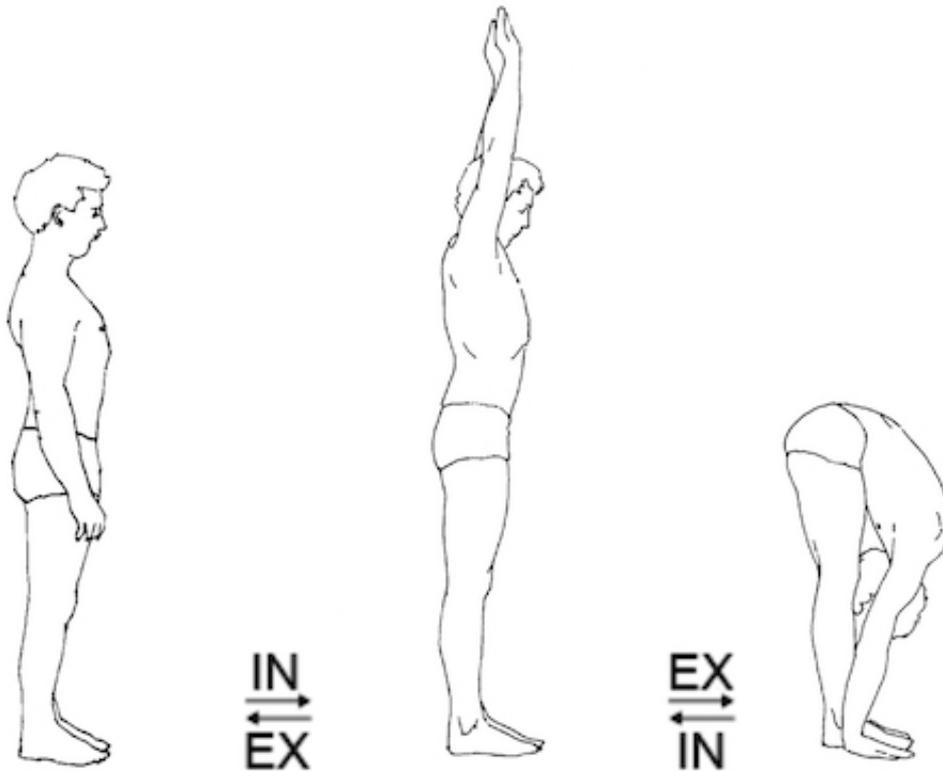


Longer term Vinyāsa Krama within the Viniyoga of the breath in Āsana.....



General perceptions in Yoga are that performance progressions in any [Āsana](#) are usually around improvement or refinement in the choreography of the entry or exit, or in the extremity of the final form.

For example if we were to compare the performance of students in say [Uttānasana](#), evaluations would tend to be made concerning how far one bends forward, or how near the head is towards the knees, or how straight the legs are, or how close to the ground the hands are, et cetera.

*"The Āsana are presented in Vinyāsa Krama,
the way it was taught to children in the Yogasāla.
This should not create the impression that
T Krishnamacharya taught in this manner to everyone."
– [TKV Desikachar Introduction to Yoga Makaranda](#)*

However from the viewpoint of Krishnamacharya and Desikachar, in terms of [Āsana](#) practice for adults, the [breath](#) has its own developmental path within the performance of any [Āsana](#).

*"Ultimately our experience of the Āsana is refined
through the mystery of the breath,
rather than the mastery of the form."*

Furthermore, within an [Āsana](#) and alongside the [Vinyāsa Krama](#) of getting in and out of the [Āsana](#) and what would be the focus whilst at the crown of the sequence around that particular [Āsana](#), there is also a [Vinyāsa Krama](#) around the development of the [breath](#).

"The first step in the practice of Āsana is the linking of the mind to movement and breath."
- TKV Desikachar

Thus I was taught that within the [Vinyāsa Krama](#), in terms of the [breath](#) within an [Āsana](#), there are clearly defined steps in the development of the students relationship with that particular [Āsana](#).

"The breath makes Āsana part of Yoga."
– [From study notes with TKV Desikachar England 1992](#)

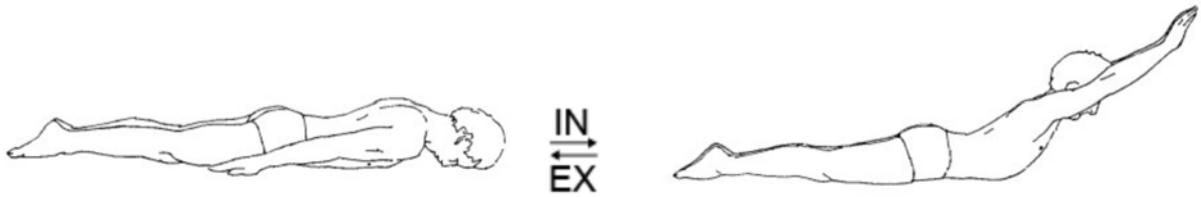
So if we look at [Uttānasana](#) we can map out some of the preliminary steps in the [Vinyāsa Krama](#) of the [breath](#) that accompanies the performance of the form.

