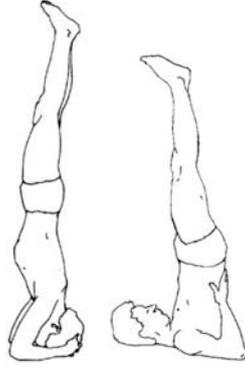


The Viniyoga of Inversion as an Āsana or as a Mudrā.....



There are some forms within the postural resources developed by Krishnamacharya that can function as either an Āsana or as a Mudrā, depending on how they are approached and utilised. This choice of direction and outcome can be realised according to the specific Bhāvana associated with the intention of the practitioner and the style of performance.

This distinction in characteristics can be generalised around whether the practitioner focuses on a dynamic form with the developmental priority around the variations of and in the posture, or on a static form with the focus on the developmental priority on the lengthening and refinement of the breath.

In other words, as to whether the focus is on the development of the various Vinyāsa Krama within the dynamic form through a specific competence within a number of physical variations. Or, the focus is on the development within the static form, of a specific competence within a number of respiratory ratios.

For example if we look at the possibilities around inverted postures presented as Āsana through forms known as Śīrṣāsana or Sarvāṅgāsana, we can emphasise the external intensity of the Āsana, or emphasise the internal intensity of a Mudrā, through choosing either of these two practice directions.

In the former, it is the focus on movement of the body through performance of variations on the form that helps cultivate the quality of Āsana. In his teaching Krishnamacharya taught the performance of 32 variations as directions for the Vinyāsa Krama within the performance of both Śīrṣāsana and Sarvāṅgāsana.

In the latter, it is the focus on the stillness of the body in order to optimise the movement of the breath through performance of specific breathing ratios in order to lengthen, slow and deepen the breath to between one to two breaths per minute, that helps cultivate the quality of Mudrā.

Of course this latter direction also presumes that the practitioner is looking to employ and develop the alchemical respiratory processes integral to Haṭha Yoga. These would include both a theoretical understanding and practical application of the teachings around Prāṇa and Apāna and Sūrya and Candra utilising techniques such as locational, or directional breathing, and if appropriate, Uḍḍiyana and Mūla Bandha.

At this point it might be helpful to further explore as an example one Yoga posture that can function in either role, in that it can be taught as an Āsana, as in Saravāṅgāsana, or as a Mudrā, as in Viparīta Karaṇī Mudrā.

However before developing either of these twin directions independently, there are for adult practitioners preliminary short term considerations that would equally apply to both. Accordingly, in this post I am offering some suggestions in the development of the breath in Saravāṅgāsana that would lay an essential foundation for longer term choices and priorities.

These respiratory Vinyāsa Krama are all based around an adult student being practice competent to maintain an attentive stay in Saravāṅgāsana for a minimum of 12 breaths as a starting point.

- Step 1 - Establish a smooth and consistent Ujjāyī breath
- Step 2 - Develop a basic Apāna Abdomen Locational Exhale
- Step 3 - Develop a basic Prāṇa Chest Locational Inhale
- Step 4 - Develop the breath length to inhale 4" exhale 6"
- Step 5 - Develop the breath length to inhale 6" exhale 6"
- Step 6 - Develop the breath length to inhale 6" exhale 8"
- Step 7 - Develop the breath length to inhale 8" exhale 8"
- Step 8 - Develop the breath length to inhale 8" exhale 10"
- Step 9 - Develop the breath length to inhale 10" exhale 10"

The nine steps suggested here, although appearing somewhat standardised, represent an important initial stage common in the development of our relationship with the breath through a basic progression within the respiratory patterns in the performance of Saravāṅgāsana. This respiratory Vinyāsa Krama will certainly take a number of months to establish.

Firstly by developing a functional competence with the technique of Ujjāyī and then, secondly and thirdly, a practical familiarity in integrating a basic locational breathing as a preliminary priority. As well as an aspect within the assessment of a student's basic capacity in this Āsana for the addition of a range of variations, these three initial stages lay a possible foundation for a further investigation into the core energetic principles inherent within the Haṭha concepts of Prāṇa and Apāna.

The remaining steps are primarily concerned with the transformation of the respiratory breathing patterns from the initial 6 breaths per minute pattern in the third stage, towards a core competence of respiratory stability in the ninth stage, with a breathing pattern of 3 breaths a minute. A considerable transformation already.

This also means that with this development of the stabilising and slowing down of the breath, the same 12 breaths will now mean a minimum stay of 4 minutes over the earlier minimum stay of 2 minutes. Hence another developmental step within the Vinyāsa Krama of Saravāṅgāsana.

Of course all of these stages would also need to be subject to the scrutiny and advisory overview of a teacher competent with these processes of working with a 'healthy' student interested in learning more of the potential role for Saravāṅgāsana in the long term development of their Yoga Sādhana, rather than say, using it as a potential short term means to as if 'treat' something.

Future developmental considerations, for either of the two directions already discussed, are beyond the scope of this particular post. If explored at a future point they would offer suggestions for further stages involving progression within developmental choices within breathing ratios. These would be through a further slowing of the respiratory rate through increasing the length of the breath beyond the three breaths a minute discussed, as well as an incorporation of Kumbhaka or suspension into the ratios.

From there exploring further processes through which Uḍḍiyāna Bandha and then Mūla Bandha can be investigated, if the capability of the practitioner and style and manner of the practice can allow and support their inclusion.

So to conclude on a more general note, in considering the role of Saravāṅgāsana, we need to reflect on our physical practice and consider what our short term and long term aims and intended outcomes are within the area of form? Then consider how this intention sits and fits within the larger map of Yoga with regard to the relationship between Āsana, Mudrā, Prāṇāyāma and Dhyānam.

Finally, how do our external choices link together to provide an appropriate boat in terms of the internal evolutionary energetic and psychological journey upstream from Haṭha Yoga towards Rāja Yoga?