

20



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ASANA



Note

In the previous lessons, you have studied the spiritual component of physical education and Hatha Yog. We have discussed the effect and benefits of Hatha Yog also. It is clear that yog plays an important role in physical fitness, mental harmony, emotional balance, spiritual and moral values or overall personality development. 'Asana' is the third important ladder of Ashtanga Yog in the Patanjali Yogsutra. It is essential that we should perform the Yogic Sukshma Vyayama before practicing of Asana. Because Yogic Sukshma Vyayama prepares our body for practicing of Asana. It provides physical stability and firmness which makes the body strong and healthy. In this unit we will study about Yogasana and their different types, importance and need.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson you will be able to:

- explain the asana and its importance;
- describe the preparatory practices i.e. Sukshma Vayayam;
- explain the practice of Surya-namaskar and
- classify the asana.



20.1 ASANA

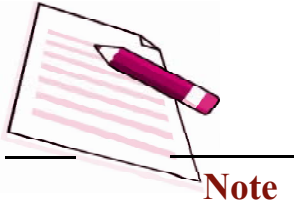
First of all we should know about the meaning of Asana. Asana means to sit. Asana is a stable and comfortable posture. The word Asana is generally used for a mat also. But in Yog, Asana is meant for posture which has a more important place in Yog Practices.

Maharshi Patanjali was a great seer who introduced and compiled Yog in a systematic way to the world. He has defined Asana in an easy way in his treatise 'Yogsutra':

'Sthirasukhamasanam' स्थिरसुखमासनम् (2/46 P.Y.S)



Yogic Practices



The meaning of this is ‘to remain steady with ease is Asana or posture. Here we should know that the meaning of Asana is a meditative pose like Sukhasana, Padmasana, Siddhasana etc. But in Hatha Yog Practices other form of postures are also considered as Asana.



Fig. 20.1



Fig. 20.2



Fig. 20.3

The purpose of an asana in Patanjali yog is to balance the different nerve impulses, feeling of pain and pleasure. Asana is an important part of hath yog. It is a specific body position which opens the energy channels and psychic centers.

In Hatha Yog, it is strongly believed that the practice of Asana gives control on our body and mind is, therefore, automatically controlled.

Here you should definitely understand that when one practices asana, steadiness develops and prana moves freely. When prana moves freely, the body also becomes supple and the toxins are removed from the system. The yogic scriptures say that altogether there are 84,00,000 of asanas, as many asanas as forms of life. We can also find a progressive evolution from the simplest form of life to the complex. But among 84,00,000 asanas, 84 are considered important and only 32 Asana are discussed in detail. These can be seen in *Gherand Sahinta*.

Importance of Asana

Asanas are very important for us in our life. They provide :

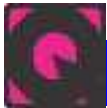
- physical stability
- firmness



- flexibility
- body tone
- sound health
- Peace of Mind
- Beyond duality



Note



INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.1

1. Define asana according to Patanjali.

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2. Explain the ultimate aim of asana according to hath yog.

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20.2 PREPARATORY PRACTICES i.e. SUKSHMA VAYAYAM

As it has already been told that Sukshma Vayayam is essential before practicing Asana. First we should perform the Yogic Sukshma Vyayama and then we should practice Asana. Here we should know the meaning of Sukshma Vayayam.

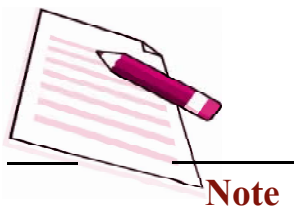
The word Sukshma means subtle and Vayayam means exercise. So those exercises which are mild, easy and have deep rooted effects are considered as Sukshma Vayayam.

The concept of this practice is to provide all possible movements to every part of body joints in a comfortable, smooth and balanced way. It improves flexibility and prepares our body for intermediate group of asanas or classic asanas. Ideally all practices of this series are performed in a sitting position but we can modify it according to our requirement.

Sukshma Vayayam can be classified broadly in four categories:

i. Practice of Leg Joints



Yogic Practices

- ii. Practice of Hand Joints
- iii. Practice of Neck Joints
- iv. Practice of Eye

20.2.1 Preparations and Precautions before Yogic Practices

Now we will learn to practice these subtle actions in detail. But it is necessary to understand some instructions and precautions before doing the yogic practices and asanas. Carefully read and understand the instructions given below.

- The place of practice should be clean, open and airy.
- Practice always on carpet and bed sheet at flat ground.
- Use the comfortable and loose clothes according to the season.
- Practice should be done in easy and comfortable way according to capacity. Do not put undue stress & pressure.
- Glasses, watches and ornaments should be removed;
- keep your body relaxed while performing the action;
- When performing SV or asana, breathing should be taken only by the nose until mentioned otherwise;
- Before practising, Keep your stomach, intestine and bladder empty.
- Relax when you feel tired.

