

Yogasanas---Vinyasa

By Srivatsa Ramaswami

Pandit Sri Krishnamacharya's core system of Yogasana teachings was Vinyasa Krama, which I studied extensively during my studentship with him between 1955 and 1988. My studies were fairly continuous with a few breaks here and there running for months some times but more often very intense like going to him for studies almost twice a day. He taught not only Yogasanas, but several other yoga related subjects like Vedanta, Nyaya, Samkhya, Upanishads. He also taught me to chant extensively from the Vedas.

The Vinyasa Krama that I learned can be grouped into about ten asanas and vinyasa sets, woven around a major posture or position. Each group can be practiced independently one vinyasa after the other in a sequence. To accommodate the difference in capabilities and requirements, some of the vinyasas could be skipped. Sometimes the same vinyasa is repeated a few more times than the others, or one may stay in the particular pose or vinyasa for a longer period of time or for more number of breaths,-oh yes- as synchronous breathing is an important ingredient of this system.

The main sequence with which this yoga system starts is the standing pose called Tadasana or Hill Pose. This particular group of asanas and vinyasas requires that one keeps the feet together all through the practice—the feet together and the ankles touching each other. Equally important, the practitioner will stand with the feet together, the eyes closed and observe how one balances. Slowly the sense of balance improves, bringing slowly more stability both to the body and the mind. This Tadasana sequence contains scores of vinyasas, and one would traverse through well known poses like Parsva Bhangi (side bends and twists), Uttanasana (forward bends), Utkatasana (squats) and some advanced poses like, Pasasana (the noose) and Malasana (the garland). The advantage of this system is that one can pick and choose those vinyasas that are appropriate to an individual student. By learning this system—the sequence, the vinyasas, the breathing and the sequencing—the teacher or the therapist can have the whole arsenal of asanas and apply it judiciously to the individual requirements.

In standing, there are three important sequences, viz., Tadasana (Hill Pose), Ekapadasanas(standing or balancing on one leg) and thirdly, the famous, Trikonasana or the Triangle pose, in which the practitioner stands with the legs spread (making an equilateral triangle of the legs with the floor.) While the one legged poses give great sense of balance, the Hill pose is said to align the body, the chakras. The Triangle pose, which boasts of such well known poses as Trikonasana, Parsva Uttanasana, Uttita Parsvkonasana and Virabhadrasana, affords empowerment of the muscles and deeper working with the joints. The Trikonasana is especially popular in the West as it provides stability and power, whereas the other standing groups require one to develop more sensitivity and balance.

There are two sequences that can be done lying down. One is called Suptasana or lying supine sequence. These are very useful for beginners and also intermediate students. Sarvangasana is considered one of the important poses in this sequence. More than a hundred vinyasas are grouped under this heading. The other lying down sequence is the prone sequence. One lies down on the belly and it is very suitable to work on the spine. Several well known poses are aesthetically woven into sequence in this arrangement. Cobra Pose, the crocodile, the locust and the bow poses are all parts of this sequence.

A seated sequence, to be considered next, in which the positions of the legs are manipulated is very versatile and elaborate as well. More than one hundred vinyasas adorn this sequence. Here the position of either leg is manipulated, kept in different positions and the trunk is moved forward, backward, twisted and the body lifted/balanced on hands. This asymmetric sequence will be helpful in correcting marginal imbalances in the body. Some of the important asanas covered in this asymmetrical seated sequence will include, Marichyasana and vinyasas, Half-lotus,

Triyang-mukha etc. Once this sequence is practiced, the next sequence will be the famous forward bend sequence called Paschimatanasana. Again scores of vinyasas are embedded in the sequence.

The inversions are perhaps the most powerful and innovative contributions of Yogis in the realm of physical exercises. The head stand and the corollaries and the hand stand variations constitute this sequence. Again scores of variations in head stand and several hand stand and forearm balancing variations like pincha mayura , scorpion and others constitute this sequence.

What is the purpose of doing asanas? To ultimately be able to sit for a very long time so that the yogi can practice Pranayama and more importantly meditation is the goal. Proper posture or asana is a sine qua non for that. So Yogis should develop proper procedures so that they could master at least one seated yogic pose and stay for a long period of time without numbness or discomfort. Slowly but surely the Yogi should dispense with all props, for a seated pose. Several classical yoga books suggest sitting on a level floor, indicating the use of uneven cushions and props are not used in seated poses especially when doing pranayama and involved meditation.. Two sequences for seated poses are in vogue. Vajrasana, Virasana Siddhasana and Gomukhasana, are some of the poses suggested and one sequence called meditative poses sequence and it deals with the vinyasas of these poses. And finally is the lotus. It is considered the best among seated poses, because of the stability, balance and control it gives to the Yogi. Again this sequence has several scores of vinyasas.

Yoga is considered an art. In the olden days Yoga was included in the 64 arts mentioned in ancient literature, along with dance, music, drama, poetry, flower arrangement etc I have included several hundred vinyasas in my book "The Complete Book of Vinyasa Yoga". Each vinyasa is described adequately with the appropriate breathing and the whole practiced in sequenced.

About the author



Srivatsa Ramaswami, 67 years old, was the longest standing student of T Krishnamachary outside the Master's family. He has written four books: Basic Tenets of Patanjala Yoga (1982); Yoga for the Three Stages of Life (2000, Inner Traditions); The Complete Book of Vinyasa Yoga (2005, Marlowe) and Yoga Beneath the Surface (with David Hurwitz, June 2006, Marlowe). In addition, he had also recorded about 40 audio cassettes and cds in India of various Sanskrit chants like Sun Salutation, Gayatri, Sive Kavacham etc. Has been teaching for more than 25 years in India—Kalakshetra (for 20 years, and recognized as an Institution of National Importance by the Govt. of India), Ramachandra Medical University, Yoga Brotherhood etc. In recent years, he travel widely in the USA to conduct workshops and Teacher Training programs. Some of the organizations which he has taught include: Esalen Institute,

Loyola Marymount University, Yoga Works, Himalayan Institute, Chicago Yoga Center and several others. For more information refer to www.vinyasakrama.com .