

The Science of Upanishads – Part 42: Foundations of Modern Yoga Practice
(Contd.): Description of Asana (Physical Poses) as The Third Anga (Limb) of The
Ashtanga Yoga (Eight Limbed Yoga) of The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali
(January 3-January 9, 2018)

The last week's Mandir Bulletin described Niyama as the Second Anga of the Ashtanga Yoga in Yoga Sutras of Patanjali. This week's bulletin will elaborate on **Asanas as the Third Anga of the Ashtanga Yoga in Yoga Sutras of Patanjali**. The word **Asana** (आसन) in Sanskrit literally means "Sitting Down", but in the context of Ashtanga Yoga it denotes a "Static Physical Position". The only rule that Sage Patanjali suggests in his "Yoga Sutras" is that the Position (or Pose) be "Steady and Comfortable" while practicing Yoga. The body should be held poised with the practitioner experiencing no discomfort. When control of the body is mastered, practitioners are believed to free themselves from the duality of heat/cold, hunger/satiety, or joy/grief, which is the first step toward the detachment that relieves suffering. The traditional rules of performing Asanas are that (a) stomach should be empty. (b) force or pressure should not be used, and the body should not tremble. (c) head and other parts of the body should be lowered slowly; in particular, the raised heels should be lowered slowly. (d) breathing should be controlled; the benefits of Asanas increase if the Pranayama that is specific to the yoga type being performed, and (e) if the body is stressed, the pose of corpse or child should be performed; such Asanas are called Shavasana or Sukhasana, respectively, which help reduce headaches. The posture that causes pain or restlessness is not a yogic posture. The one main requirement of correct posture is to keep chest, neck and head erect (proper spinal posture) **Asana is thus a posture that one can hold for a period of time, staying relaxed, steady, comfortable and motionless.**

As mentioned in one of the earlier Mandir Bulletins, Yoga in the Western World practically refers to Asanas with an explosive number of postures having been added to Yoga practice in recent years. Today there are more than a hundred postures available in various Yoga schools and centers around the world. However, we will list here only **Twelve Major Asanas suggested in the original Yoga Sutras of Patanjali**. They are as follows: **(1) Padmasana (lotus), (2) Veerasana (heroic), (3) Bhadrasana (decent), (4) Svastikasana (like the mystical sign), (5) Dandasana (staff), (6) Sopasrayasana (supported), (7) Paryankasana (bedstead), (8) Krauncha-nishadasana (seated heron), (9) Hastanishadasana (seated elephant), (10) Ushtranishadasana (seated camel), (11) Samasansthanasana (evenly balanced) and (12) Sthirasukhasana (any motionless posture that is in accordance with one's pleasure).**

The following are the brief descriptions and benefits of each of the above Asanas:

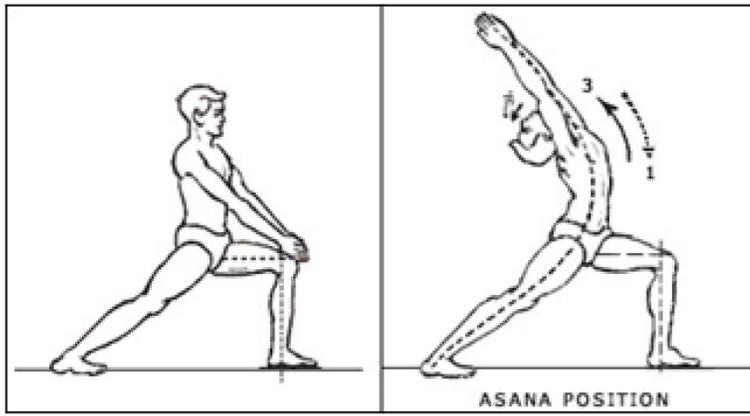
(1) **Padmasana** or Lotus pose is a cross-legged yoga posture which helps deepen meditation by calming the mind and alleviating various physical ailments.



The benefits include:

- [Reduces muscular tension and brings blood pressure under control](#)
- [Relaxes the mind](#)
- [Helps pregnant ladies during childbirth](#)
- [Reduces menstrual discomfort](#)
- [Improves digestion.](#)

(2) **Veerasana** or heroic pose is where [the joints of the legs, the waist, the spinal column and the neck get strained, so the blood circulation is regulated. The spinal column, digestive organs and belly becomes elastic and their functioning improves. The practitioner looks like a warrior ready to attack or counter attack her/his enemy.](#)



The benefits include:

- [Improves the strength and blood supply to the joints like the ankles, knees, hips, lumber region, cervical region and shoulders](#)
- [Abdominal muscles are stretched so helps to remove fat from the region.](#)
- [Helps to maintain the proper balance of the body.](#)
- [Improves the flexibility of the spinal column.](#)

More to follow. Stay tuned.....

[Read Here for More on Asana, the third of the eight principal steps of Ashtanga Yoga described in Yoga Sutras of Patanjali](#)