Now we will learn the practice. Read carefully the position and method of the Kriyas described below, understand and memorize and practise them at the right time.

Prayer

Yogic prayer is considered necessary before starting any kind of yog practices.

Position

- Stand erect, keep both feet together, body straight.
- Close your eyes.
- Join both hands together in front of chest, slightly above the heart area.

Method: Pray to God while meditating. For example the prayer should be done as follows –

Om.....

Asato ma sadgamyā;

Tamso ma jyotirgamyā;



Mrityorma amritamgamyā

Note - Instead, you can also make another prayer of your God according to your wishes.

20.2.2 Practice of Leg Joints

Base Position

- Sit with the legs outstretched in front and palms on the floor beside the hip, fingers pointing backward or Dandasana.
- Head, neck and back should be in a straight line, and take support of the arms.
- Eyes closed and relax the whole body.
- Repeat the practice 10 times.

Practice 1: Toe bending

- Sit on the Base position;
- Move the toes of both feet slowly backward and forward but ankles should be relaxed and motionless.
- Hold each position for a few seconds.

Practice 2 – Ankle Bending

- Sit on the Base position;
- Slowly move both feet backward and forward, bend them from ankle joints;
- Hold the position for a few seconds.

Practice 3 – Ankle rotation

- Sit on the Base position;
- Rotate both the feet clockwise and anticlockwise from ankle.

Practice 4 – Butterfly

- Sit on the Base position;
- Bend the knees and bring the soles of the feet together;
- Keeping the heels as close to the body as possible ;
- Clasp the feet with both hands.
- Gently bounce the knees up and down;

Benefits –The practices are helpful in releasing hip joints, pelvic girdle and lumbar spine stress.



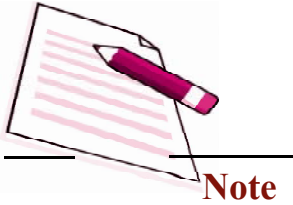
Note



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Yogic Practices



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20.2.3 Practice of Hand Joints

Practice – 1 Hand clenching

- Sit on the position of Dandasana;
- Stretch both arms in front of the body at shoulder level and palm facing downward;
- Open the hands, and stretch the fingers wide apart as possible ;
- Close the fingers and make a tight fist with thumb inside .

Practice – 2 Wrist bending

- Sit on the position of Dandasana;
- Stretch the arms in front of the body at shoulder level ;
- Keep the arms open and downward and fingers straight through out the entire practice ;
- Bend the palms from the wrist joint upward and backward.

Practice – 3 Wrist joint rotation

- Sit on the position of Dandasana;
- Make a fist with the both hands with the thumb inside;
- Slowly rotate the wrist joints clockwise and anticlockwise.

Practice – 4 Shoulder socket rotation

- Sit on the position of Dandasana;
- Place the fingers of the right hand on the right shoulder and left hand on the left shoulder;
- Fully rotate both elbows at the same time in a large circle clockwise and anticlockwise.
- Benefits –The practices are helpful in releasing shoulder stress.

20.2.4 Practice of Neck Movements

- Sit on the Base position;

Stage 1 : Move the head forward and Backward as much as possible comfortably .

Stage 2 : Move the head to the right and left side as much as possible comfortably .

Benefits –The practices are helpful in releasing neck and shoulder muscles stress.



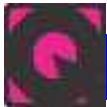
20.2.5 Practice of Eyes

Blinking-

- Sit on the Base position;
- Keep your eyes open ,
- blink the eyes 25 to 30 times quickly ;
- Close the eyes and relax it for 20 seconds.

Sideways viewing –

- Sit on the Base position;
- look at a fixed point in front;
- focus eyes on the extreme left for a few seconds;
- now focus eyes on the extreme right for a few seconds;



INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.2

Fill in the Blanks with appropriate word.

- The word Sukshma meansand Vayayam means exercise.
- Sukshma Vayayam can be classified broadly in categories.

20.3 PRACTICE OF SURYA-NAMASKAR

We have learnt and practiced Sukshma Vayayam. Now we will discuss Surya-Namaskar. It is a wonderful practice for us to keep our body fit.

Surya Namaskara means salutation to the sun. It can be seen as a form of worship of the sun. In yogic terms this indicates that Surya Namaskara awakens the solar aspects of an individual's nature and releases this vital energy for the development of higher awareness. This can be realized by the practice of surya Namaskara . Surya namaskara is a series of twelve physical postures ,which has to be repeated by the other side then it makes one round . It is an effective way of loosening up ,stretching ,massaging and toning all the joints , muscles and internal organs of the body .

