing work efficiently and excel in tasks taken up;
- viii) in the social complex, as well as, the global complex;
- ix) To keep the internal body clean and detoxified and thereby render it free from disease;
- x) To transform a mundane life to a blissful godly life.

The ultimate goal of yoga is to know one's Self within and bring union between the individual Self (*Atman*) and the Universal Consciousness (*Paramatman*), to bridge between the microcosm and the macrocosm, and, thereby, to attain liberation (*Moksha* or *Kaivalya*) from the cares and anxieties, pains and sufferings of worldly life and enjoy Truth-Knowledge-Bliss-Absolute. For that, it is necessary to have a clear vision of the individual self. That is possible only when the mind (*chitta*) is made free from modifications. Thus, **annihilation of the propensities of mind** (*Chitta vritti nirodha*) becomes the first objective.

1.7 MISCONCEPTIONS ON YOGA

It is seen that there are several misconceptions prevalent, not only among common people but also among many educated people. Some of the misconceptions are as follows:-

1. Yoga is nothing but some physical exercises called *asana*, breathing exercises called *pranayama* and mental exercises called meditation, in order to keep man physically healthy and mentally free from stress and tension;
2. Yoga is part of Hinduism and its propagation is indirectly related to the expansion of the empire of Hinduism. Some of the yogic practices are against the principles of other religions. So, many people belonging to other religions think that the practice of yoga affect their loyalty to their professed religions;
3. Yoga is purely a spiritual practice, and not meant for people busy in worldly life;

4. For learning and practising yoga, one must take the help of a Guru (Yoga Expert); otherwise it may be a dangerous practice for the learner. With this fear in mind, many people avoid practicing yoga;
5. In order to practise yoga one must avoid non-vegetarian food and eat vegetarian food;
6. A yoga practitioner must observe strict celibacy and he or she should not marry;
7. Yoga can be practised only by those people who have flexible body. So it is meant only for children and youths, and not meant for the old people;
8. Those who practise yoga must take rich food, otherwise they become weak;
9. If one starts practicing yoga, he must not leave it. If he stops practising, he may suffer from physical ailments.

Against the misconceptions mentioned above, the following clarifications may be given:

1. Yoga is a very broad subject which is not confined to *asana*, *pranayama* and meditation alone. These are only three out of many limbs of Hatha Yoga and Astanga Raja Yoga. Over and above these two kinds of yoga, there are many other kinds of yoga, viz., Karma Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Laya Yoga, Mantra Yoga, Tantra Yoga, Kriya Yoga etc. Moreover, *asana*, *pranayama* and meditation are not exercises, though superficially they look like that. Against quick movements and dynamism which are characteristic features of exercise; asanas and pranayamas are controlled and regulated movements of body and breathing where importance is given on their composed state. Meditation is a state where fluctuations of mind are calmed down and is brought to a tranquil state.
2. Yoga is not confined to a particular state, community or religion; it is universal. The door of yoga is open to all irrespective of caste, creed, religion, nationality, gender and place of birth. Though a theist system, it is secular and gives equal regards to all religions. Practice of yoga makes a Hindu a better Hindu, a Christian a better Christian, a Muslim

a better Muslim by taking them to the core of their religions. It is a system for self-realisation, for manifestation of divinity lying dormant within, through physical, mental, moral, intellectual and spiritual practices.

3. Yoga has a very wide scope which encompasses people of all walks of life. Practice of yoga is important, equally for house-holders, businessmen, intellectuals, scientists, musicians, artists, players, sportsmen, students, teachers and service-holders, as it is for the spiritual seekers. Yoga practice helps men in all walks of life to learn skill in their works and excel in their pursuits.
4. To learn any skill or trade, it is always good to learn from a learned person and experienced in that particular skill or trade. But, when such a teacher is not available one can learn by himself from books or other sources but by taking all kinds of precautions. What is very much important for practising yoga is awareness, diligence, steadiness and carefulness. Thus, one requires direct contact of an expert master and his instructions, in order to reach higher and complicated stages of yoga.
5. As far as diet is concerned, persons desiring to remain healthy must take care of quality and quantity of his diet and timing. He is required to take balanced diet which includes required quantity of carbohydrate, protein, fat, minerals, vitamins and pure water in sufficient quantity. One's diet may or may not include non-vegetarian items, depending upon his tradition and culture, his likes and dislikes, climatic conditions and physical made-up.
6. Observance of celibacy till one's ripe young age and maintenance of regulated sex life after marriage is good for health; but forceful suppression of sexual urge is not good. It may adversely affect, not only physical health but also mental health thereby leading to social nuisance. Marriage is a sacred institution, not to be treated as license for satisfying the sexual urge of a couple indiscriminately. It may be mentioned that ancient sages and saints like Viswamitra, some of the great yogis of modern era, like Syam Charan Lahiri, Sri Yogendra,

Dr. Swami Gitananda Paramhansa and B. K. S. Iyengar, led householder's life in spite of being yogis.

7. Flexibility of body is good for health, but that does not mean that one's body must be flexible for practising yoga. It is only for performing the cultural asanas that flexibility is considered a favorable factor. Body flexibility, even in case of elderly people, comes after regular practice of the asanas through proper relaxation of the limbs. In meditative asanas, sitting with erect spine is emphasised upon and not on bending towards different directions.
8. Balanced food is good for health; but not rich food. Statistics show that those who eat rich food regularly, become prey to diseases, sooner or later. Although, in the Yoga Shastras it is said that the power of digestion of a yoga practitioner is very strong, it is also cautioned that he should take food which is nutritious, easily digestible and do not cause constipation.
9. Regularity is required in case of practising yoga for success as is required in any other work as well. The practitioner will not receive due benefit if he is not regular in practice; but it does not mean that he will suffer from disease if he leaves practice.

1.8 FORMS (SCHOOLS) OF YOGA

There is an English saying - 'All roads lead to Rome'. Destination is one, roads or paths are many. One goes according to his own convenience, but reaches the same destination. So is the case with yoga. The final goal of yoga is one i.e. *Kaivalya* (Salvation). But the methods of practice applied to reach the goal differs from man to man, depending upon their nature and capabilities. The saints, sages and yogis, after long experiences and experiments, have found out different methods of practising yoga, to suit the people of different temperaments and nature, living in different atmospheres and climatic conditions, running different trades and professions. As a result, different schools of yoga have come up and the number is increasing day-by-day.

According to western psychology, the mind is constituted of three elements –thought, feeling and will-power. Though all the three elements work within the mind, they do not work equally. One of the three elements becomes predominant in every individual. Depending upon the predominating element men may be divided into three broad categories- analytical-minded, emotional- minded and active-minded. *Srimad Bhagawad Gita* prescribes three different kinds of yoga for these three categories of people- (A) Jnana Yoga for the analytical-minded, (B) Bhakti Yoga for emotional-minded and (C) Karma Yoga for active minded people. *Srimad Bhagawad Gita* mentions about another kind of yoga and that is Dhyana Yoga or Raja Yoga for controlling and channelising the mind and to proceed from conscious to the super-conscious state of mind and arrive at the ultimate goal.

- (A) Jnana Yoga** is the yoga of enquiry into the Self. The fundamental tenet of Jnana Yoga is that the ocean of knowledge is lying within, and not outside. The outside world, i.e., the material world around us, is an illusion. The Ultimate Truth is Brahma (Supreme Consciousness or Paramatman) and Jiva or Atman is the embodiment of the Param Brahma. If one knows the Self, he knows everything. So, the proponents of Jnana Yoga emphasise upon the realisation of the Self. The tools of Jnana Yoga for realisation of the Self are –
- a) *Viveka* (conscience), b) *Vairagya* (non-attachment), c) *Sat-Sampatti* (six properties or virtues) and d) longing for *Mumukshatva* (liberation).

The six properties (*Sat-Sampattis*) are : 1) *Sam* (Calming down of the mind), 2) *Dam* (Self-control), 3) *Uparati* (Sacrifice of greed), 4) *Titiksha* (Patience), 5) *Sraddha* (Respect and Devotion) and 6) *Samadhana* (One-pointedness of mind on God).

The methods of Jnana Yoga are – first Listening/Studying (*Sravana/Adhyana*), then thinking and analysing (*Manan/Vislekhan*) and at last diving deep into it and realising the truth (*Anudhyasan*).

- (B) Bhakti Yoga** is the yoga of devotion to God in some form or the other. A Bhakta Yogi surrenders completely to God, the Almighty. Love is the core element of Bhakti Yoga.

Nine kinds of Bhakti or devotion are mentioned in '*Narada Bhakti*

Sutra', '*Srimad Bhagawata*' etc. These are- *Sravana* (Listening to chantings in praise of the Deity), *Kirtana* (Singing religious songs), *Smarana* (Remembering the Deity), *Pada-Sevana* (serving at the feet of the Deity), *Archana* (worshipping), *Bandana* (Praising), *Dasya* (acting like a slave), *Sakhya* (treating the Deity as friend) and *Atma-Nivedana* (Self-surrendering). Taking any kind of *Bhakti*, the *Bhakta* (devotee) starts his journey. *Bhakti* gradually becomes ripe and in the ripe stage it transforms into divine Love and the devotee merges fully in the ocean of Love. A heart filled with divine Love cannot give shelter to malice towards others; everything become pure and the devotee visualises God in every object. In the Bible, it is said "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."

(C) **Karma Yoga** is selfless devotion to work for social wellbeing. A Karma Yogi sees God in all beings and for him service to beings becomes service to God. To such an individual, work is worship. He works with dedication for the welfare and happiness of others, sacrificing his selfish interest, his ego, happiness and sorrow. Leaving the fruits of his work to God Almighty, he goes on working without care for success and failure.

The basic principles of Karma Yoga are –

1. Right attitude while doing work;
2. Right motive- love to serve without any profit-motive, to get reward, remuneration, name and fame.
3. Contribute the utmost by doing one's work with heart and soul
4. Give up the thought of success and failure from mind
5. Follow the discipline of the work
6. Treat any work as service to God

Raja Yoga is that yoga where the sense organs and the mind are withdrawn from the external objects, they are confined to the inside of the mind, the mind is controlled and calmed down and with the help of concentration and meditation proceeds towards super-conscious state where self-realisation is attained, the individual Self merges with the Universal Consciousness.

