

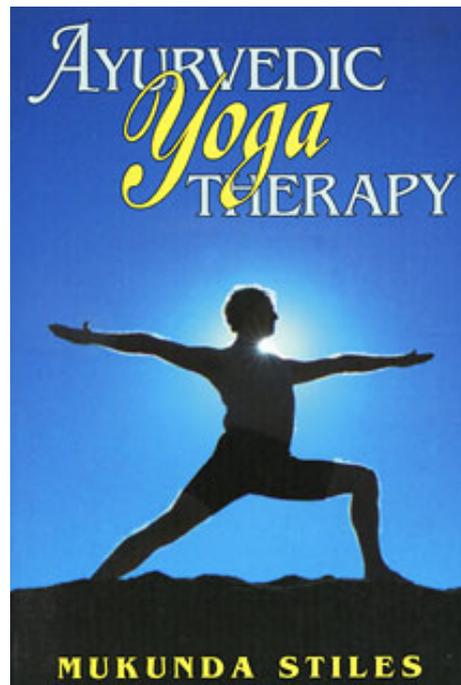
Mukunda Stiles Ayurvedic Yoga Therapy

Reading excerpt

[Ayurvedic Yoga Therapy](#)

of [Mukunda Stiles](#)

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Narayana Verlag GmbH, Blumenplatz 2, D-79400 Kandern, Germany

Tel. +49 7626 9749 700

Email info@narayana-verlag.com

<http://www.narayana-verlag.com>



Vinyasa and Breath

"During the practice of the asanas, one must regulate the inhalation, exhalation and retention of the breath. This depends on the student's capacity. Slow breathing following the ujjaye technique must be taught." ⁶²

The practice of Vinyasa quickly shows the importance of proper breathing. In beginning Yoga practitioners, the breath is often shallow (using only the upper half of the chest) and irregular. The flowing movements of Vinyasa encourage the breath to become deeper and more regular, establishing a smooth continuous rhythm in all phases of breathing.

"Without proper practice of the asanas,
it is not possible to master pranayama.
Without the mastery of the prana,
the mind will not be steady." ⁶³

There is a profound relationship between our mental state, our emotions, and the quality of our breathing. The next time you are sad, angry, or frightened, notice your breath. It is likely to be irregular. Scientific studies have also shown this to be the case.⁶⁴ "The quantitative analysis of the respiratory movements for the fundamental cycles showed that for anger, erotic love and tenderness significant changes in amplitude, rate and duration of the 'expiratory pause' were the major elements of differentiation, while for sadness, joy and fear inspiratory over expiratory time ratios were the elements of differentiation." ⁶⁵

Vinyasa practice results in the cultivation of a regulated, deep, full breathing pattern that in turn gives a freedom for personal adjustments to become stimulating, sedating, or balancing. Thus, it can easily be utilized for increasing Pitta, Vata, or Kapha. The presentation style may be rajasic, tamasic or sattvic according to the

needs of the student.

Practice the ujjaye breath while sitting for approximately three to five minute periods, concentrating on the sound of the breath at the base of the throat, *It* should not be a nasal sound, but rather a deep throat sound coming from the region near the junction of the collarbones and breastbone. It is necessary to have a qualified teacher check this breath to insure that it is being done properly. This is the ideal type of breathing (pranayama) to use during Vinyasa practice, since it slows the breath and increases concentration. For more details, read the chapter on Pranayama for Vata.

Vinyasa Learning Sequence

In mastering the process of Vinyasa flows, there is a sequence of training that will enable the practice to reach deeply into the experience of Patanjali's guidelines for asana moving into pranayama (YS II, 46-50).

- 1 - Read through the Vinyasa instructions and check for any potential contra-indicated postures. If you identify any, then begin to practice the sequence omitting or modifying postures that may be harmful.
- 2 - Memorize the sequence of motions and breath patterns.
- 3 - When the sequence can be practiced in its entirety uninterrupted, now begin to pay more attention to the breath flow than the postures.
- 4 - Begin to slow your breathing down so that the sequence will take longer to practice. Vinyasas are done with even ratio (sama vritti) breathing. That is, the inhalation is equal in duration and force to that of the exhalation.
- 5 - Use Jnana Mudra (thumb and forefinger tip joined) or Yoni Mudra (2 hands forming a down pointing triangle in the space between them) whenever possible.
- 6 - Deepen the pranayama aspect of the practice by adding pause (kumbhaka) after both the inhalations and exhalations.
- 7 - During each kumbhaka use mula bandha, releasing it for all breath movements.
- 8 - A final variation is to sandwich the posture between the beginning and ending of the breath. In this method, begin inhaling for 3-5 seconds before moving into the first posture. Sustain the inhale for the same 3-5 second interval following the completion of the posture. A similar pattern is maintained during the exhalation phase. This variation creates a profound concentration and is especially beneficial for students who do asana practice prior to their seated meditation practice. The effects will profoundly deepen the ability to enter meditative states more readily.

The Importance of Story Telling

One important aspect of good teaching style is the use of story telling as a way to integrate Yoga practices into a deeper level of the psyche. Yoga is about transformation on all levels and storytelling is a way to allow this to occur, through its ability to reach both sides of the brain.⁶⁶

Swami Muktananda, my spiritual teacher, was adept at story telling, making use of classical stories from his Indian heritage as well as created stories drawn from Sufi and Buddhist traditions.⁶⁷ Swami Prakashananda, my last spiritual mentor, composed stories showing how members of the audience represent archetypes of the story's characters, thus promoting insight into human nature and more specifically into the character of those present.

