

UNIT : 1 Introduction to Yoga and Yogic Practices

1.9 Introduction to Yogasana: meaning, principles and their health benefits.

Meaning :

Yogasana is not just acrobatics of bending and twisting the body. *Yogasana* is the wholistic system comprising of contemplation (मनन), balance (संतुलन) and capacity building (क्षमता वर्धन).

The study of *Yogasanas* is done for body and mind purification. Once body and mind are purified, we get the knowledge of self realization by practicing meditation technique.

Principles of Yogasanas :

There are two references for the principles of *Yogasanas*. One is *Rajyoga* related to mind i.e. *Yog Sutra* by sage *Patanjali* and second one related to body i.e. *Hathiyoga*.

1. *Patanjali* muni says '*sthira sukham asanam*' – meaning 'asana is a posture which is stable and comfortable'. That is the definition of asana according to *Patanjali Yogasutra*,

It is a fundamental text book of yogic philosophy. Yoga poses i.e. asana is one of eight "limbs".

To attain the goal of enlightenment, *Patanjali* muni directs us to cultivate two qualities in the *yogasanas* – *sthira* and *sukham*.

sthira means stability, steadiness, and strength

Sukham translates to **ease or comfort**. When both of these principles are fulfilled, we are less distracted by physical discomfort and can focus on the deeper layers of the practice.

2. *Hatha Yoga* practices, start with the body, prepare the ground for reaching higher states of consciousness

In *Gherand Samhita* :

षट्कर्मणा शोधनं च आसनेन भवेद् दृढम्।
मुद्रया स्थिरता चैव प्रत्याहारेण धीरता ॥१०॥

Shatkarmana shodhana ch Asanen bhaved Dridham

Mudraya sthirata chaiv Pratyaharen Dhirata.

Asana are described for strengthening and Mudra for steadying.

Let us discuss the yogic principles:

1. Yogic practices should not be misunderstood with 'exercises'. Vigorous physical movements are generally applied in exercises. As in practice of yoga no vigorous movements are involved, so any type of violent action must not be included in yogic practice.
2. The 'static stretching procedures' which are known for the vital and best yogic practices are known as Asanas. The asanas should be practiced slowly, in order to influence toning system of body rather than the physical.
3. One should maintain a particular asanas' position for a certain time by using less effort. The main feature of asanas' technique is to perform effortlessly and attain maximum relaxation in the final position.
4. Practice of Yoga should not be done in such a way that it leads to unnecessary exhaustion and tiredness. In case fatigue is felt then one should get into Shavasana.
5. The performance of yoga by individuals must be performed *yathashakti* (as per own capacity of practitioner) .
6. Practitioner peace of mind must be the main aim of person practicing yoga.
7. A routine of yoga should start with relaxation in terms of psychophysical or by reciting some prayers actually or centering attention as done in the prayers. This will generate the necessary silence conducive for the class.

Health benefits :

One of the first and foremost advantages of yoga is that it improves flexibility. Continuous practice of yoga loosen the body muscles as well as connective tissues which are adjacent to the joints and bones.

This is the main reason why yoga helps in reducing pains and body aches. Yoga assists in maintaining the strength of the muscles and building the muscle mass which help in protecting them from conditions, like back pain, osteoporosis and arthritis. According to various studies, meditation and *asana*, or a combination of these two help in reducing pain in chronic conditions, back pain and arthritis.

1. Yogasanas are physical postures often imitating the natural positions of the animals like Gomukhasan, Marajarsan etc. They are meant to make the mind tranquil. Through these postures, the physical revitalization, deep relaxation and mental calmness is achieved.

2. The body which is the vehicle of the spirit is strengthened by yogasanas so as to enable it to sustain higher levels of energy. Practice of yoga can bring about a life style change, a transformation in the total personality.
3. In the joints of our body two or more than two bones are connected with one another etc. they which help us to swing, turn and bend our head, torso and limbs, These movements in our body help us in making the various poses of yoga. But these joints are vulnerable to many injuries. Hence, it is important to understand the benefits of performing yoga so as to prevent and heal the joint injuries.
4. By improving flexibility and toning the muscles, yoga makes sure that joints work smoothly in all our movements and activities.
5. Yogasanas help in maintaining the balance of strengthening and stretching which lengthens ligaments, tendons and muscles.
6. Regular routine of yoga helps in preventing conditions, such as osteoarthritis in which the cartilage protects the joint to deteriorate.
7. Repetition of exercise will help in squeezing nutrients and blood in the cartilage in order to be healthy and compresses body joints.

This is not directly related to Asanas but indirectly affect body either positively or negatively, therefore, I would like to mention here that : We must follow proper Yogic diet.

Yogic diet principles are very easy to understand but difficult to follow.

The *Hatha Pradipika* very clearly tells what diet to take and what to avoid. Proper diet is very important if a person wants to maintain good health. Most of the problems people experience are due to bad eating habits. One needs to start eating properly and the right away.