In Patanjali's Yoga Sutra, the eightfold path is called *ashtanga*, which literally means "eight limbs". These eight steps basically act as guidelines on how to live a meaningful and purposeful life. They serve as a prescription for moral and ethical conduct and self-discipline; they direct attention toward one's health; and they help us to acknowledge the spiritual aspects of our nature. In brief the eight limbs, or steps to yoga, are as follows: **1) Yama 2) Niyama 3) Asanas 4) Pranayama 5) Pratyahara 6) Dharana 7) Dhyana 8) Samadhi**

Raja Yoga is the royal path of yoga. As a king maintains control over his kingdom from his capital, so also, in Raja Yoga, the Yogi maintains control over the kingdom of his mind through psychological control. The basic principle of Raja Yoga is that our vision of Divine Self is obscured by the fluctuations of the mind (*chitta*). If the mind is stilled and purified, the Self shines forth automatically. Raja Yoga is also called classical yoga.

Treatises on yoga, like *Yoga Tattva Upanishad*, *Yoga Sikha Upanishad* and *Siva Samhita*, mention about four kinds of yoga- Mantra Yoga, Laya Yoga, Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga. George Feuerstein, a German Indologist specialising on Yoga, mentions six kinds of yoga. They are Raja Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and Mantra Yoga. He mentions about Integral Yoga of Sri Aurobindo as another kind of yoga. Ernest Wood, the European yogi, mentions about seven Indian systems, viz. (1) Raja Yoga of Patanjali, (2) Buddhi and Karma Yoga of Sri Krishna, (3) Jnana Yoga of Adi Sankaracharya, (4) Hatha Yoga, (5) Laya Yoga, (6) Bhakti Yoga and (7) Mantra Yoga, and three non-Indian systems, viz. (1) Persian Sufi Yoga, (2) Eight Noble Paths of the Buddha and (3) Zen Yoga of China and Japan.

In due course of time, with the change of man's life-style, various styles of yoga have evolved through the practices of the masters of yoga, which are nothing but variations of Hatha Yoga with different names.

1.9 CHARACTERISTICS OF A YOGA PRACTITIONER

The characteristic features of a yogi, as mentioned in the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* is that he has a slim body, glowing complexion, clear voice, dazzling eyes, controlled vital energy and has a very strong digestive power.

A devoted practitioner of yoga practises physical mental, moral, emotional, intellectual and spiritual culture, regularly and methodically, in order to drive away or annihilate all the evils and unfold the humane and divine qualities lying dormant in him. As a result of regular practice of yoga, the practitioner develops in him a strong moral character with integrity, honesty, intellectual maturity, confidence, tolerance, fellow-feeling, love and friendship, selflessness and respect for other. Gradually, he develops the mental attitude to treat friends and foes alike, without any ill-feelings, even to his enemies. He develops the feeling of universal brotherhood, 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'. He starts seeing God in all God's creations. His magnanimous personality attracts all, whoever comes to his contact. Such persons are capable of influencing people without any verbal or written communication or public appearance, only through their meditation from a secluded place.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: Fill up the blanks:

- i) According to western psychology, mind is constituted of elements.
- ii) The tools of Jnana Yoga for realisation of the Self are –
(a) (b).....(c).....(d).....

Q 3: What are the kinds of Yoga, according to George Feuerstein ?

.....

Q 4: What are the limbs of Yoga, according to Raja Yoga?

.....



1.10 LET US SUM UP

- The word 'Yoga' is a Sanskrit word, originated from the root 'YUJ'. 'Yoga' is the maintenance of equilibrium between the individual soul and the universal soul.

- Yoga education is a holistic education which includes physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, moral, spiritual, social as well as environmental education, due to which the practitioner of yoga becomes healthy in the true sense of the term.
- The Ministry of Human Resource Development through the National Institutes of Education, NCERT has further informed that the affiliated schools of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), who have already been advised to provide compulsory yoga for at least 2 periods per week (90-120 minutes/ week).
- *Srimad Bhagawad Gita* prescribes four different kinds of yoga-a) Jnana Yoga, b) Bhakti Yoga, c) Karma Yoga, and d) Raja Yoga. We can also mention about another kinds of Yoga- Hatha Yoga, Laya Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Mantra Yoga etc.
- The characteristic features of a yogi is that he has a slim body, glowing complexion, clear voice, dazzling eyes, controlled vital energy and a very strong digestive power.



1.11 FURTHER READING

- 1) Bapat, Sudhir. (1981). *A Scientific Approach to Yoga*. Delhi : Ravi.
- 2) Dvivedi, M. N. (Ed .and Tr.). (1934). *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. Adyar, Madras : Theosophical Publishing House.
- 3) Feuerstein, George, (2002). *The Yoga Tradition*. Delhi :Motilal Baanershidas.
- 4) Phukan, B.N., (2012). *Yog Vijñan Parichay*. North Lakhimpur : Dr. Jogada Phukan.



1.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: (i) Yuj

(ii) equilibrium

(iii) Central Board of Secondary Education, Secondary

Ans to Q No 2: (i) 3

(ii) *Viveka, Vairagya, Sat-Sampatti and Mumukshatva.*

Ans to Q No 3: George Feuerstein mentions six kinds of yoga. They are Raja Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and Mantra Yoga.

Ans to Q No 4: The eight limbs, or steps to Raja yoga, are as follows:

1)Yama 2)Niyama 3)Asanas 4)Pranayama 5)Pratyahara
6) Dharana 7)Dhyana 8)Samadhi.



1.13 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very Short Questions

Q 1: Define Yoga.

Q 2: In order to practise yoga one can eat both non-vegetarian and vegetarian food. Explain briefly.

Q 3: Write any two characteristics of a Yoga practitioner.

B. Short Questions (Answer in about 150 words)

Q 1: Write are the aims and objectives of Yoga?

Q 2: Write a note on Karma Yoga.

Q 3: What are the different forms of yoga according to *Srimad Bhagawad Gita*?

C. Long Questions (Answer in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: What do you understand by Yoga ? Explain its meaning and definition.

Q 2: Discuss the importance of Yoga in the present day context.

Q 3: Give a description of different kinds of Yoga.

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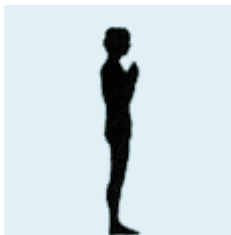
Yoga Postures Step By Step

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Yoga Postures Step-by-Step

1. The Sun salutation - *Suryanamaskar*



Posture: *Surya-namaskar* - Sun Salutation

Translation: The Sanskrit word *surya* means sun. Namaskar is the Hindi word for Namaste, from the root *nam*, to bow. Namaskar means salutation, salute, greeting or praise.

Pronunciation: soor-yee-ah-nahma-skar

Difficulty: (3)

STEP ONE:



Stand facing the direction of the sun with both feet touching. Bring the hands together, palm-to-palm, at the heart.

STEP TWO:



Inhale and raise the arms upward. Slowly bend backward, stretching arms above the head.

STEP THREE:



Exhale slowly bending forward, touching the earth with respect until the hands are in line with the feet, head touching knees.

STEP FOUR:



Inhale and move the right leg back away from the body in a wide backward step. Keep the hands and feet firmly on the ground, with the left foot between the hands. Raise the head.

STEP FIVE:



While exhaling, bring the left foot together with the right. Keep arms straight, raise the hips and align the head with the arms, forming an upward arch.

STEP SIX:



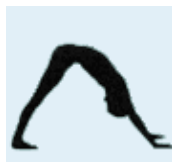
Exhale and lower the body to the floor until the feet, knees, hands, chest, and forehead are touching the ground.

STEP SEVEN:



Inhale and slowly raise the head and bend backward as much as possible, bending the spine to the maximum (as in the [naga-asana](#)).

STEP EIGHT:



While exhaling, bring the left foot together with the right. Keep arms straight, raise the hips and align the head with the arms, forming an upward arch.

STEP NINE:

Inhale and move the right leg back away from the body in a wide backward step. Keep the hands and feet firmly on the ground, with the left foot between the hands. Raise the head.

STEP TEN:

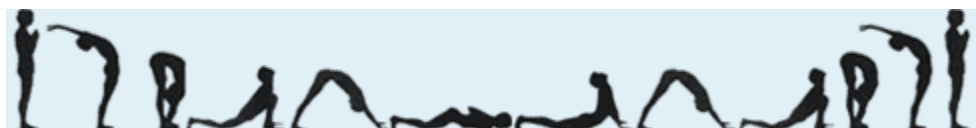
Exhale slowly bending forward, touching the earth with respect until the hands are in line with the feet, head touching knees.

STEP ELEVEN:

Inhale and raise the arms upward. Slowly bend backward, stretching arms above the head.

STEP TWELVE:

Stand facing the direction of the sun with both feet touching. Bring the hands together, palm-to-palm, at the heart.



2. Akarna-Dhanura-asana – The Shooting – bow - Pose



Posture: *Akarna-dhanura-asana*
The Shooting-bow Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *karna* means ear and the prefix "*a*" means near to or towards. *Dhanur* means bow-shaped, curved or bent. The "bow" here referred to is a bow as in "bow and arrow." Literally we could translate this as the near-the-ear bow posture but because of the obvious appearance of the posture we'll call it the shooting bow posture.

Pronunciation: ah-car-nah da-noor ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (6) Requires flexibility of hips and legs.

Instructions:

1. Sit on the floor with the legs together and extended straight out in front. Keep the back straight, shoulders level and head straight. Place the hands, palms down, flat on top of the thighs then inhale deeply.
2. Exhale and reach down and loop the forefinger of the right hand around the big toe of the right foot and grasp the left foot with the left hand.
3. Inhale and pull the right foot back placing the big toe next to the right ear. Straighten the back as much as possible and hold the posture for the duration of the inhale breath.
4. Exhale and return to the seated position of step #1 then repeat the posture on the opposite side.

"Having caught the toes of the feet with both hands and carried them to the ears by drawing the body like a bow, it becomes *Dhanura-asana*."

The Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika I.27.

