

Asana Clinic #1 ~ Introduction to Asana

What is Asana?

- An asana is a posture.
- There are innumerable postures or shapes that your body can take. Among these, certain postures have been identified as “yoga asanas”, also referred to as ‘yogasanas’
- ‘Yoga’ means that which takes you on to a higher dimension or higher perception of life. So ‘Yoga asanas’ - that kind of posture which leads you to a higher possibility.

Asanas are emotional

- Different mental and emotional situations tend to naturally take a certain posture in the body - if you’re happy, you sit one way. When you’re unhappy, you sit another way.
- You can tell what is happening with someone just by observing the way they are sitting, or holding themselves, or moving.
- By consciously getting your body into a certain posture, you can also elevate your consciousness. You can change the very way you feel, think, understand, and experience life.

Asanas are not exercises.

- They are very subtle processes of manipulating your energy in a certain direction.
- It needs to be done with a certain level of awareness.
- There are various levels of doing asanas. You can practice asanas just physically, or more deeply, being aware of the breath, sensations, reverberations, being aware of the nadis, or with appropriate mantras.

The Science of Asanas

- The science of asanas is known as hatha yoga. “Ha” means sun, “ta” means moon. The first process of yoga is to bring balance between the masculine and feminine in you.

Asanas are a way to attain

- Asanas are ways in which one can elevate our consciousness. When we say asanas, do not think of them as just postures - think of them as systems, ways of attaining.
- The biggest barrier is the limitations of your body & mind.
- The yogic system identifies a series of asanas through which you can transform your body and mind into a great possibility for your ultimate wellbeing.
- The body is a constant manifestation of various levels of compulsiveness, depending upon the type of information that has gone into the system.

In the Indian tradition, yoga asana means - *taking charge of your life.*

- You are transforming your body and mind into a possibility in your life. It is becoming a passage, not a block.
- The process of transforming the body, changing the texture of the body, changing the fundamental information in the body, which makes it go in certain compulsive patterns, needs a certain determination, forcefulness, and adamancy.
- This process of asanas is you not willing to give in to the cycles of compulsiveness. You go the way you want to go. It's a retraining of the body & mind.

Creating the right atmosphere

- *Ha* and *tha* describe sun and moon. Hatha is about bringing a balance between the two. If these two dimensions are balanced within you, naturally, the body becomes a conducive place to live in for your being.
- If you mess up the place around you, you can move elsewhere. But if you mess up the body from within, you cannot go elsewhere until you die. As long as you live in this life, the body is the abode of your existence.

It is important that an atmosphere is conducive rather than being compulsive.

- If your home is a very compulsive place, you will feel suffocated. Every situation, every atmosphere is set up for a certain purpose. Your home may be set up for one kind of purpose. The ashram may be set up for another kind of purpose. An industry or a business may be set up for a different kind of purpose.
- Every atmosphere should serve the purpose that we have set it up for.
- You must decide what purpose your body should serve. And then do the appropriate yoga for that.

Ease and Stability – The Third Limb of Yoga

- Patanjali describes the third limb of yoga, which is the asana, as “*Sthiram, Sukham Asanam*” – asana is about creating sukha - ‘ease’.
- If your body is at ease, your mind is at ease, and your energy is at full vibrance and balance. Now you are naturally meditative. You will find full potential to your life.

The Sequence of the asana

- Intelligent sequencing of asana stems from this idea of essentially creating ‘ease’. It doesn’t mean that the practice can’t be dynamic or challenging, but it means that the “end goal” is achieving this ease.
- The order is not something that you invent – it arises from the observation of how not only the physical body but the whole human system functions.
- **The right postures create comfort** In your system - whether it be skeletal comfort, muscular comfort, organ comfort, and energy comfort.
- The intention behind sequencing is also **not to disjoint your energy.**

- Sequencing is about it making sense and that “making sense” will stem from an understanding of how the body systems work and what you’re trying to achieve. This comes back to what ‘purpose your body is serving’ and finding balance.

