

The [Aṣṭāṅga Āsana](#) or the eight limbs of [Āsana](#) Planning and Practice



The [Aṣṭāṅga Āsana](#) or the eight limbs of [Āsana](#) Planning and Practice are the formula for constructing a skilful and place, time and lifestyle appropriate [Āsana](#) practice. These eight limbs fall into eight categories, that of:

- The definition, meaning and context of Āsana
 - Core concept – [Nāma Rūpa Lakṣana](#) – name, form and characteristics
- How Āsana are arranged into groups and categories
 - Core concept – [Vinyāsa Krama](#) – collecting postures together
- How counterpostures or Pratikriyāsana are integrated
 - Core concept – Pratikriyāsana – maintaining the balance
- The value and purpose of the breath in Āsana
 - Core concept – [Prāna-Apāna Dhāranā](#) – where the focus is
- How movement or stay are used in Āsana
 - Core concept – Circulation and Purification – dynamic and static
- The adaptation of Āsana practice
 - Core concept – Variation and Modification – change and necessity
- Intelligently planning and Āsana practice
 - Core concept – [Brahma](#) and [Laṅghana Kriyā](#) – connecting postures together
- Observation within Āsana practice
 - Core concept – Spine, Breath and Attention – learning to look

In my last post on Aṣṭāṅgāsana I talked about introducing each of these eight topics to help the reader to appreciate more about what is inherent in the depth and breadth of this approach in terms of [Āsana](#) planning having a precise and comprehensive formula.

[Āsana](#) practice starts with a need to know something about the [Āsana](#) we are going to work with as we introduce, persevere and develop and especially personalise our practice. Hence we have to both practice but also have some theoretical background in order to context an [Āsana](#) in itself and in relationship to other [Āsana](#).

This first aspect within this study encompasses the concepts of [Nāma](#), [Rūpa](#) and [Laksana](#) or name, form and physical characteristics of the posture we wish to engage with.

- Nāma or Name

Firstly we have the [Nāma](#) or name. Each [Āsana](#) has a name, though within the different threads of transmission these names are not always the same. Plus the development of [Āsana](#) is an ongoing process with new forms appearing throughout the [Hatha](#) Yoga historical timeline. These names range from that of animals, plants or minerals, to sages or mythological heroes or aspects of nature, to geometric form or man made objects.

- Rūpa or Form

However behind the individuality of the [Nāma](#) or name lies the concept of [Rūpa](#) or the form. Here I was taught each [Āsana](#) had a core form that was defined according to certain principles known as [Śikṣana Krama](#).

"Śikṣaṇa Krama - do something perfectly or correctly.
Anything is taught to achieve perfection in the practice of Āsana and Prāṇāyāma.
In other words teaching children and healthy people
where you can take risks with no problems."
- TKV Desikachar 1983

This concept of [Śikṣana Krama](#) can be seen within the work of students of Krishnamacharya and is a theoretical reference point from which this ideal of [Āsana](#) was then considered in relation to the individual student's needs, interest and especially starting point.

These considerations can mean the practice is modified through the concepts of [Raksana Krama](#) where the priorities are protection and preservation in order to promote a continuity in levels such as maintaining health or lifestyle stability, or [Cikitsā Krama](#) where the priority is healing and recovery.

However the starting point for a theoretical consideration and study of the performance potentiality of [Āsana](#) was always from the [Śikṣana Krama](#) perspective.

- Lakṣana or Characteristics

The third aspect in the study of [Āsana](#) was that of [Laksana](#) or characteristics. As well as name and form an [Āsana](#) had certain essential qualities. A study of [Āsana](#) needs to consider how these characteristics can both influence the potential effect of a particular [Āsana](#) or be modified to either intensify or pacify its essential qualities.