Comments:

While practicing this posture imagine yourself as an archer with the gaze focused on the target and the arrow firmly yet gracefully being pulled back in the bow. Hold the posture steady as an archer would hold the arrow aimed at its target. Return the foot to the floor gently. This simple technique will help cultivate a focused and unwavering attention.

Variations:

Reverse the hands and feet so that the right hand pulls the left foot to the left ear and vice versa. The foot gets pulled under the outstretched arm.

3. Anjanaya-asana – The Salutation Pose

Posture: *Anjanaya-asana - The Salutation Pose*

Translation: The Sanskrit word *anjaneya* means salutation or praise from the root *anj* which means to honor, to celebrate, to anoint.

Pronunciation: Ahn-jah-nay-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (7)

Instructions:

1. Sit comfortably in the *vajra-asana* (thunderbolt pose).
2. Kneel up on your knees until your back, buttocks and thighs are aligned.
3. Extend your left foot forward bending your left knee at about a 90 degree angle.
4. Place the palms of your hands together at the heart in the *anjali-mudra*.
5. Raise your arms straight up keeping the palms together while bending the head backward and looking up.
6. Slowly bend backward stretching the arms backward and straightening out the right leg. Hold this position for as long as comfortable while breathing gently through the nostrils.

7. Come back to the *vajara-asana* (thunderbolt pose) then reverse the posture by alternating legs.

Comments:

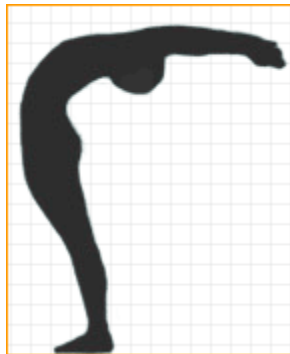
The *anjaneya-asana* combines several postures and *mudras* (gestures) in a fluid, evolving flow that combines motion, stretching and holds. It delivers great benefits for the back, arms, chest, legs and hips. Regular practice will strengthen concentration and improve balance.

Perform this posture with a sense of reverence and praise. Take a moment to reside in silence and peace as your hands are held at the heart in the gesture (*mudra*) of salutation (*anjali-mudra*). Keep the intention of praise in mind as you extend your arms skyward. Feel your entire body-mind-heart extending outward in recognition of the sacredness of life.

Duration/Repetitions:

Repeat twice on each side.

4. Ardhashandra-asana – The Half – moon Pose



Posture: **Ardhashandra-asana - The Half-moon Pose**

Translation: The Sanskrit word *ardha* means "half," and the word *chandra* means "moon," thus, this is the "half moon" posture.

Pronunciation: ard-ha-chun-drah-sa-na

Difficulty: (2)

Instructions:

1. Stand in the *tada-asana* (Stand with both feet touching from the heel to the big toe, keeping the back straight and the arms pressed slightly against the sides with palms facing inward).
2. Bring the hands together at the chest with palms lightly pressed against each other (the *Anjali-mudra*).
3. Inhale and raise the arms straight up keeping the palms pressed lightly together.
4. Arch your body backwards keeping your arms alongside your neck and head, tilt the head backward and hold. Keep your knees straight while holding posture.
5. Slowly return to the *tada-asana*.

Comments:

The *ardha-chandra-asana* is a basic stretching and balancing pose that benefits principally the lower back, abdomen and chest. It is equally suitable for use in your stretching routine as well as formal *asana* practice.

This pose is also one of the postures that are sequenced in *surya-namaskar* (the Sun Salutation).

Duration/Repetitions:

Repeat *ardha-chandra-asana* two to three times.

5. Ardha-matsyendra-asana – The Half Spinal Twist Pose

**Posture: *Ardha-matsyendra-asana*
The Half Spinal Twist Pose**

Translation: *Ardha* means half. *Matsyendra* is one of many Siddhas or masters who were accomplished Yogis mentioned in the medieval Yoga text the *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika*. This posture is traditionally called the Spinal Twist because the spinal column is twisted gently.

Pronunciation: ard-ha-mat-syen-drah-sa-na

Difficulty: (4)

"Keeping the abdominal region at ease like the back, bending the left leg, place it on the right thigh; then place on this the elbow of the right hand, and place the face on the palm of the right hand, and fix the gaze between the eye-brows. This is called *Matsyendra*-posture."

Hatha-yoga-pradipika I.37

Instructions:

- Sit in any comfortable cross-legged position.
1. Straighten the legs out in front. Bend the right knee and bring the heel of the right foot close to the left hip.
2. Inhale and bend the left knee upward and place the left foot flat on the floor to the right of the right leg with the ankle touching the right thigh.
3. While turning the spine to the left straighten the right arm bringing it around to the outside of the left knee and grasp the left foot with the right hand.
4. Turn your head as far as possible to the left and bend the left arm behind your back. Keep your spine, neck and head aligned and continue to exert effort at turning to the left.
5. Repeat the posture the other side by reversing directions 2-6.

Comments:

The Half Spinal Twist is one of the best Yoga postures for cultivating flexibility and strength in the spine. It soothes stiff necks and upper back tension caused by stress, poor posture, or prolonged periods of sitting in one position.

The alternating compression and release of the abdominal region flushes this area with blood and massages the internal organs. Muscles of the stomach and hips are also toned from repeated practice of the Half Spinal Twist.

Duration/Repetitions:

The posture can be held for as long as you are comfortable. (One repetition consists of performing the posture on each side. Two to three full repetitions should be done at each session.

6. Baddha-kona-asana – The Restrained Angle Pose



Posture: *Baddha-kona-asana*

The Restrained Angle Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *baddha* means a bond, chain, caught or restrained. The word *pada* means foot, and *kona* means corner or angle therefore this is the restrained-foot-angle posture.

Pronunciation: ba-dah-cone-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (4)

Instructions:

1. Sit on the floor with the legs together and extended straight out in front. Keep the back straight, shoulders level and head straight. Place the hands, palms down, flat on top of the thighs then inhale deeply.
2. Exhale and bend the knees drawing the feet toward the torso.
3. Place the soles of the feet together, clasp the hands over the feet interlocking the fingers pulling the feet closer and placing the heels against the perineum. The outer edge and small toe of each foot should touch the floor.
4. Lower the knees to the floor and keep the back straight. Use the elbows to press down on the thighs if necessary to bring the calves and knees to the floor. Hold the posture breathing gently through the nostrils.
5. Release the posture and sit with the legs extended out and hands on the thighs.

Comments:

Regular practice of the *baddhakona-asana* stretches the knees and stimulates circulation in the legs. It should be practiced frequently until one is comfortable sitting in the *padma-asana*. The main areas of the body that are stimulated, besides the legs, are the stomach, pelvis and lower back. It is said to keep the kidneys, prostate and bladder healthy. The *baddha-konasana* is one of the few postures that can be practiced comfortably soon after eating.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the posture from thirty seconds to two minutes depending on comfort. Repeat two or three times.

7. Bala-asana – The Child Pose**Posture: Bala-asana - The Child Pose**

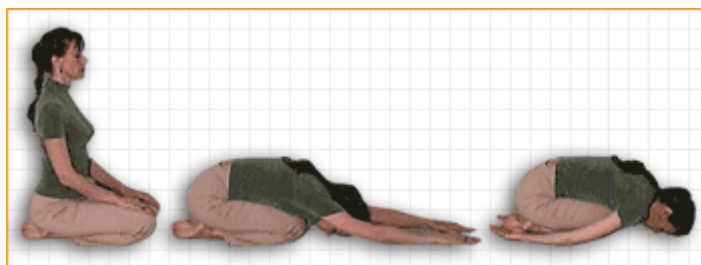
Translation: The Sanskrit word *bala* means child.

Pronunciation: ba-lah-sa-na

Difficulty: (2)

"As innumerable cups full of water, many reflections of the sun are seen, but the sun is the same; similarly individuals, like cups, are innumerable, but spirit, like the sun, is one."

The Shiva-samhita I.35 II.42-43.

**Instructions:**

1. Sit on your knees with your feet together and buttocks resting on your heels. Separate your knees about the width of your hips. Place your hands on your thighs, palms down. (This is the *vajra-asana* or Thunderbolt Pose).
2. Inhale deeply, then exhale as you bring your chest between your knees while swinging your arms forward.
3. Rest your forehead on the floor, if possible, and then bring your arms around to your sides until the hands are resting on either side of your feet, palms up.
4. Breathe gently through your nostrils as you hold the posture. Hold for about one to two minutes. Then return to an upright kneeling position with your back straight and your hands on your thighs.
5. Repeat the posture at least one more time.

Comments:

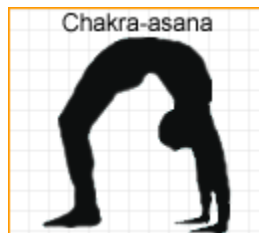
The *bala-asana* is one of the more relaxing Yoga postures and can easily be done by beginners. As part of your Yoga routine it is best used as a counter-pose to any posture that stretch the spine backward (such as the [naga-asana](#), the [dhanura-asana](#), the [chakra-asana](#), the [ushtra-asana](#), etc.)

The *bala-asana* gently stretches and relaxes the shoulders, neck, back muscles and thighs.

Duration/Repetitions:

The *bala-asana* can be held for as long as is comfortable. Repeat at least twice if it is held for less than a minute.

8. Chakra-asana



Posture: *Chakra-asana*
The Wheel Pose

Translation: *Chakra*, from the root *cak* ("to move") means wheel and therefore this is the Wheel Posture.
 The *cakra-asana* is also known as the *urdhva-dhanurasana*.
Urdhva means raised, elevated or upright and *dhanur* means bow. Both "wheel posture" and "raised bow posture" describe the appearance of this asana.

Pronunciation: chu-krah-sa-na

Difficulty: (8) (full variation), (3) (bridge variation)

Instructions:

1. Lie flat on the back in the *shava-asana* (corpse pose).
2. While exhaling bend the knees and bring the feet as close to the buttocks as possible with the soles of the feet flat on the floor.
3. Bend the arms at the elbows and place the palms of the hands flat on the floor directly under each shoulder with the fingers pointing toward the back.
4. While inhaling slowly, begin to raise the head, back and buttocks off the floor while arching the spine. Continue to press downward on the hands and feet while raising the hips and stomach as high as possible.
5. Hold for the duration of the held inhaled breath. When you can't hold the breath comfortable any longer, slowly exhale and return the back to the floor, slide the legs out straight returning to the *shava-asana*.

