



3

ASANAS AND PRANAYAM

In the previous lesson you have learnt Yama and Niyama with the help of relevant stories. You have understood that, Yamas are personal disciplines or restraints and Niyamas are social disciplines or observances. Now in this lesson we are going to learn about the Asana and Pranayama.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to :

- explain the terms Asana and Pranayama;
- list the types of Asana and Pranayama;
- describe the objectives and benefits of Asana and Pranayama;
and
- adopt the correct procedure for undertaking Asana and Pranayama.



3.1 ASANA

Our ancient rishis of India based on their observations of nature - animals, birds etc. devised a number of asanas or postures. It is not by mere chance in Hatha yoga terminology, all the postures are named after the different animals of the jungle. Each posture or pose, whether the lion, camel, cat or peacock, has a purpose of its own. Asana literally means 'seat'. An asana is a body posture, originally a sitting pose for meditation, and later in hatha yoga and modern yoga as exercise, adding reclining, standing, inverted, twisting, and balancing poses to the meditation seats.

All asanas should be done by observing the following qualities:

- Stability - Sthiram
- Ease - Sukham
- Effortlessness - Prayatna Shaitilyam
- Unlimited Happiness - Ananta Samapatti

Remember that all yogic postures or the yogasanas are performed slowly and with stability.

3.2 OBJECTIVES AND BENEFITS OF ASANA

Asana is a gift given to us by ancient sages. By regular practice of these Asanas one can live a long and healthy life. For doing



these Asanas, one needs to learn to focus on the pose and learn to align the body correctly in relation to how it functions -guiding each limb or part of the body to observe appropriate the degree of the pose. Alignment, balance and strength are key factors of all asanas.

The common benefits of asanas are :

- Helps maintains flexibility and strength of muscular-skeletal system
- Increases concentration and focus by calming the mind
- Improves the function of vital organ systems
- Promoting flexibility of the spine leading to ease in forward bending, backward bending and side bending
- Development of personality

3.3 CLASSIFICATION OF ASANA

All asanas helps you and some of the asanas also helps to culture your personality.

Asanas are classified in the following manner:

- **Standing Asanas** - In standing asanas the body is supported on the soles of your feet.
- **Sitting Asanas** - In sitting Asana the body is supported on the buttocks.



- **Prone Asanas** - Prone asanas refers to lying face down and the body is supported on your stomach.
- **Supine Asanas** - Supine asanas refers to lying in a face up position with the body supported by your back.

Ásanas are also be classified as :

- Cultural
- Relaxation, and
- Meditative postures.

The Shavásana, the Makarásana (the crocodile postures), Shithila Tadasana and Shitila Dandasana are called relaxation postures.

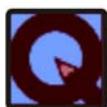
While the Padmásana, Siddhásana, the Vajrásana and the Sukhásana are known as the meditative postures.

All the remaining postures are called cultural postures. These postures are meant essentially to develop the personality.

To develop confidence, to overcome shyness and to become confident and dynamic, it is advised to practice the cultural asanas, especially that involve back bending postures and the Chakrásana, Bhujangásana (the cobra postures). The Ardha Chakrásana (standing bending backward) and Suptavajrásana are also good. These practices strengthen the chest and shoulders.

People who are egoistic, are observe to always hold their

shoulders back and heads up. For such people, humility can be promoted by practicing the front bending postures like Paschimottánásana, Shashankasana, Padahastásana. These are prescribed to help overcome the egotistic characters and to develop a pleasing and warmer personality. Every cultural asana has been designed to build the personality .

**Notes****INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.1**

State whether true or false.

1. Yamas are personal disciplines or restraints and Niyamas are social disciplines or observances.
2. For doing these asanas, one needs to learn to focus on the pose and learn to align the body correctly.
3. Asanas reduce flexibility and strength of muscular-skeletal system.
4. Shithila Tadasana and Shitila Dandasana are meditative postures.
5. In Prone asanas one is lying face up and the body supported on the stomach.

3.4 PRANAYAMA

Prana means ‘energy’ and Ayama is ‘to regulate’. Pranayama is the practice by which one can regulate the vital energy.



Notes

Pranayama helps to make the breath slow and rhythmic. When the breath slows down, mind becomes calm. It is the practice of using the breath to soothe the fluctuations of 'chitta' or the active thinking mind.

Benefits of Pranayama

- It improves blood circulation
- It relaxes the body and mind
- It improves your concentration skills
- It releases anxiety
- It improves the lung capacity

3.5 TYPES OF PRANAYAMA

There are four types of Pranayama:

I. Vitalizing Pranayama: Kapalabhati is one of the yoga vitalizing pranayama. 'Kapalbhati' means 'shining forehead' in sanskrit.

Benefits:

- It removes carbon-dioxide from your body,
- Makes you feel fresh, oxygenated and vitalized.

II. Balancing Pranayama: Nadi Shuddhi pranayama is a balancing pranayama using alternate nostril breathing. Shuddhi

means 'to purify'. The practice balances the flow of breath through both the right and left nostrils.

Benefits

- The deeper breathing enriches the blood with oxygen.
- This pranayama strengthens the respiratory system and balances the nervous system.
- It helps to relieve nervousness and headaches.

III. Cooling Pranayama: Chandra Anuloma Viloma Pranayama is a cooling Prnayama. It is done in which both inhalation and exhalation is done through left nostril adopting Nasika Mudra.

Benefits

- It helps in cooling down the body
- It is beneficial for anxiety and mental tension
- It will help to calm down the mind
- It is not advisable to practice in winter

IV. Laya or Silencing Pranayama - Bhramari is a Laya or Silencing Pranayama. This Pranyama helps to reduce stress and anger and brings calmness and silence within you.



Notes



Notes

Bhramari is derived from Bhramara which means a 'black humming bee'. In this pranayama, the practitioner makes the sound which resembles the buzzing sound of a black bee which brings calmness and silencing of mind.



Fig. 3.1 Black humming bee

Benefits

- It helps to reduce anger.
- It helps in improving concentration and memory.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.2

Fill in the blanks

1. 'Kapalbhati' means ----- in sanskrit.
2. The main objective of Pratyahara is about training the mind to ----- from the senses.
3. In Bhramari Pranayama, the practitioner makes the sound which resembles the ----- of a black bee.



WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNT

- Asana -
 - Objectives
 - Benefits
- Classification
 - Cultural
 - Relaxation
 - Meditation
- Pranayam
 - Benefits
- Types
 - Vitalizing
 - Balancing
 - Cooling



TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Giving examples list of the different types of Asanas
2. Giving examples list of the different types of Pranayams
3. What are the suggested guidelines for practicing Pratahara?
4. Explain the method of practicing Dharana.
5. Explain the special features of Dhyana.



Notes



Notes



ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

3.1.

1. True
2. True
3. False
4. False
5. False

3.2.

1. 'Shining forehead'
2. Withdraw
3. Buzzing sound