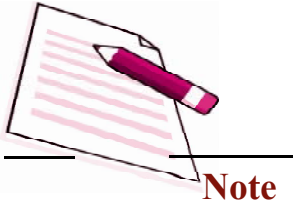


Fig. 20.4



Note





It is a set of 12 fixed yog asana, which is done in a certain order.

20.3.1 The method of Surya Namaskar

Preparation

- First stand erect with the feet together and the arms hanging loosely by the side of the body.
- Close the eyes gently and be aware of whole physical body.
- Take the awareness to the eyebrow centre and visualize the red rising sun infusing the whole body and mind with its vitalizing and healing rays.

First Position: Pranamasana (prayer pose)

- Slowly bend the elbows and place the palms together in front of the chest in Pranam-mudra.
- Relax the whole body and breath normally.
- Pray to God for sound health and wisdom.

Second Position : Hasta-Utтанasana

- Raise and stretch both arms above the head.
- Keep the arms separate shoulder width apart.
- Bend the head, arms, and upper trunk backward as much as is comfortable.
- Inhale while raising the arms and exhale while bending back.

Third Position: Padaahastasana

- Now, bend forward slowly and try to keep your palms on the floor besides the feet and forehead to the knees.
- But do not strain and keep the knees straight.
- Exhale while bending forward

Contra-indications –People with back problems, sciatica, slip-disk etc. should not do this pose. In these conditions forward bending is prohibited.

Fourth Position: Ashwa Sanchalanasana (Equestrian Pose)

- Now stretch the right leg back as far as possible and simultaneously bend the left knee as much as possible comfortably.
- Give a curve to the back and try to gaze upward . Make sure that right knee should be on the floor.
- Inhale while stretching the right leg back.



Fifth Position: Parvatasana (Mountain pose)

- Now take the left foot also back beside the right foot.
- Simultaneously, raise the buttocks up as much as possible and keep the head between the arms, so that the back and legs form two sides of a triangle.
- Try to keep the heels on the floor in the final pose and bring the head towards the knees, but do not strain.
- Exhale while taking the left leg back and keep breath normal in final position.

Sixth Position: Asthanga Namaskara (Salute with eight parts of the body)

- Now, Bend both knees and keep them on the floor.
- With this bend your elbows and keep your chest and chin on the floor.
- The part of the body between chest and knee - buttocks, hip and abdomen should not touch the floor.
- Take normal breathing.

Seventh Position: Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose)

- Now lower the buttocks and hips to the floor.
- Raise your upper body up and straighten your hands.
- Inhale while raising the torso and arching the back .

Eighth Position: Parvatasana

- This position is a repeat of position 5.
- Exhale while raising the hip.

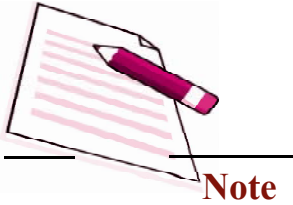
Ninth Position: Ashwa Sanchalana

- Keep the palms flat on the floor and bring the right foot forward in between the hands.
- Place the left knee on the floor.
- Inhale while assuming the pose .

Tenth Position: Padahastasana

- This is a repeat of position 3.
- Bring the left foot forward next to the right foot.
- Exhale and straighten the knees.

**Note**



Eleventh Position: Hasta uttanasana

- This is a repeat of position 2.

Twelfth Position Pranamasana (prayer pose)

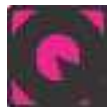
- This is a repeat position of 1.
- Exhale while assuming the final pose.

Note: Position 1-12 constitute half a round of Surya Namaskara. To complete the other half the same movements are performed with other leg in position 4th and 9th.

20.3.2 Benefits of Surya-namaskar:

Now we should know the benefits of Surya-namaskar.

- Surya-nmaskar is a complete set of exercises which provides complete health and body fitness.
- It strengthens and tones all parts of the body.
- It makes the spine and the waist flexible and removes the disorders.
- It keeps abdomen, intestine, stomach, pancreas, heart and lungs healthy.
- It helps to increase the blood circulation all over the body smoothly and removes the impurities of blood and destroys the skin diseases.
- It helps to balance secretion of hormones of all glands of the body.
- Surya-nmaskar enhances the vigour, vitality and mental peace.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.3

1. What is meant by Surya-namaskar?

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.....

2. How many positions are there in Surya-namaskar?

.....
.....

3. What is the seventh position of Surya-namaskar? Explain.

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20.4 CLASSIFICATION OF ASANAS

The Asanas may be classified in following categories mainly:

1. Meditative Asanas
2. Forward bending Asanas
3. Backward bending Asanas
4. Side Bending Asanas
5. Inverted Asanas
6. Twisting Asanas
7. Balancing Asanas
8. Relaxing Asanas

- **Meditative Asans:**

The aim of all Asanas are to make one capable of sitting in a meditative asans for longer period of time steadily with ease. There are three-four types of meditative Asanas like Sukhasana, Padmasana, Siddhasana, Swastik Asans etc.