Comments:

The *chakra-asana* is more challenging than most other yoga postures. Don't be discouraged if your unable to accomplish it right away. Even attempting this posture without successful completion holds great benefits.

First and foremost is the strength and suppleness it restores to the spine. It strengthens the arms, shoulders and upper back as well and stimulates the cardiovascular system. The *chakra-asana* has an overall tonic effect for the entire body.

As the natural suppleness of the spine is restored after a period of practice you can begin to perfect the form of this *asana* and thus experience greater benefits.

First be certain that the arms are as straight as possible with very little to no bend in the elbows. When you can hold this comfortably, begin breathing through the nostrils while holding the posture and attempt to get a greater arch in the spine by bringing your hands closer to your feet and/or bringing your feet closer to your hands. Finally, you can extend the duration of the *chakra-asana* by doing several repetitions in sequence without resting in-between. As you return from the posture keep the hands behind the shoulders and the soles of the feet flat on the floor and as soon as the back returns to floor immediately raise it and enter the full posture again.

Duration/Repetitions:

The *chakra-asana* is either held for the duration of the inhaled breath or between one and three minutes while breathing gently through the nostrils. Repeat it two or three times.

The "Bridge" Variation:

Although this variation is much easier to perform than the full *chakra-asana*, it shares several of its benefits. In particular it will help to stretch the spine and relieve tightness in the upper back and shoulder area.

To get the full benefit of the bridge variation continual effort should be applied to raising the back upward and creating the greatest possible arch with the spine.

While holding the bridge breath slowly through the nostrils. If there is no discomfort felt in the spine or shoulders then one should advance to the full variation of the *chakra-asana* as described above. Both variations strengthen the back and promote flexibility of the spine. Tightness in the back and spine results from poor posture, stress, a sedentary lifestyle and/or emotional disturbances. You should begin to feel the tightness being released after just a few repetitions.

9. Dhanura-asana



Posture: Dhanura-asana - The Bow Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *dhanur* means bow-shaped, curved or bent. The bow referred is a bow as in "bow and arrow." This *asana* is so named because the body mimics the shape of a bow with its string stretched back ready to shoot an arrow.

Pronunciation: dha-noor-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (5)

Instructions:

1. Lie flat on the back in the shava-asana (corpse pose).
2. Lie on the stomach with the head turned to one side and the arms alongside the body with palms facing upward.
3. Turn the head and place the chin on the floor. Exhale, bend the knees, reach back with the arms and grasp the right ankle with the right hand and the left ankle with the left hand.
4. While inhaling, slowly raise the legs by pulling the ankles up and raising the knees off the floor while simultaneously lifting the chest off the floor. Hold the inhale breath. The weight of the body should be resting on the abdomen.
5. Tilt the head as far back as possible. Hold the posture as long as you can comfortably hold the inhale breath.
6. Slowly exhale bringing the knees to the floor, release the ankles, slowly bring the legs and arms straight down on the floor and turn the head to one side, assuming the prone posture you began with.

Comments:

The most obvious benefit of the *dhanur-asana* is that it restores flexibility to the spine. Regular practice will relieve lower back pain and release tension and strain in the upper back and neck area. The alternating stretching and releasing of the abdominal muscles increases blood flow to this area and aids all sorts of digestive disorders and discomforts. Strain or fatigue in the legs is also released after a few repetitions. Extended practice will help develop upper-body strength.

Duration/Repetitions:

The *dhanur-asana* is either held for the duration of the inhaled or between one and three minutes while breathing gently through the nostrils. Repeat it two or three times.

Variations:

The two variations of the *dhanur-asana* have to do with the method of breathing and the amount of arch of the back. As one progresses with this asana and is able to hold the posture for a longer period of time, the posture can be held while slow, rhythmic breathing is maintained through the nostrils. As the spine becomes more flexible try drawing the feet closer to the head. Some are able to join the top of the head to the soles of the feet although this is certainly not necessary to accomplish the *dhanur-asana*.

10. Ekapada-asana

Posture: *Ekapada-asana* - The One-legged Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *eka* means one and *pada* means foot making this the one-foot, or more commonly, one-legged pose.

Pronunciation: eka-pod-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (5)

Instructions:

1. Stand with the feet together and the arms by your sides (see the *tad-asana*).
2. Focus the eyes straight ahead on a spot midway between waist and eye level and remain focused there throughout this asana. (standing about five feet from a wall would be helpful).
3. Inhale and extend the arms directly in front, parallel with the floor with thumbs touching.
4. Exhale and raise the right knee bending the leg at a 90 degree angle, pause for a moment then extend the leg straight out in front pointing the toes forward.
5. Pause for a moment then swing the leg backward while bending forward at the waist.
6. Breathe slowly through the nostrils and make sure the arms, torso and legs are parallel with the floor.
7. Hold the posture for at least 30 seconds and then return slowly to a standing position.

Comments:

The *ekpada-asana* tones and strengthens leg muscles, improves sense of balance and helps sharpen concentration.

The *ekpada* requires that you become aware of your body/mind as a whole. As you practice this posture turn the attention away from distractions of the mind and center it on full body-awareness. Continual effort in the *ekpada-asana* in this way will help cultivate concentration.

The "closed eyes" variation (see below) intensifies the effect of the posture. Instead of relying on a fixed point of vision as an "anchor" the practitioner will cultivate an inner stability. The *ekpada-asana* also gives strength to the hips and lower back.

Duration/Repetitions:

This posture should be held for a minimum of 30 seconds and can be extended to up to several minutes. Repeat at least twice on each foot.

Variations:

When you can remain in the *ekpada* effortlessly for at least 30 seconds without wavering or losing balance, try doing it with the eyes closed. This variation makes the posture quite challenging but it increases the benefits as described above.

11. Garuda – asana

Posture: Garuda-asana - The Eagle Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *garuda* means eagle. In Hindu mythology Garuda is known as the king of birds. He transports the God Vishnu (shown with a bow and arrow in the illustration to the left) and is said to be eager to help humanity fight against demons.

Pronunciation: ga-roo-dah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3)

Instructions:

1. Lie flat on the back in the shava-asana (corpse pose).
2. Stand with the feet together and the arms by your sides (see the tad-asana).
3. Draw the left foot upward bending the knee and wrap the left foot around your right leg as you rest the back of your left thigh on the right thigh.
4. Cross your arms at the elbows, left over right.
5. Join the palms of your hands together keeping the fingers pointed upward.
6. Inhale and hold the posture for the duration of the inhaled breath.
7. Exhale and return to the *tada-asana*. Repeat the posture on the opposite side, wrapping the right leg over the left and the right arm over left.

Comments:

The *Garuda-asana* will strengthen the legs, knees and ankles. It stretches and tones muscles of the leg and can help relieve cramps of the legs.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the *hala-asana* for as long as you are comfortable. 20-30 seconds is fine for early attempts, increase the time gradually as you become more comfortable. You can also try holding the posture for as long as you can hold the inhaled breath. Repeat 2 or 3 times on each leg.

12. Gomukha - asana



Posture: *Gomukha-asana* - The Cow face Pose

Translation:

The Sanskrit word *garuda* means eagle. In Hindu mythology Garuda is known as the king of birds. He transports the God Vishnu (shown with a bow and arrow in the illustration to the

left) and is said to be eager to help humanity fight against demons.

Pronunciation: ga-roo-dah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3)

"Placing the right ankle on the left side and the left ankle on the right side, makes *Gomukha-asana*, having the appearance of a cow."

Hatha-yoga-pradipika I.22

Instructions:

1. Sit in a crossed-leg position, right leg over left.
2. Spread the legs as far apart as possible without bending the knees.
3. Bend the left knee and place the bottom of the left foot against the inner left thigh. Bring the left heel as close to the perineum as possible. Keep the left knee on the floor.
4. Grasp the right foot with the left hand and keeping the foot on the floor place the heel of the right foot against the front-left portion of the left buttock. The right knee should be directly on top of the left knee..
5. Inhale slowly through the nostrils and raise the right hand over the head and bend the right elbow. Reach behind the back with the left hand and clasp the fingers of both hands (forming an "s" shaped lock).
6. Hold the posture as long as you can comfortably hold the inhale breath. Exhale slowly and then repeat the posture reversing the arms and legs.
- 7.

Comments:

This posture stretches the arms, upper back, chest and the sides of the chest and abdomen. As the shoulder blades are stretched backward the lungs are expanded and as the abdominal muscles are lifted the stomach is toned. It helps to relieve neck strain, backache and tight shoulders. The hands, fingers and wrists are strengthened.

Duration/Repetitions:

You can either hold the posture while the breath is held or you can try holding the posture while breathing gently through the nostrils. If you choose to breathe, then hold the posture for thirty seconds to a minute. Repeat the *gomukha-asana* two to three times on each side.

Variations:

If you are unable to lock the fingers behind the back you may grasp one end of a small piece of cloth in the right hand and the other end of the cloth in the left hand.

13. Hala - asana



Posture: *Hala-asana* - The Plow Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *Hala* means plow, as in a traditional plow that is drawn by a horse or oxen. When performing this posture your body resembles a plow.

Pronunciation: hull-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (5)

Instructions:

1. Lie flat on the back in the [*shava-asana*](#) (the corpse pose).
2. Inhale through the nostrils. Place the palms face-down on the floor. Keeping the hips on the floor, bend the knees and bring them up toward the stomach while exhaling.
3. Inhale, then while exhaling, raise the legs straight up perpendicular to the floor. You may support your hips with your hands or leave the arms flat on the floor, whichever is most comfortable.
4. Exhale and continue to raise the legs over the head, bending at the waist, lifting the back and buttocks until the toes touch the floor directly in back of the head. Keep the feet together. If the lower back is supported by the hands try returning the arms flat to the floor with the palms facing down. If you are unable to comfortably place the arms on the floor continue to support the lower back with the hands.
5. Keep the knees straight. Breathe slowly through the nostrils and hold the posture for several minutes. If you cannot touch the floor with your toes hold them as close to the floor as possible and continue to exert effort to lower them.
6. Reverse the steps to return to the *shava-asana*.

