

The Viniyoga of Āsana -

5. What are the Common Points within the Variables in Āsana Practice



If we look at all the variables around Āsana practice we can find some similarities between various individuals.

For example:

- The variable must accept and include a persons previous training
- We must respect where a person is coming or starting from
- It is better to consider the immediate situation rather than the long term
- We must respect the after effect of the Āsana practice
- We must respect the after action to come
- We must respect the travel from A to Z or Upāya
- Z seems to vary much more than A, i.e.
- Practice in the morning – generally less variables
- Practice in the evening – more subject to the days effects and different lifestyles
- We must respect age, condition, gender, work, lifestyle, etc
- It is also necessary to consider some technical priorities

Here a pragmatic choice arises, especially relevant for Western bodies today, the question of establishing what are the priority areas within any given Āsana. This question can be examined through the lens of consideration of setting postural priorities around what constitutes a primary characteristic and what constitutes a secondary characteristic.

In other words the importance of where, within the form, to choose or allow an adaptation in the Āsana and where, within the form, to endeavour not to compromise the Āsana.

I do feel these days that our understanding in Āsana practice is dominated by the Nāma, or name and the Rūpa or final form, with little emphasis on the Lakṣaṇa or inherent characteristics of the Āsana. Furthermore, how understanding this aspect can have a profound effect on the approach, application and outcome of the overall or accumulative impact of the Āsana within the student's personal practice.

For example, if we choose to consider Uttānāsana, we can look at it and the question of what common points within the Āsana are the primary Lakṣaṇa and what variables are the secondary Lakṣaṇa.

From this we can set priorities for adapting the Āsana to retain the focus when we encounter variables, such as too much resistance or stiffness from or within different parts of the body.

In Uttānāsana the primary Lakṣaṇa is generally the spine and the secondary Lakṣaṇa is generally the legs. This means that when we encounter the tug of war between the back and the legs we yield to the the potential of influencing the movement in the spine. Rather than compromise the integrity of the spine in favour of hanging onto the tension or distraction arising from too much of our attention being drawn to the demands of the legs.

Thus the primary focus in Uttānāsana is to experience optimum movement in the spine as we both go down and come up. If the legs are allowed to be more fluid during the movement, then the benefits of this fluidity can be transferred to facilitate a deeper exploration of movement in the spine. Here the movement within the spine is the common point and the differences in the potential flexibility in the legs the variables.

This shift in priorities can offer a quality of localised movement to areas of the spine often held rigid due to the limitations of the legs. This rigidity can be down to variables ranging from performance expectations such as goal centred movement, to the hidden influences of structural genetics. This can be an especially useful guideline to consider when encountering the variables around Āsana practice listed at the beginning of this article.

The next post will consider questions around the planning of an appropriate Āsana practice.