- **Forward bending Asanas:**

There are many forward bending Asanas like Janushirasana, Pashchimottanasana, Padahastana, Yog mudra, Mandook Asana, Padprasara Pashchimottanasana etc.

- **Backward bending Asanas:**

There are many Backward bending Asanas like Ushtrasana, Sarpasana, Bhujangasana, Matsyasana, Chakrasana, Rajkapotasana, Dhanurasana etc.

- **Side bending Asanas**

There are many Side bending Asanas like Side bending, Tiryak Tadasana, Trikonasana etc.

- **Inverted Asanas**

There are many Inverted Asanas like Vipreetakarni Asana, Sarvangasana, Shirshasana, Vrishchikasana, Hand Stand Asana etc.

- **Twisting Asanas**

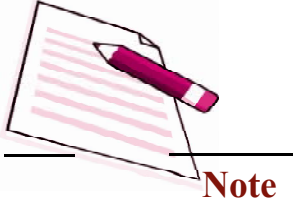
There are many Twisting Asanas like Meruvakrasana, Ardhamatsyendrasana, Vakrasana, Katichakrasana, Markatasana etc.



Note



Yogic Practices



- Balancing Asanas

There are many Balancing Asanas like Tadasana, Vrikshasana, Ek padasana Garunaasana, Bakasana, Mayurasana, Kukkutasana etc.

- Relaxing Asanas

There are many Relaxing Asanas like Shavasana, Balasana, Makarasana, etc.

We will study and practice all the above categories of Asana during the Practical Session.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 20.4

Match the following in a meaningful way:

- | A | B |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| i. Titli Asana | a. Inverted asana |
| ii. Astang Namaskar | b. Balancing |
| iii. Dhanurasana | c. Backward Bending asana |
| iv. Natrajasana | d. Surya Nmaskar |
| v. Sarvangasana | e. Sukshma vayama |



WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT

- Yog plays an important role in physical fitness, mental harmony, emotional balance, spiritual and moral values or overall personality development.
- ‘Asana’ is the third important ladder of Ashtanga Yog in the Patanjali Yogsutra.
- It is essential that we should perform the Yogic Sukshma Vyayama before practising of Asana. Because Yogic SukshmaVyayama prepares our body for practising of Asana.
- Maharshi Patanjali has defined Asana in an easy way in his treatise ‘Yogsutra’ ‘*Sthirasukhamasanam*” स्थिरसुखमानसनम् (2/46 P.Y.S).
- The word Sukshma means subtle and Vayayam means exercise. So those exercises which are mild, easy and have deep rooted effects are considered as Sukshma Vayayam.



- Sukshma Vayayam can be classified broadly in four categories:
 - i. Practice of Leg Joints
 - ii. Practice of Hand Joints
 - iii. Practice of Neck Joints
 - iv. Practice of Eye
- Surya Namaskara means salutation to the sun. It can be seen as a form of worship of the sun. In yogic terms this indicates that Surya Namaskara awakens the solar aspects of an individual's nature and releases this vital energy for the development of higher awareness.



TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Describe the Practice of Surya-namaskara with names of all positions and its benefits.
2. Write the techniques of hands joints S V and give its benefits.
3. What is meant by Asana? Classify them.
4. Write short notes on:
 - i) Eye practices ,
 - ii) Leg Joints Practices



ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

20.1

- 1) **‘Sthirasukhamasanam’** स्थिरसुखमानसनम्
- 2) In Hatha Yog, it is strongly believed that the practice of Asana gives control on our body and mind is therefore automatically controlled.

20.2

- i) subtle
- ii) four

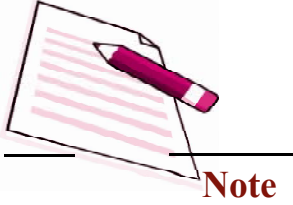
20.3

- i) Surya Namaskara means salutation to the sun.



Note



Yogic Practices

- ii) 12
- iii) Bhujangasana

20.4

- i) e
- ii) d
- iii) c
- iv) b
- v) a

Suggested Reading and References

- Maharishi Patanjali Yog Sutra,
- Hatha Yog Pradeepika - Swami Swatmaram,
- Yog And Kriya - Swami Satyanand Saraswati Y P T
- Asana Pranayan Mudra Bandha - Swami Satyanand Sraswati Yog Publication Trust, Munger, Bihar, India
- Shrimadabhadgavadagita
- Yogic Therapy By Swami Kuvalayananda Central Health Education Bureau Directorate General of health services, Kotla road, New Delhi