Comments:

The benefits of this posture, like the *sarvanga-asana*, are numerous. All of the muscles and ligaments in the calves and thighs are stretched resulting in greater leg flexibility. People suffering from leg cramps will find great relief from the *hala-asana*.

Since the abdominal area is contracted, blood compressed out of this area releases toxins and when the contraction is released the area is flooded with richly oxygenated blood. The contraction also helps to relieve gas and stimulates a sluggish digestive system. Similar effects take place as the neck and chest area is compressed effecting the throat, thyroid, hyperthyroid and lungs. Upper and lower back pain or discomfort is relieved due to the forward stretching of the spine.

It is highly recommended that this posture be accompanied by the [*sarvanga-asana*](#). In fact, many of the benefits of the *sarvanga-asana* apply to the *hala-asana* as well with the added benefits detailed above.

The *hala-asana* is an excellent morning posture although some might find it more difficult then. During sleep the spine can become somewhat compressed resulting in the experience of tightness or stiffness in the back. A few repetitions of the *hala-asana* will quickly restore flexibility to the spine as well as promote alertness.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the *hala-asana* for as long as you are comfortable. 20-30 seconds is fine for early attempts, increase the time gradually as you become more comfortable.

Variations:

There are several variations of the basic *hala-asana* each of which require greater flexibility in the spine

and legs. Once one is adept at performing this *asana* these variations may be tried. The first entails swinging the arms around and either touching or grasping the toes with the hands (1). The posture is then held in this position. (illustrated above)

Another variation calls for dropping the knees to the ground and placing them close the ears and keeping the arms extended on the floor (2). And finally from this variation the arms are swung around and placed over the legs behind the knees and the hands are clasped and pressed down on the knees to hold them firmly on the floor (3). All three variations are held while breathing gently through the nostrils.

Cautions/Restrictions:

The *hala-asana* should not be performed by woman who are menstruating, as is the case with all inverted postures (where the legs are raised over the head). No other restrictions apply.

14. Hasta – pada – angusta - asana

Posture: *Hasta-pada-angusta-asana*
The Hand-Foot-Big Toe Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *hasta* means hand, *pada* means foot, and *angusta* means big toe therefore this is the hand-foot-big toe posture.

Pronunciation: ha-sta-pah-don-goo-stah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3)

Instructions:

1. Sit on the floor with the legs together and extended straight out in front. Keep the back straight, shoulders level and head straight. Place the hands, palms down, flat on top of the thighs.
2. Spread the legs as far apart as possible without bending the knees.
3. Bend the left knee and place the bottom of the left foot against the inner left thigh. Bring the left heel as close to the perineum as possible. Keep the left knee on the floor.
4. Stretch both arms straight out in front of you, then keeping the back straight turn slowly at the waist toward the right aligning the arms with the right leg.
5. Inhale slowly while raising the arms over the head and arching the back.
6. Exhale and slowly while bending forward bringing the chest down to the right thigh. Clasp the big toe of the right foot with the first finger of both hands. Hold this position for the duration of the exhaled breath.
7. Inhale slowly through the nostrils releasing the posture while sitting up straight.
8. Straighten the left leg and return to the seated position described in step 2 then repeat the posture, this time bending the right leg.

Comments:

The benefits of the *hasta-pada-angusta-asana* are similar to those of the *ugra-asana* (i.e.: spinal stretch,

abdominal toning, gastro-intestinal stimulation). There is additional stretching of the leg that is outstretched as well as to the groin.

Duration/Repetitions:

Repeat two or three times on each leg.

15. Matsya - sana



Posture: *Matsya-asana* - The Fish Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *matsya* means fish, therefore this is the fish posture. Matsya (depicted to the left) is a divine being, found in Hindu mythology, that saved mankind from a universal flood.

Pronunciation: maht-see-yah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3)

Instructions:

1. Lie flat on the back in the *shava-asana*.
2. Keeping the buttocks on the floor, inhale and raise the head, shoulders, back and upper arms off the floor arching the back and raising the chest up. Tilt the head back and place the top of the head flat on the floor.
3. Raise the elbows off the floor bring your hands up just below the chest and join them at the palms with the fingers pointing straight up (form the anjali-mudra or salutation hand gesture). Hold for the duration of the inhale breath or breath gently through the nostrils to remain in the posture longer.
4. Return to the *shava-asana*.

Comments:

The *matsya-asana* creates a great expansion and stretching of the chest which helps relieve upper respiratory congestion as well as benefits the heart. Additionally, the sinus are drained and opened from the inversion of the head, stretching of the neck and pressure placed on the top of the head. The thyroid and parathyroid glands are stimulated as well.

Duration/Repetitions:

Since this is not a difficult posture, it is recommended that you breath while holding it for between two and four minutes. If you are uncomfortable breathing, hold the posture for the duration of the inhaled breath. Repeat two or three times.



Variations:

There is one major variation in the *matsya-asana* and it is a bit more challenging than the one described

above (illustrated above). It calls for beginning the posture in *padma-asana* or the full lotus seated posture and then lying flat on the back while the legs are still locked. From there on the posture is done the same way as described above.

16. Naga - asana



Posture: **Naga-asana - The Cobra Pose**

Translation: The Sanskrit word *naga* means snake or serpent. The *naga-asana* is also known as the *bhujanga-asana*. The Sanskrit word *bhujanga*, which also means snake, is derived from the root *bhuj* which means to bend or curve.

Pronunciation: na-gah-sa-na

Difficulty: (4)

"Let the body, from navel to toes, touch the ground, the palms placed upon the ground, and raise gently the upper part of the body (from navel to head) like a snake. This posture increases the gastric fire; it destroys all diseases and by constant practice leads to the awakening of *Kundalini*."

The Gheranda-samhita II.42-43.

Instructions:

1. Lie on the stomach with the head turned to one side and the arms alongside the body with palms facing upward.
2. Turn the head and place the chin on the floor. Inhale then exhale slowly through the nostrils and swing the arms around until the hands are placed just below the chin with the palms down and the finger tips of each hand almost touching and the elbows on the floor.
3. Inhale slowly through the nostrils, press down on the hands and lift the torso from the waist up off the floor, arching the spine backwards and straightening the arms. Keep the hips on the floor.
4. Tilt the head as far back as possible and hold the posture for the duration of the inhaled breath.
5. Exhale and reverse the process to return to position #1.

Comments:

If you find it uncomfortable holding the breath while the posture is held, breathe gently through the nostrils. Some may find that they are able to arch the spine back even more than in the initial arch in step 3. In this case try "walking" the hands toward the pelvic region and stretching the head further back.

In addition to the obvious benefits to the spine and lower back, the standard variation of the *naga-asana* strengthens the wrists and stretches the muscles in the chest. By maintaining a constant exertion to create a greater arch in the spine, the stomach and pelvic muscles are strengthened. Greater strength in these areas can be cultivated by performing the variation where the arms remain on the ground. B.K.S.

Iyengar, a renowned expert in *yoga-asanas*, claims that displaced spinal discs can be placed back in their original position by practicing the *naga-asana*.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the posture for either the duration of a held inhaled breath or from one-half to three minutes. Repeat the *naga-asana* two to five times.

17. Nataraja - asana



Posture: Nataraja-asana

The King of the Dance Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *nata* means dancer and *raja* means king. Nataraja is another name for Shiva, the Lord of the Dance, whose cosmic dance is the creation and destruction of the world.

Pronunciation: nah-tah-raj-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3)

Instructions:

1. Stand with the feet together and the arms by your sides (see the *tad-asana*).
2. Inhale and bend the right leg backward grasping the left foot with your left hand while simultaneously extending the right arm straight out in front.
3. Continue raising the right arm upward until it is about 45 degrees from the floor while lifting the left leg as high as possible with the left arm.
4. Hold the posture while breathing gently through the nostrils. Keep your gaze fixed slightly above the horizon.
5. Remain in the *nataraja-asana* for about one minute then return slowly to a standing position. Repeat by reversing directions 2-4.

Comments:

Perform the *nataraja-asana* gracefully as if dancing, yet firmly with focused attention.

This posture helps to strengthen your sense of balance and concentration. The arch formed by the back and stretched leg gently aligns the vertebrae of the spine restoring suppleness and easing strain caused

by poor posture or long periods of sitting. It tones the muscles of the hips and legs as well as stimulates the chest muscles.

Duration/Repetitions:

Begin by holding the *nataraja-asana* for about a minute and gradually increase the time as you become more comfortable with this posture. Repeat it three times on each side, alternately from right to left.

18. Padmasana – The Lotus Posture



Posture: *Padma-asana* - The Lotus Posture

Translation: The Sanskrit word *naga* means snake or serpent. The *naga-asana* is also known as the *bhujanga-asana*. The Sanskrit word *bhujanga*, which also means snake, is derived from the root *bhuj* which means to bend or curve.

Pronunciation: pud-mah-sa-na

Difficulty: (2-6) depending on flexibility of legs

Instructions:

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched out straight in front.
2. Bend the right knee and grasp the right foot with both hands and place it on top of the left thigh bringing the heel as close to the navel as possible.
3. Bend the left knee and grasp the left foot with both hands and place it on top of the right thigh bringing the heel as close to the navel as possible.
4. Both knees should be on the ground and the soles of the feet are pointed upward. The spine is held straight but not rigid.
5. The position of the legs may be switched after a period of time if the posture becomes uncomfortable.

Comments:

When in the *padma-asana* the hands can be placed in one of the following three positions:

- Place one hand on top of the other, both palms up, and rest the hands on the heels (this is known as the *dhyana-mudra*). This variation is recommended for meditation.
- Place the hands on the knees, palms down.
- With palms up, place the hands on the knees, form a circle with the thumb and forefinger and extend the remaining fingers straight ahead (this is known as the *chin-mudra*). Recommended for *pranayama* (Yogic breathing).

The *padma-asana* facilitates relaxation, concentration and ultimately, meditation. The posture creates a natural balance throughout the body/mind. When the knees are stretched enough to remain in the *padma-asana* without discomfort the posture creates a feeling of effortlessness and ease that will soothe the nervous system, quiet the mind and bring about the condition of one-pointedness.