Asana is about exploring how the body & mind work

- If you try to stop what you don’t want, only that will happen. This has always been the nature of your mind.
- The whole system of yoga is about experientially exploring the nature of your body and your mind.
- The biggest problem that we have in society is that we are trying to live without having a grasp of the two basic vehicles which you cannot go through life without – the physical body and the mind.

We need to understand the vehicle

- How comfortably you travel through life depends on how deeply you have grasped your body and your mind. For the journey to be comfortable, the vehicle has to be good, and you must understand the vehicle – how it behaves, what it does, and why it does what it does. This isn’t enlightenment, it’s just necessity.

Asana is an experiential exploration

- When you do your asanas, you explore the nature of your body and your mind. If you move your fingers in a certain way, your mind will function accordingly.
- Everything that you do with your body does something with your mind and a true understanding of this comes from exploration.
- Understanding the fundamentals, grasping how your mind functions, does not come from an intellectual analysis – it is an exploration. What you need to do is, hold your body in one posture, and see how your mind functions in a certain way. Hold your body in another posture, and see your mind functions in a different way.

Hatha Yoga is preparatory

- If you stay in an asana and breathe properly, as you go through this process, the mind will go into various states. This exploration is the most fundamental aspect of yoga. Yoga asana is not the peak – it is preparatory.
- In relation to meditation - some amount of physical preparation is needed, because body and mind are not two separate things. What happens to your little finger happens to the brain. What happens to the brain happens to the little finger. It works both ways.
- That is why the yogic system is designed the way it is - yoga - ‘union’.

We’ve established that Yoga is fundamentally experiential - it inspires an exploration of your own body. In that sense - you cannot explore someone else’s body, so as a teacher your role is to guide someone else in the exploration of their body.

Revisit *Beyond The Asanas* in your manual (page 2)

“The asanas are useful maps to explore yourself, but they are not the territory.” Donna Farhi

Think of the actual asana as a snapshot, capturing a moment that doesn't necessarily express the whole - moving in and out to complete the experience.

Starting positions and the base of support

- The base of support is the parts of the body that are on the ground and through which weight-bearing forces are transmitted down to the earth, resulting in some supporting energy generated upward into the body.
- When we change our base of support, we change our experience of ourselves in relationship to gravity and space.

Standing - supported on the soles of the feet

Sitting - supported on the base of the pelvis

Kneeling - supported on the knees, shins, and tops of the feet

Supine - supported on the back surface of the body

Prone - supported on the front surface of the body

Arm support - supported on the upper limbs

Explorative Task (pg 3 - complete in your manual) - Explore the 6 bases of support and describe your experience of each position. Try to take off your teacher (& intellectual) hat and simply describe your experience of the different bases of support

Essentially, we are always in movement

- We may talk about a final position but in fact the image we hold is a kind of snapshot in a never-ending progression of movement, extending infinitely forward and backward in time. On the most fundamental level, the actions of breathing never cease - as long as we are alive, we are never actually still.

The point of the asana (on a body level) is not to do it right, but to find the relationship between all the parts of the body that will let the experience of the asana resonate throughout the whole body - cells, tissues, fluids, and systems.

With practice and skilful observation we can see from the initiation how the movement will travel through the body and the effect it will have on the body systems.

The asana is not just the final arrangement of the limbs and spine, but is the full process of coming into that arrangement.

Reflection (pg 3 - complete in your manual) - Take some time to reflect on your experience of asana in the context of a yoga class. What experiences (or teachings) have resonated with you and why.

Asana Clinic #1 - Reflection - complete in the online portal

- *What is your key take-away from the asana clinic and introduction to exploring Yoga Asana?*
- *Identify how you may apply that key take away to both your personal practice and in the context of teaching one-to-one or in a class setting.*
- *Share one aspect of your practical exploration of the 'bases of support'*