

The Viniyoga of Āsana -

1. The Definition of Āsana according to Haṭha and Rāja Yoga



HAṬHA PRADĪPIKĀ CHAPTER ONE VERSE 17

haṭhasya prathama-aṅgatvād-āsanaṃ pūrvam-ucyate |
kuryāt-tad-āsanaṃ sthairyam-ārogyaṃ cāṅga-lāghvam ||

Āsana, being the initial limb of Haṭha, is spoken of first.
Āsana brings about steadiness, improved health and lightness of limb.

For me, still to this day, one of the simplest, direct and most succinct definitions on the purpose of Āsana within the processes and practices of Haṭha Yoga, is the definition offered in the Haṭha Pradīpikā Chapter One verse 17.

It is a definition valid for any situation, discussion or presentation, or as a response to questions from any background, or level of interest around why we practice Āsana.

It can also be a springboard to linking physiological qualities, such as the relationship of Agni, to the energetic qualities of health and lightness of limb.

Or drawing from the Jyotsnā, a commentary on the Haṭha Pradīpikā by Brahmānada, as that explores psychological qualities such as the relationship of the Guṇa, Rajas, to mental qualities such as steadiness.

YOGA SŪTRA CHAPTER TWO VERSE 46

sthira-sukham-āsanam ||

Steady and Comfortable is Āsana

Āsana, according to Chapter Two verse 46, needs to correlate the two qualities of steady attentiveness and spacious clarity.

However, we are offered qualities that are actually the fruits or outcome of the guidelines in the next verse. Hence this verse is a definition, but one that arises as an outcome of the attitude around the way we go about exploring Āsana.

Although it could be added that this definition also relates to the direction of one's Āsana practice as a whole.

The experience known as Sthira Sukham Āsanam, is described in Yoga Sūtra Chapter Two verse 46. It arises as a fruit of Yoga Sūtra Chapter Two verse 47, from melding the mastery of outer stillness in the world, described as Prayatna Śaithilya, or relaxation of continued effort; with the mystery of inner openness to the beyond, described as Ananta Samāpatti, or unity in the infinite.

The next post will be around the many approaches to Āsana practice.