Duration/Repetitions:

The length of time to sit in the *padma-asana* depends on your intention. In the course of a typical asana routine you might hold it for several minutes or until you experience discomfort in the legs. When used as a meditation posture you hold it for the duration of the meditation.

Variations:

If you find the *padma-asana* difficult or painful, can try the *ardha padma-asana* variation or half lotus posture (*ardha* means half). Instead of placing both feet on the thighs, only one foot is place on top of the opposite thigh and the other is place under the opposite thigh. Periodically alternate positions to allow both knees to be stretched. Those who are unable to do either variation of this asana comfortably should practice the [*baddha kona-asana*](#).

19. Parivritta-parshvakona-asana

Posture: *Parivritta-parshvakona-asana*
The Turned Side-Angle Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *parivritta* means revolved, turned round or back, *parsva* means side and *kona* means angle.

Pronunciation: par-ee-vrit-ah parsh-va-cone-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (6)

Instructions:

1. Stand with the feet together and the arms by your sides (see the *tad-asana*).
2. Inhale and spread your legs apart slightly further than shoulder distance (about 3-4 feet).
3. Stretch your arms straight out from the shoulders parallel to the floor with your palms facing down.
4. Exhale slowly and turn your right foot toward the right 90 degrees. Bend your right knee about 90 degrees.
5. Place the palm of your left hand flat on the floor next to the outside of your right foot. Rest the right elbow on the outside of the right knee.
6. Stretch the right arm over your head, parallel with the floor, with the inside of the elbow resting on the ear. Hold for abot 30-60 seconds while breathing gently through the nostrils.
7. Slowly return to a standing position and repeat on the other side reversing directions 2-6.

Comments:

The *parivritta-parshvakona-asana* stretches the muscle group along the side of the torso. It strengthens the ankles, claves and thighs as well as the arms. It is also an excellent posture to tone the muscles in the waist and hips. This posture also strengthens the digestive system and thus aids digestion, stimulates blood circulation and assists in restoring strength and flexibility to the spine.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the posture for as long as is comfortable. Performing the *parivritta-purvashakona-asana* once on each side is considered one repetition. Do 2 or 3 repetitions.

20. Pavana – mukta - asana



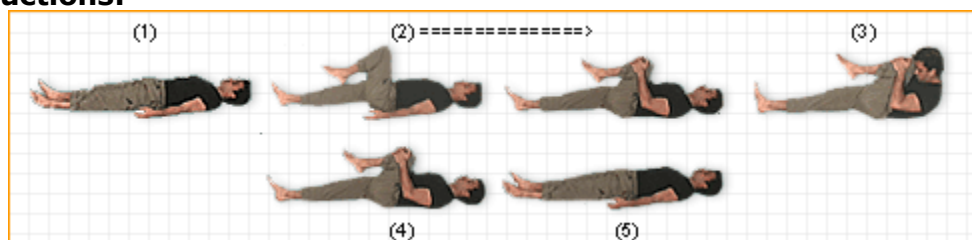
Posture: *Pavana-mukta-asana*
The Wind-releasing Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *pavana* means air or wind and *mukta* means freedom or release, therefore this is the "wind relieving posture" so named because it assists in releasing trapped digestive gas from the stomach and intestines.

Pronunciation: pa-vana mook-tah-sa-na

Difficulty: (1)

Instructions:



1. Inhale and bend the right knee and pull it close to the torso with both hands while interlocking the fingers just below the knee. Keep the left leg flat on the floor.
2. Hold the inhaled breath for a few seconds then exhale slowly through the nostrils and lift the back, shoulders and head off the floor and touch the knee with the forehead.
3. Hold the exhaled breath for a few seconds then slowly inhale and return the back, shoulders and head to the floor. Remain holding the knee.
4. Hold the inhaled breath for a few seconds then exhale while bringing the right leg to the floor.
5. Lie flat on the back in the shava-asana for a few seconds then repeat beginning with the left leg.

Comments:

As mentioned above, practicing the *purvana-mukta-asana* will help to release gastrointestinal gas. It is also improves other gastrointestinal problems like upset stomachs and constipation by stimulating the abdominal region.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold each of the four parts of this posture (corresponding with the held breaths) for three to five seconds each. Repeat the *purvasa-mukta-asana* three to five times on each side.

21. Sarvanga – asana:



Posture: *Sarvanga-asana*
The Shoulder-stand Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *sarvaanga* means limb or body. *sarvanga* therefore translates as either "all-limb" or "whole-body posture". It is so named because of the benefit it provides to the entire body. It is commonly referred to as the "shoulder-stand" because one is essentially standing on one's shoulders.

Pronunciation: sar-vong-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (5)

Instructions:

1. Lie flat on the back in the *shava-asana*.
2. Inhale through the nostrils. Place the palms face-down on the floor. Keeping the hips on the floor, bend the knees and bring them up toward the stomach while exhaling.
3. Inhale slowly through the nostrils, press down on the hands and lift the torso from the waist up off the floor, arching the spine backwards and straightening the arms. Keep the hips on the floor.
4. Inhale, then while exhaling, raise the legs straight up perpendicular to the floor. You may support your hips with your hands or leave the arms flat on the floor, whichever is most comfortable.
5. The legs should be together with the knees straight and toes pointed straight up. Keep the head straight without turning it to either side. The chin should be pressed against the chest.
6. Breathe gently through the nostrils while the posture is held.
7. Reverse the steps to return to the *shava-asana*.

Comments:

The *sarvanga-asana* is considered by many to be the most beneficial of all yoga postures. Because of its many benefits, if you find that your time is limited in the course of Yoga practice at home, it is recommended to place special emphasis on the *sarvanga-asana*.

When performed in the morning the *sarvanga-asana* relieves fatigue caused by sleeping too much or too little and when practiced in the evening it helps to promote deep, restful sleep. It strengthens the back and helps to relieve lower back pain.

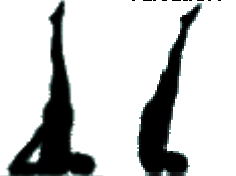
The increased blood flow to the head and upper body helps to heal many disorders such as headaches, nasal congestion and sore throats. The entire endocrine, digestive, nervous, and venous systems of the body are stimulated in ways that no form of diet or conventional exercise can perform.

Because the body is inverted a rich supply of oxygenated blood is sent to the organs and glands in the upper part of the body, such as the brain, thyroid and pituitary, and heart thereby stimulating them. Pressure is relieved from the lower body extremities relieving pain and/or swelling of the feet and legs. The *sarvanga-asana* also provides great benefit to the abdominal organs helping to relieve gas and constipation and stimulate digestion. Regular practice of this posture invigorates the mind and helps to calm the nervous system.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the *sarvanga-asana* anywhere from one to five minutes depending on comfort. Repeat the posture two or three times.

Salamba
Variation Nirlamba
Variation



Variations:

There are two common variations to this posture. One is called the *shalamba-sarvanga-asana*. *Sa* means with and *alamba* means prop or support and refers to the use of the arms to support the legs and torso as they are inverted. The other variation is called the *niralamba-sarvanga-sana*. *Nir* means without and thus this variation is done without the support of the arms.

22. Shalabha – asana – The Locust Pose



Posture: *Shalabha-asana*

The Locust or Grasshopper Posture

Translation: The Sanskrit word *Shalabha* means locust or grasshopper. There is a variation of this posture called the *viparita-shalabha-asana*. The Sanskrit word *viparita* means "reverse." This is an advanced variation not covered here.

Pronunciation: sha-la-bhah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3)

Instructions:

1. Lie on the stomach with the head turned to one side and the arms alongside the body with palms facing upward.
2. Turn the head and place your chin on the floor. Slide your hands under your thighs, with the palms pressed gently against the top of your thighs.

3. Inhale slowly and then raise the head, chest, and legs off the floor as high as possible. Tilt your head as far back as possible. Keep your feet, knees, and thighs pressed together.
4. Starting at the top of the head and working your way down to the feet, bring your attention to each part of your body, consciously relaxing it before proceeding on to the next.
5. Remain in the posture while holding the breath. You can support your legs by pressing the hands upward against your thighs.
6. Hold the posture for as long as you can hold the inhaled breath then slowly return the legs, chest, and head to the floor while exhaling.
7. Remove your hands from under your thighs and place the arms alongside your body. Turn your head to the side and rest.

Comments:

The *shalabha-asana* has many benefits. Besides strengthening the muscles of the upper legs and lower back, it stimulates the stomach and intestines helping to relieve gastrointestinal gas, strengthens the bladder, and stretches the spine.

To assist raising the legs as high as possible keep the back of the hands resting against the floor while pushing the legs upward with the fingers. As you get better at this posture and increase the strength of your legs you can raise the hands completely off the floor so your legs are raised unsupported. This increases the benefits of the *shalabha-asana*.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold this posture for as long as you can hold the inhaled breath. Repeat the *shalabha-asana* three times.

23. Shava – asana – The Corpse Pose:



Posture: *Shava-asana*
The Corpse Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *shava* means corpse hence this is the Corpse. The *shava-asana* is also known as the *mrita-asana*.

Pronunciation: sha-vah-sa-na

Difficulty: (1)

Instructions:

1. Lie flat on your back with your legs together but not touching, and your arms close to the body with the palms facing up.
2. Keep your eyes gently closed with the facial muscles relaxed and breath deeply and slowly through the nostrils.
3. Starting at the top of the head and working your way down to the feet, bring your attention to each part of your body, consciously relaxing it before proceeding on to the next.
4. Remain in the shava-asana for between 3 and 5 minutes or longer. If you become sleepy while in the shava-asana begin to breath a bit faster and deeper.

Comments:

While many consider this a simple posture at first, its simplicity eventually proves to be deceiving. The goal of the shava-asana is for the body and mind to be perfectly still and relaxed. Not only should the body be motionless and at ease, but the mind as well should be quiet, like the surface of a still lake. The result will be a deep and stable relaxation that will extend into your meditation or be felt through the activities of your daily circumstances.

It goes without saying that the *shava-asana* will take some time to perfect. You will find the simple exercise of focusing your attention on each part of your body and consciously directing the breath there to be a great help with this posture.