For each of the Vinyasas I have adapted stories from my teachers and classical sources that will open a door to the inner teachings and awaken you to be able to hear your intuitive guidance more clearly. By hearing the story and reflecting upon its personal or social impact during the practice of the Vinyasas, the sequences can have a more profound affect.

Vinyasas for the Doshas

Vata Vinyasas

The sequences I have chosen for balancing Vata emphasize a deep connection to the breath so that the Prana can be increased and held within your body. These Vinyasas emphasize forward bending motions that are not held for long or with much effort as this tends to imbalance and upwardly displace Vata. They are long sequences challenging concentration and developing the mental strength necessary for contemplation (Dharana) and meditation (Dhyana). With regular practice, they can help the student develop sensitivity to their Prana and over time help to return the five Pranic subdoshas to their home sites.

Vata Vinyasa Sequence

Palm Tree - Balancing Tree - Stick - Auspicious

Pitta Vinyasas

These sequences emphasize opening feelings of spaciousness to the midriff region between the pelvis and the ribcage. While many incorporate backward bending, these poses are meant to be done in an effort that ranges from mild to moderate. When backward bending is overemphasized or done with intensity, it tends to aggravate and upwardly displace Pitta. The pacing for these Pitta Vinyasas is faster than for Vata Vinyasas. Once memorized, the sequences do not need to be done [in harmony with the breath, as this element of the practice emphasizes Vata.

Instead the student is focused on the warm sensations to the body of the momentary pauses at the extremes of each motion. The key here is to be able to

connect with the energy of enthusiasm and heat, balancing it to purify the physical body. Too much and the body is weakened from the increased rajasic behavior, not enough and one's vitality is not adequate to keep a high level of energy, as tamasic behavior is promoted. When the Pitta Vinyasas are done in this way tejas (the light of spiritual discernment) is developed.

Pitta Dosha Sequence

Cobra - Sunbird - Sun Salutation

Kapha Vinyasas

These sequences promote strength and stamina for the physical body. The poses are challenging for the purpose of developing upper body and cardiovascular strength. Once memorized, they are to be done to challenge your capacity to hold the poses gradually longer. When done repeatedly and slowly, the Vinyasas also can promote an increase in the autoimmune system's function. Inverted poses and variations of the Shoulderstand are particularly instrumental in developing this benefit. Yogis are well known for the ability to remain healthy and are rarely sick because of their capacity to stimulate and balance Kapha. The chest region is especially expanded yet with an underlying softness so that the emotional heart feels open. There is a sense that the shoulders and arms are separated from the chest to become like the wings of the heart. The subtler component is to promote a feeling of ojas as the liquidity of spirit opening your heart to its innate emotions of love and devotion. It does not matter the object of these feelings, but rather that the feelings are expressed and drawn upwards as an offering to the higher power.

Kapha Dosha Sequence

Warrior - Bridge - Shoulderstand

Ayurvedic Vinyasa Sequencing

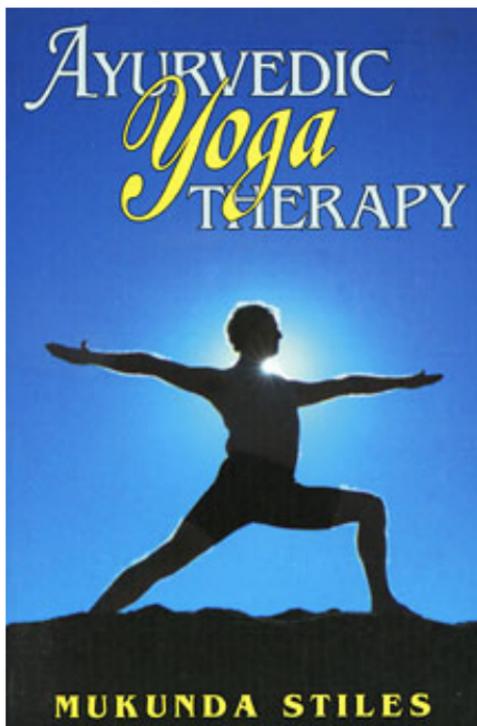
There are a number of ways that the Vinyasas may be sequenced. They can be practiced in groups according to the dosha that is being balanced, as they are sequenced here. This is the best way to learn this system of Yoga, because it allows you to observe the effects they have upon bringing your subtle elements into harmony. By sequencing in this manner, you can direct attention to uncovering your predominant constitutional quality (Prakruti); balancing Vikruti (the current imbalance), so that you are better able to adapt to the ever changing influences of life.

An advanced method of sequencing appropriate for the student who has regularly practiced these sequences over a year and is familiar with how it influences the doshas through seasonal changes. It places all ten Vinyasas in a longer flowing sequence requiring about an hour of practice (not including other foundational practices such, chanting, and meditation).

Palm Tree - Balancing Tree - Warrior - Bridge - Shoulderstand

Stick - Cobra - Sunbird - Auspicious Pose - Sun Salutation

This sequence will be ideal for those doing pranayama and meditation prior to the Vinyasas so that they can go to work refreshed and invigorated. For those whose lifestyle is free of work schedule and worldly demands, I would recommend doing the Sun Salutation first. Then pranayama and meditation would follow Auspicious Pose Vinyasa to be aligned with the sequence of Patanjali's Classical Ashtanga Yoga Sequence.



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