

The Viniyoga of Āsana -

4. Considerations around the Direction of Āsana Practice



As well as considering what is acceptable to each and everybody as basic principles of Āsana practice, we must consider the direction of one's Āsana practice.

For example:

- Where are we starting from in terms of practice as a process?
- Where are we going to in terms of practice as a process?
- Is this process of potential change working with Immediate needs in mind?
- Is this process of potential change working with long term needs in mind?
- Is this process of potential change trying to integrate both Immediate needs and long term needs?

So what is Yoga practice as a process? Practice as a process is consideration of all the factors that surround the establishing of a home practice.

For example this can be:

- The time of the day
- Energy levels at the time of practice
- What the student would be stepping away from in order to engage in practice
- What follows the practice in terms of activity or life demands
- Differences in gender and impact on body rhythms
- Differences in age and impact on body rhythms

To name but a few aspects of practice as a process.

In addition to these factors we must also consider:

The starting point or what has happened before the Āsana practice? In other words, does the intended process of change through Āsana integrate what has happened before?

This notion of establishing the starting point in terms of setting goals and establishing the number of steps was one of the fundamental principles within any aspect of practice taught to me by Desikachar. It is also an inherent factor within the notion of the Viniyoga of Āsana, in that how can we make and apply intelligent choices without knowing both where the student is starting from as well as going towards.

So, we also need to consider the finishing point or what will happen after the Āsana practice? In other words, does the intended process of change through Āsana integrate what will happen after the practice?

Furthermore there are additional considerations if teaching Āsana within group situations:

- Given the range of students in a group class there will be more potential differences in what has happened before the Āsana practice.
- Given the range of students in a group class there will be more potential differences in what will happen after the Āsana practice.

Hence the maxim from Krishnamacharya around the concept of the Viniyoga of Yoga, in that the Āsana practice should be considered in terms of both the content of the practice and the process that surrounds the circumstances within which the student lives and breathes. Thus the importance of adapting the Āsana practice to the student rather than adapting the student to the Āsana practice.

This maxim also emphasises the differences in potentials between group class and individual teaching environments. The teaching of students within a 121 environment optimises the possibilities in meeting their directional and practice needs.

In other words, how we develop the breadth and depth of the content of a student's personal Yoga practice is inevitably and continually framed within the diorama of life's hue and change. Hence, the premise that for Krishnamacharya and Desikachar, Yoga practice as a process needs to precede Yoga practice as content.

For example in considering:

- Immediate needs
- Long term needs
- What has happened before the Āsana practice
- What will happen after the Āsana practice

Thus, sometimes the Vinyāsa Krama, or special placing of the steps from, is more important than the steps to. At other times the Vinyāsa Krama, or special placing of the steps to, is more important than the steps from. In our life as well as our practice.

The next post will consider the common points amidst the variables around students and their Āsana practice.