

## Vinyasa

‘Nyasa’ is the sacred practice of placement. Arranging the fingers in a hasta mudra and placing them on a part of the body while chanting a mantra is known as ‘Nyasa’, and charges that particular part of the anatomy with the vibration of a particular deity so a healing energy arises. ‘Vi’ refers to division and difference. ‘Vinyasa’ in Hatha Yoga refers to the practice of moving from one posture to another, and inherent in the word is the understanding that the practice is sacred. As one placement of the body turns by movement to another, a transformation takes place. This practice is worthy of total focus and as such becomes a moving meditation.

A sequence of asanas done mechanically and without attention is not helpful. A standard sequence - such as sun salutations – done at the dictation of a teacher may not suit everyone, as everyone has different movement patterns and proclivities. As the Vinyasa may be done at some speed, some students may struggle to keep up. In some schools of Yoga – such as Ashtanga and Bikram - there is emphasis on the group dynamic, and there is definitely value in this: the individual ego gives way to a more universal reality. Unfortunately this may cause the individual to over-ride their own reservations of their own capabilities, and they may take risks and even injure themselves in order to keep up. An attentive teacher would pre-empt this possibility by preparing the students not only to do the individual postures before linking them together in a sequence but also to make the transition from one to another.

In Sanskrit there is a grammatical term known as ‘Sandhi’, which refers to the change of sound as two words are joined ie. each word is influenced by the words either side of it. No word exists in isolation: meaning comes from a gathering of words. ‘Sandhi’ denotes a twilight zone in which sound and meaning are modified according to their neighbours. In the same way, postures influence

one another as the body moves from one configuration to another, and every transition is a twilight realm of transformation in its own right.

Change can trigger panic, and often – especially if we move from one posture to another at speed – we are not fully engaged with what we are doing. To appreciate what each posture consists of, and to understand what is changing and how, it is helpful to slow our practice down. By appreciating the nuances of the transformation from bridge to boat, cat to dog, eagle to warrior we cross rivers and oceans, assisted by the calm wind of our own breath.

By finding the common denominators between one posture and the next, by using the contrast between one asana and another as stepping stones, we enliven the practice from within. Yoga is not a performance art, but a practice. If we can move from one posture to another while listening to our own inner wisdom we can unpick the locks to our own blocks and harness the subtleties of Yoga in motion.

The first mention of the word ‘Yoga’ in the Rig Veda refers not to Yoga as we know it, but to the yoking of horses. The image is continued in the Katha Upanishad, where the senses are likened to five horses, which we need to tame and control:

‘When one lacks discrimination,  
And his mind is undisciplined, the senses  
Run hither and thither like wild horses.  
But they obey the rein like trained horses  
When one has discrimination and has made  
The mind one-pointed.’<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Easwaran, Eknath (translator), The Upanishads (1988) Arkana Books

It is through discrimination and paying attention to our own breath and body that we can make the mindful transition from one posture to another with safety and confidence. This transition is a demonstration of the impermanence of all form, a playful projection of the cosmic realm onto the relative stage.

Repetition of a particular sequence makes us adept, but we are never the same twice: however we are will depend on the time of day, the season, our stage of life and our mood. What suits us may not suit another. What suits us one day will not suit us another day. We need to pay attention so as not to become complacent. By so-doing we re-set and fine-tune our energies and so, through the practice of mindful movement, access our own individual code and open the gateway to self-awareness.