There are two common obstacles that can prevent you from fully benefitting from this posture: sleepiness and a restless mind. If find yourself getting drowsy while in the *shava-asana* increase the rate and depth of your breathing. If your mind is restless or wondering focus your attention on all of the bodily sensations you're experiencing. Bring your mind to the sensation of the floor beneath you or on the rhythm of your breath.

While practicing your *Yoga-asana* routine you should always begin and end each session with the *shava-asana*.

Duration/Repetitions:

We recommend that you begin your period of *yoga-asana* practice with at least 3-5 minutes of *shava-asana*. Return to it periodically through your posture session to relax and rejuvenate the body/mind and then conclude your session with at least 3-5 minutes more

24. Siddha – asana – The Adept Pose:



Posture: *Siddha-asana***The Accomplished or Adept Pose**

Translation: The Sanskrit word *siddha* means accomplished or adept, one who has attained the highest. The name implies the attainment of a perfectly stilled mind and the experience of peace that results from meditation. The *siddha-asana* is a recommended pose for meditation.

Pronunciation: sid-dhah-sa-na

Difficulty: (2)

Instructions:

1. Begin in a seated posture. Bend the left knee and grasp the left foot with both hands and place the heel against the perineum and the sole of the foot against the inside of the right thigh.
2. Exhale and reach down and loop the forefinger of the right hand around the big toe of the right foot and grasp the left foot with the left hand.
3. Bend the right knee, grasp the right foot with both hands and place the outside edge of the right foot where the calf and thigh of the left leg meet, right ankle over left ankle. The heel of the right foot should line up approximately with the navel and be as close to the pubic area as possible..
4. With palms up, place the hands on the knees, form a circle with the thumb and forefinger and extend the remaining fingers straight ahead.

Comments:

The *siddha-asana* is complicated to describe but is actually one of the simpler sitting postures. It requires less flexibility of the legs than the [*padma-asana*](#) yet it facilitates relaxation, concentration and ultimately, meditation.

Siddha-asana helps to establish an equilibrium throughout the body/mind. It will also help stretch the legs and pelvic area to the point where the *padma-asana* can be held effortlessly. Either posture, by creating a firm foundation with the legs locked in a crossed position and the spine held straight and motionless, awakens the attention and helps cultivate concentration. When concentration is highly focused and undistracted, meditation follows.

Duration/Repetitions:

Sit in the *siddha-asana* for a minimum of 1 minute and extended the time up to ten minutes or more.

25. Simha – asana – The Lion Pose:

Posture: *Simha-asana* - The Lion Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *simha* which literally means "the powerful one" is the word for "lion." This, therefore is known as the lion posture, and one performing it can be said to resemble a roaring lion about to attack.

Pronunciation: sin-gha-sa-na

Difficulty: (2)

Instructions:

1. Sit up on the knees with the heels of the feet pressed against the buttocks and the calves of the legs flat on the floor.
2. Place the balls of the hands on the knees, straighten the arms and keep the back erect and the head straight (not tilted forward, back, to the left or the right).
3. Inhale while leaning forward slightly, stretching the mouth the jaws as wide as possible, extend the tongue out and downward as much as possible, fix your gaze either at the tip of the nose or between the eyebrows and stretch the fingers straight out from the knees.
4. Hold the posture for the duration of the inhaled breath then exhale, relaxing the forward stretch, dropping the fingers to the knees and closing the mouth and eyes.

Comments:

The *simha-asana* benefits parts of the body that most other asanas do not: the face, jaw, mouth, throat and tongue. Those who experience tightness or discomfort in the jaws such as teeth grinding, clenched jaws, a misaligned bite, etc. will benefit from both the jaw and tongue stretching of the *simha-asana*. This asana is also known to help prevent or cure sore throats. The muscles and tissues of the face are rejuvenated from the alternating stretching and release, an exercise they rarely get in the course of our everyday lives. The fixed gaze relieves tense or burning eyes and the stretched fingers benefits the hands and wrists.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the *simha-asana* for thirty to sixty seconds and repeat three to five times.

Variation:

Try roaring loudly like a lion as you enter into the Lion Pose while sticking your tongue out. This stimulates the throat and cultivates courage and fearlessness. Kids love to do it, shouldn't adults as well?

26. Sirsha – asana – The Head Stand



Posture: *Sirsha-asana* - The Head-stand

Translation: The Sanskrit word *sirsha* means head. This posture is the well-known headstand posture, and perhaps second only to the *padma-asana* or lotus posture, is widely identified with the practice of Yoga.

Pronunciation: sir-shah-sa-na

Difficulty: (7)

Instructions:

1. Sit in a kneeling position with the buttocks resting on the heels of the feet.
2. Lean forward and place the forearms on the floor in front while keeping the elbows about shoulder distance apart. Interlock the fingers of both hands.
3. Place the top of the head flat on the floor with the back of the head pressed against the inside of the interlocked fingers.
4. Placing the tips of the toes firmly on the floor while lifting the heels, raise the knees off the floor.
5. Hold for the duration of the held inhaled breath. When you can't hold the breath comfortable any longer, slowly exhale and return the back to the floor, slide the legs out straight returning to the *shava-asana*.

Comments:

The *siddha-asana* is complicated to describe but is actually one of the simpler sitting postures. It requires less flexibility of the legs than the [*padma-asana*](#) yet it facilitates relaxation, concentration and ultimately, meditation.

Siddha-asana helps to establish an equilibrium throughout the body/mind. It will also help stretch the legs and pelvic area to the point where the *padma-asana* can be held effortlessly. Either posture, by creating a firm foundation with the legs locked in a crossed position and the spine held straight and motionless, awakens the attention and helps cultivate concentration. When concentration is highly focused and undistracted, meditation follows.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the *sirsha-asana* for 15-30 seconds when you first attempt it and increase the duration gradually over a period of a few weeks. As you skill increases you should hold it for as long as you feel comfortable.

Cautions/Restrictions:

If you are new to Yoga we recommend that you find a qualified instructor to teach you this posture and monitor your performance. If you attempting this alone position yourself in front of a wall as mentioned above.

If you are suffering from high or low blood pressure you should not attempt this posture.

The *sirsha-asana* should not be performed by woman who are menstruating, as is the case with all inverted postures (where the legs are raise over the head).

Variations:

There are several variations to the *sirsha-asana* that you can try when you are comfortable with the standard variation. First try spreading your legs wide apart, carefully separating them very slowly, while maintaining your balance, until they are as far apart as is comfortable. Bring your legs together before returning from the posture. Next you can try placing the soles of your feet together while steadily holding the pose.

27. Tada – asana - The mountain Pose



Posture: *Tada-asana* - The Mountain Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *tada* means mountain. This posture is also known by the name *samasthiti-asana*. Sama means unmoved, equilibrium, and sthiti means standing upright or firmly, abiding, remaining, thus *samasthiti* means standing firmly without moving.

Pronunciation: ta-dah-sa-na

Difficulty: (1)

Instructions:

1. Stand with both feet touching from the heel to the big toe, keeping the back straight and the arms pressed slightly against the sides with palms facing inward.
2. Slightly tighten or flex the muscles in the knees, thighs, stomach and buttocks maintaining a firm posture. Balance your weight evenly on both feet.
3. Inhale through the nostrils and lift the buttocks off the legs arching the back and thrusting the abdomen forward and tilt the head as far back as possible.

Comments:

Many common ailments and discomforts can be traced to poor posture. If the spine is not properly aligned or if there is tightness or stiffness in the back, the result is often an imbalance in the body. When this imbalance becomes chronic many kinds of disorders arise in the organs, glands and nervous system.

Performing the *tada-asana* allows one to observe one's posture closely and clearly recognize those problems which get masked or ignored by day-to-day activities. As the posture is held and the breath, mind and body is quieted various effects will surface to indicate difficulties with the spine. Favoring one foot over the other, shifting back and forth, drooped shoulders, tightness in the neck and upper or lower back, and various other physiological disturbances may appear indicating the need for further yoga practice.

The proper execution and continual practice of the *tada-asana* along with other postures helps to re-train the body to stand correctly and reverse the negative effects of poor posture.

When the *tad-asana* is performed properly and the mind is focused and free of distraction, the body is experienced as being rooted firmly to the earth and as steady and motionless as a mountain.

Duration/Repetitions:

One repetition for several minutes is advisable. The *tada-asana* is also recommended prior to and following any other standing posture.

28. Trikona – asana – The Triangle Pose



Posture: *Trikona-asana* - The Triangle Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *tri* means three and *kona* means corner or angle. Thus "three corner or three angle posture" is often called the triangle posture. This posture is also known as the *utthita trikona-asana*. *Utthita* means stretched or extended thus this is the Extended Triangle Pose.

Pronunciation: tri-cone-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3)

Instructions:

1. Stand with the feet together and the arms by your sides (see the *tada-asana*).
2. Separate the feet slightly further than shoulder distance apart.
3. Inhale and raise both arms straight out from the shoulders parallel to the floor with the palms facing down.
4. Exhale slowly while turning the torso to the left, bend at the waist and bring the right hand down to the left ankle. The palm of the right hand is placed along the outside of the left ankle. The left arm should be extended upward. Both legs and arms are kept straight without bending the knees and elbows.
5. Turn the head upward to the left and gaze up at the fingertips of the left hand. Inhale and return to a standing position with the arms outstretched.
6. Hold this position for the duration of the exhaled breath. Exhale and repeat steps 4 - 6 on the opposite side.

Comments:

The *trikona-asana* is an excellent posture to do early in your routine. The forward bending and lifting stimulates blood flow and helps to stretch and relax the back, shoulders, legs and arms as well as increases the flow of blood to the head. The muscles of the thighs and calves as well as the hamstrings are stretched. The slight twist of the spine creates suppleness in the spinal discs and relieves lower back discomforts.

The posture can be held longer by breathing gently through the nostrils rather than holding the breath. Another variation is to perform the *trikona-asana* rapidly thereby giving it a slightly aerobic effect.

Duration/Repetitions:

Remain in the forward bending position for the duration of the exhale breath. Do two or three repetitions (one repetition consists of bending forward on both sides).

29. Ugra – asana – The Noble Pose



Posture: *Ugra-asana* - The Noble Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *ugra* means powerful, mighty, strong or noble. We usually keep this posture untranslated but it can be called the noble or powerful posture.

