

Astanga Marga of Maharishi Pathanjali - Asana

Asana has been defined very clearly and profoundly by Maharishi Pathanjali in the Sadhana Padha (The path of practice). Though there are seemingly differences between 'The Asana' as defined by Maharishi Pathanjali and that of Hata Yoga, in essence there are no differences in the core principle. It is painful to note that 'The Asana' is the most misunderstood / misinterpreted practice of Yoga. Even the so called great schools of Yoga teach 'Asana' as a physical exercise or an acrobatic pose. Let us explore what is Asana.

In the very beginning of the 'Sadhana Padha' it is said:

Tapah-svadhyayesvara-pranidhanani kriya-yogah

(Tapas, swadhyaya, and isvara pranidhana) are the three essential prerequisite (kriya) activities that lead us to realizing the fruit of yoga.)

As it is mentioned earlier to realize the state of Yoga one should follow the seven limbs of Yoga scrupulously. The Seven limbs are interconnected and inter dependent on each other. Asana is the next limb or next stage after Niyamas. The last three of the Niyamas are directly connected to the 'Asana' and their practice has direct impact on the 'Asana'.

What is Asana:

II 46. sthiram-sukham asanam

Asana is Stable (sthiram) and Joyful (sukham) in other words which is stable and joyful is Asana. The stability is not of mere Physical it is keeping the mind in non-dual state of oneness in the present moment. The mind can be stable only when it is in the ever existing present, neither in the past nor in the future. To be joyful is only possible when is outside the dual nature that is in union with the Universal self in the present moment, though temporarily. It is possible to achieve this state by consistent practice of the Niyamas referred above. 'Asanam' is not just sitting; it is the state of our being which has the qualities of stability and joyfulness. So, one can be said to be in

'Asana', when he is able to have those qualities in any moment. Thus, 'Asana' is not just a sitting pose, but the state of mind one bears for the Sadhana to achieve Samadhi. Maharishi Phatahnjali further explains how it is to be achieved.

II 47. prayatna-saithilyananta-samapattibhyam

With consistent and continuous practice one has to synchronize himself with the Ananta (the endless unlimited consciousness).

II 48. tato dvandvanabhighatah

That way one can go beyond the dualities.

So, the mental attitude is more important than the physical pose in the 'Asana'. Sri Bhagavan Ramana Maharishi sits in various physical poses, as we have seen, but he is always in the state of 'Asana' in its real sense. You may not find any 'Asana' mentioned in Hata Yoga is similar to How Sri Bhagavan sits.

What is the core principle behind 'Asana': In Hata Yoga one can find many 'Asanas', which have been prescribed for doing Sadhana, like Padmasana, Siddhasana, Vajrasana etc. These physical poses help one to achieve the state of mind required for the Sadhana. Aligning oneself with the Universal self is the core principle or requirement for successful Sadhana. Once Asana is performed in the right way it will lead to the next stage of Sadhana, Pranayama, seamlessly.

-Ramachandra Raju Kalidindi