1. Establishing a theoretical link with the [inhale](#) to the opening and exhale to the closing movements of the spine.
2. Working on establishing a basic experiential link of the [breath](#) to the [Vinyāsa Krama](#) of [Uttānasana](#), in that as we raise the arms we [inhale](#) and as we bend forward we exhale on the way down, with the coming up on the [inhale](#) and lowering the arms on the exhale.
3. Refining this basic link by learning to exactly match the steps in the opening and closing movements of the form to the movements of the [inhale](#) and exhale. So there is a seamless co-ordination of [breath](#) and movement.
4. The next step in the progression is to develop the ability to be able to commence the [breath](#) a second or two before we start to move and extend the [breath](#) a second or two beyond the end of that particular phase of the [Vinyāsa Krama](#) of, in this case, [Uttānasana](#). In other words each step in the flow of the form is encapsulated within the [breath](#).

We can already see from these steps that there is a longer term developmental progression that sits alongside the physical performance of the [Āsana](#). More importantly this progression also helps to define the inner experience of the [Āsana](#) as embracing far more than just the usual dimensions of being identified with such as gymnastics, or dance, or keep fit, or stretch, or Yoga for.....

In that it represents and introduces that aspect of Krishnamacharya's teachings around our relationship with the [infinite](#) within the practice of the finite.

"The practice of Āsana without breathing and without remembering Ananta has no value."
– Śrī T Krishnamacharya commentary on [Yoga Sūtra Chapter Two verse 47](#)



Having mapped out some of the preliminary steps in the [Vinyāsa Krama](#) of the [breath](#) that accompanies the performance of the form, I now want to focus on the last of the four steps, this time in relation to [Nirālamba](#) Bhujangāsana or unsupported Cobra posture. Here I want to focus on step four of this process when working within a physically demanding dynamic form of an [Āsana](#) such as [Nirālamba](#) Bhujangāsana and yet managing to keep the [breath](#) longer than the movement.

The fourth step in the progression listed above, was to develop the ability to be able to commence the [breath](#) a second or two before we start to move and extend the [breath](#) a second or two beyond the end of that particular phase of the [Vinyāsa Krama](#) of, in this case, Bhujangāsana. In other words each step in the flow of the form is encapsulated within the [breath](#).

What are the some of the pitfalls to watch out for in this process generally and especially those which will be highlighted in this particular [Āsana](#) example?

*"Once you lose the breath in Āsana,
effort becomes force."*

Here its about sustaining the ability to actually keep the [breath](#) longer then the movement, especially at the end of the [inhale](#), where their will be a tendency to:

- Snatch at the last part of the [inhale](#)
- Use an involuntary hold as a substitute for the inability to sustain the [inhale](#) to the end of, let alone beyond the movement.
- End up just matching the [inhale](#) to the movement, rather than actually making it longer than the movement
- Having an uneven speed in the movements especially with regard to actually increasing the speed of the sweeping of the arms towards the end of the [inhale](#) where the demand is greatest
- Having an uneven speed in the movements especially with regard to actually increasing the speed of the sweeping of the arms also at the beginning of the [exhale](#) where the demand is just as intense
- Find the quality of the [Ujjāyī breath](#) varies especially, in this example, at the end of the [inhale](#) and the beginning of the [exhale](#) in terms of the volume, in both sound and evenness of flow

Thus what we are working at as an outcome of transcending these tendencies is a situation where we have a smooth and consistent link between [breath](#) and movement in that the [breath](#):

- Extends a second or two beyond both the upward and downward movements of the form
- Has a smooth flow in terms of sound and volume, especially at the changeover points between the [inhale](#) and [exhale](#), often a key observation point for the force over effort transition
- Facilitates an experience of stillness of around 2-4 seconds at the end of each phase of the movement into and out of the form, as we extend the [inhale](#) beyond the movement and begin the [exhale](#) before the return movement and vice versa

All these suggestions offer a direction for working with the [Āsana](#) in a way which offers much more than merely the grunt or hold of the [breath](#), or the snatch and lift of the body processes that are often associated with these type of physically demanding poses.

*"The test for intelligent effort is the response of the breath."
– [TKV Desikachar Switzerland 1978](#)*

Instead we can explore the possibilities of how the mystery of the [breath](#) is accessed and prioritised within the mastery of basic forms such as [Uttānasana](#), or within more demanding forms such as the dynamic approach to [Nirālamba Bhujāṅgāsana](#).

*"The journey into the breath in Āsana
is one where we evolve from firstly,
finding the breath within ourself,
towards ultimately,
finding ourself within the breath."*