Alternate name: Also known as the *pascimottana-asana* or the *brahmacharya-asana*. The word *pascima* can mean behind, later, last or final but it literally means "western" as in the direction. *Pascimottana* thus means back-stretching posture.

Pronunciation: oo-grah-sa-na

Difficulty: (4)

Instructions:

1. Sit on the floor with the legs together and extended straight out in front. Keep the back straight, shoulders level and head straight. Place the hands, palms down, flat on top of the thighs then inhale deeply.
2. Exhale and extend the arms straight out in front, parallel with the floor with fingers pointed straight ahead and palms facing down.
3. Inhale slowly while raising the arms over the head, keeping them straight, and bending as far back as is comfortable. Tilt the head back and look up at the hands.
4. Exhale slowly bending forward at the waist and grasp the feet with the hands. Bring the head as close to the knees as possible, placing it on the knees if you can, keeping the legs straight. (If you are unable to grasp the feet then grasp the ankles).
5. Hold that position for the duration of the exhale breath.
6. Inhale slowly and return to the seated position described in step #1.

Comments:

When the *ugra-asana* is properly performed, all the vertebrae of the spine and each muscle in the back is stretched. This type of stretching is highly beneficial. Try it regularly for a week and you will, without doubt, notice the benefits.

The compression or contraction of the stomach followed by the release increases blood flow to the abdominal region and tones the muscles. Gas is released and sluggish digestion and/or constipation is improved. The muscles in the calves and thighs get a good stretching, helping to relieve fatigue and soreness in the lower extremities.

Duration/Repetitions:

Repeat this posture two or three times holding each repetition for the duration of the exhaled breath and take at least three deep breaths in-between each repetition. As you become more adept at doing the *ugra-asana* you may begin breathing slowly through the nostrils while holding the posture to increase its duration.

30. Ushtra – asana – The Camel Pose



Posture: *Ushtra-asana* - The Camel Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *ushtra* means camel.

Pronunciation: oosh-trah-sa-na

Difficulty: (5)

Instructions:

1. Sit up on the knees with the heels of the feet pressed against the buttocks and the calves of the legs flat on the floor.
2. Reaching backward, grasp the left ankle with the left hand and right ankle with the right hand.
3. Inhale through the nostrils and lift the buttocks off the legs arching the back and thrusting the abdomen forward and tilt the head as far back as possible.
4. Either hold the posture for the duration of the inhale breath or breath gently through the nostrils while holding the posture.
5. Exhale and return to the kneeling position.

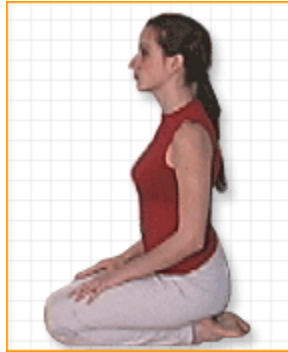
Comments:

The *ushtra-asana* is a powerful posture for stretching the spine, back muscles, shoulders and arms. It is best to practice it later in your *asana* routine after most of the muscles are limber and you have worked the back and shoulders.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the posture for the duration of the inhaled breath. If you choose to breath while holding the *ushtra-asana*, hold it for between thirty seconds to one minute. Repeat the posture three times.

31. Vajra – asana – The Thunderbolt Pose



Posture: *Vajra-asana*

The Thunderbolt or Diamond Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *vajra* means thunderbolt or diamond.

Pronunciation: vuh-drah-sa-na

Difficulty: (2)

Instructions:

1. The vajra-asana is a seated posture. Begin by sitting back on your heels and placing your knees, legs and feet together.
2. Keeping the back straight place the palms of your hands down on top of your thighs.
3. Breath gently thorough your nostrils and sit in this position for at least three minutes.

Comments:

The *vajra-asana* is a versatile posture well suited for meditation, rest in between other seated postures, or as an aid to digestion.

The *vajra-asana* is the position in various other yoga postures such as the [*anjaneya-asana*](#) (salutation posture) and the [*ushtra-asana*](#) (the camel).

Duration/Repetitions:

The *vajra-asana* can be held for as long as is comfortable (and depending on the reason for doing the posture).

32. Vira – asana – The Hero Pose

Posture: *Vira-asana* - The Hero Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *vira* means hero, brave or eminent man, or warrior.

Pronunciation: veer-ah-sa-na

Difficulty: (2)

Instructions:

1. Kneel on the floor with the calves and tops of the feet flat on the floor and the thighs touching.
2. Slowly spread the feet, about shoulder distance apart, while keeping the knees together. Place the buttocks flat on the floor. The outer sides of the thighs are touching the inner sides of the calves and the soles of the feet are exposed facing up. Place the hands palms down, on the knees and form a circle with the thumb and forefinger (in the chin-mudra) while pointing the other fingers straight ahead.
3. Breathe slowly and deeply through the nostrils and remain motionless for six complete breaths (an inhale and exhale is one complete breath).
4. Inhale slowly and stretch the arms straight up over the head and interlock the fingers with the palms pushed upward. Remain in this position for six complete breaths.
5. Exhale slowly, release the fingers and slowly bend forward at the waist while placing the palms of the hands flat on the soles of the feet. Place the chin between the knees.
6. Hold this position for the duration of six complete breaths. Inhale, raise the chest up, stretch the legs straight ahead and place the hands, palms down, on top of the thighs.

Comments:

The *vira-asana* is an alternative to the [*padma-asana*](#), [*siddha-asana*](#), as well as other seated postures, for meditation and *pranayama*.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the posture from several minutes as part of an *asana* session or for the duration of your meditation or *pranayama*.

Variations:

The *Supta-vira-asana* variation (*supta* is the Sanskrit word for "lying down") stretches the abdominal muscles and relieves pain and discomfort in the legs. Begin the posture as detailed above then incline backwards and lean the back on the floor. The arms are stretch straight above the shoulders and kept flat on the floor.

33. Vriksha – asana – The Tree Pose

Posture: *Vriksha-asana* - The Tree Pose

Translation: The Sanskrit word *vriksha* means tree, thus this is the Tree Posture.

Pronunciation: vrik-shah-sa-na

Difficulty: (3-4)

"Standing straight on the left leg, bend the right leg and place the right foot on the root of the left thigh. Stand thus like a tree on the ground. This is called *vriksha-asana*."
Gheranda-samhita II.36

Instructions:

1. Stand with the feet together and the arms by your sides (see the *tad-asana*).
2. Bend the right leg at the knee, raise the right thigh and bring the sole of the right foot as high up the inside of the left thigh as possible.
3. Balancing on the left foot, raise both arms over the head keeping the elbows unbent and joining the palms together. Hold the posture while breathing gently through the nostrils for about 10 complete breaths.
4. Lower the arms and right leg and return to the *tad-asana*, standing position with feet together and arms at the sides. Pause for a few moments and repeat on the opposite leg.

Comments:

The challenge of the *vriksha-asana* is maintaining balance on one leg. Poor balance is often the result of a restless mind or distracted attention. Regular practice of this posture will help focus the mind and cultivate concentration (*dharana*).

When practicing *vriksha-asana* it may help to imagine or picture a tree in the mind and apply the following technique: Imagine that the foot you are balanced on is the root of the tree and the leg is the trunk. Continue by imagining the head and outstretched arms as the branches and leaves of the tree. You may be unsteady for a while and find the body swaying back and forth, but don't break the concentration. Like a tree bending in the wind and yet remaining upright, the body can maintain balance.

Aim to achieve the "rootedness" and firmness of a tree. Regular practice of the *vriksha-asana* improves concentration, balance and coordination. Because the weight of the entire body is balanced on one foot, the muscles of that leg are strengthened and toned as well.

As you advance in this posture and are able to remain standing for more than a few moments, try closing the eyes and maintaining your balance.

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the *vriksha-asana* as long as your comfortably can. Repeat it two or three times on each leg.

34. Vrischika – asana – The Scorpion Pose

Posture: *Vrischika-asana*

The Scorpion Pose

Translation: *Vrischika* is the Sanskrit word for scorpion. This posture is so named because the body resembles a scorpion with its tail arched above its head ready to sting its victim. Although it may not be a simple posture for beginners to perform, the Scorpion is not as difficult as it may at first seem.

Pronunciation: vrik-shah-sa-na

Difficulty: (7)

Instructions:

1. Kneel on the floor and lean forward placing the elbows and forearms flat on the floor with the palms facing down. Your arms should be placed about shoulder-distance apart.
2. Extend your head forward and lift it as high as possible.
3. Raise the buttocks and place the feet firmly on the bottoms the toes.
4. Inhale a swing the legs up and over the head while maintaining your balance. Bring the legs straight up over your head.
5. Slowly bend the knees and drop the legs toward the head being careful not to move too quickly or drop the legs to far while maintaining balance.
6. Reverse the steps above and return to a kneeling position.

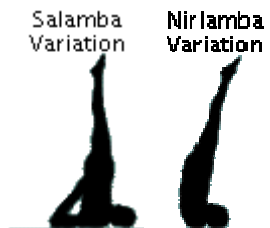
Comments:

The Scorpion should not be attempted until you are comfortable with all the balance postures (e.g.: [Vriksha-asana](#), [Ekapada-asana](#), etc.) as well as the Headstand (*Sirsha-asana*). Beginners should do this posture under the supervision of a qualified teacher. When first attempting the Scorpion asana you may want to try it while facing a wall. Position yourself so that when you are doing step #1 above your head is about 2 - 3 feet from the wall. This way if you lose your balance you can use the wall for support.

This posture will provide maximum stretch to the neck, spine and chest. It combines many of the benefits of the [Chakra-asana](#) (the Wheel posture) and the *Sirsha-asana* (the Headstand).

Duration/Repetitions:

Hold the *vrischika-asana* for as long as you are comfortable. Keep in mind that returning from the posture gracefully without falling out of it will take some strength, so don't hold it too long. 20-30 seconds is fine for early attempts, increase the time gradually as you become more proficient.



Variations:

There are two common variations to this posture illustrated and described below:



To do the first variation, illustrated above, after entering the Scorpion as described above slowly raise the legs straight up until your feet are directly over your head (you won't, of course, be able to see this but you will easily be able to *feel* when they are properly positioned). This variation requires a bit more strength and a stronger sense of balance than pose described above.

