

Sanskrit Glossary

A brief study of asana names and common Yoga terms.

Rushing Water Yoga

It is important in the practice of Yoga to learn enough of the Sanskrit so that you recognize the asana names and other terms in class and for your own practice. The vibrational quality to the Sanskrit informs our practice because the vibration brings to mind the shape and quality of the asana and helps the asana resonate in our being.

Two things will make identification of asanas (poses) easier. First you must know that those long Sanskrit words are in fact like strings of pearls. For example, Urdhva Mukha Paschimottanasana has 5 words in it; Urdhva (upward); Mukha (face); Paschima (West or backside of the body); Uttana (intense stretch); Asana (pose). Learning to identify the smaller words within the long name makes it easier not only to recognize but also with pronunciation.

The Names of Asanas

The names of asanas are most commonly from four categories: anatomy; animals; sages and deities; and objects. Additionally, the names of the poses are further broken down into numbers and characteristics of the pose. As we get acquainted with some of these basic translations within the asana, then the longer names of asanas start to become decipherable.

Sanskrit Terms Used In Yoga Asana

Directions:

Adho (downward)
Mula (base)
Parsva (side)
Paschima (west, back)
Purva (east, front)
Sama (upright)
Urdhva (upward)
Vama (left side)
Viparita (inverted)

Numbers & Geometry:

Ardha (half)
Ashta (eight)
Chatur (four)
Dwi (two)
Eka (one)
Kona (angle)
Mandala (circle)
Paripurna (complete)
Sama (equal)
Sarva (whole)
Tri (three)
Ubhaya (both)
Vakra (crooked)

Actions:

Baddha (bound)
Lola (dangling)
Mudra (seal)
Niralamba (unsupported)
Parivrtta (revolved)
Pida (pressure)
Prasarita (expanded)
Prasvasa (expiration)
Puraka (inhalation)
Rechaka (exhalation)
Salamba (supported)
Sthiti (steady)
Supta (reclining)
Tan (stretch)
Upavistha (seated)
Ut (intense)
Utkata (powerful)
Utthita (extended)
Vrtti (movement)

Body Parts:

Anga (limb)
Angula (finger)
Angustha (big toe)
Bhuja (shoulder, arm)

People and Sages:

Bharadvaja (a sage, the father of famous archer, Drona)
Galava (a sage)
Garuda (king of the eagles)
Gheranda (a sage)
Hanuman (chief of the monkey army)
Maharsi (a sage)
Marichi (a sage, son of Brahma and grandfather of Surya the sun god)
Matsyendra (person, Lord of the Fishes)
Nataraja (one of the names of Shiva)
Patanjali (author of Yoga Sutras)
Raja (king)
Sava (corpse)
Siddha (a sage)
Surya (Sun god)
Vasistha (a sage)
Virabhadra (great warrior)

Things:

Chakra (wheel)
Chandra (moon)
Danda (staff, rod)
Dhanu (bow)
Ha (moon)
Hala (plow)
Mala (garland)
Nava (boat)
Parigha (bolt)
Parigha (gate latch)
Parvata (mountain)
Paryanka (bed)
Pasa (noose)
Pincha (feather)
Setu (bridge)
Surya (sun)
Tada (mountain)
Tha (sun)
Tola (scales)
Vajra (thunderbolt)
Vayu (wind)
Vimina (airplane)

Body Parts (cont.):

Ganda (cheek)
Hasta (hand)
Janu (knee)
Jathara (abdomen)
Karna (ear)
Meru-danda (spine)
Mukha (face)
Pada (foot,leg)
Padangustha (big toe)
Pincha (chin)
Sarvangasa (entire body)
Sirsa (head)

Plants & Animals:

Baka (crane, crow)
Bheka (frog)
Bhramara (black bee)
Bhujanga (cobra/snake/serpent)
Garuda (eagle)
Go (cow)
Hanuman (powerful monkey)
Kapota (pigeon)
Krauncha (heron)
Kurma (tortoise)
Makara (crocodile)
Matsya (fish)
Mayura (peacock)
Padma (lotus)
Salabha (locust)
Simha (lion)
Svana (dog)
Tittibha (firefly)
Ustra (camel)
Vrksa (tree)
Vrschika (scorpion)

Quiz – Name that Asana

- a. three angle pose
- b. reclining bound angle pose
- c. the pose where you stretch the head of the other knee
- d. the pose where you hold the body stiff like a rod, with only your four limbs touching the floor (downward push-up position)
- e. downward face dog pose
- f. the pose where you put pressure on the ears
- g. the pose where the whole body is supported
- h. headstand or head balance
- i. one leg out to the side in supported shoulderstand
- j. spreading the feet intensely pose

Answers below

Common Sanskrit Terms Used In Yoga

Ashtanga Yoga (8 Limbs of Yoga):

Yamas (ethical discipline)

1. Ahimsa (non-violence)
2. Satya (truthfulness)
3. Asteya (non-stealing)
4. Brahmacharaya (sexual responsibility)
5. Aparigraha (non-hoarding)

Niyamas (personal discipline)

1. Saucha (purity, cleanliness)
2. Santosa (contentment)
3. Tapas (austerity, burning desire)
4. Svadhyaya (self-study)
5. Isvara Pranidhana (dedication and surrender to God)

Asana (poses)

Pranayama (breath control)

Pratyahara (sense withdrawal)

Dharana (concentration)

Dhyana (meditation)

Samadhi (pure consciousness)

Yoga Philosophy:

Abhyasa (dedicated, devotional practice)

Atman (supreme soul)

Bhakti (devotion)

Bhoga (pleasure [to be avoided])

Gunas (qualities of nature)

1. Sattva (illuminating)
2. Rajas (active)
3. Tamas (dull)

Chitta (consciousness)

1. Manas (mind)
2. Buddhi (intelligence)
3. Ahamkara (ego)

Chitta-vrtti (fluctuations of mind)

Duhkha (sorrow)

Jnana (knowledge)

Karma (action)

Klesa (5 causes of chitta-vrtti)

1. Avidya (ignorance)
2. Asmita (egoism)
3. Raga (attachment)
4. Dvesa (aversion)
5. Abhinivesa (fear of death)

Mantra (sacred thought and sound)

Prakrti (nature)

Prana (energy, life force)

Pranidhana (dedication)

Sadhana (quest)

Sadhaka (seeker)

Sukha (happiness)

Vairagya (non-attachment)

Yoga (union)

Answers to the Quiz:

- a. tri-kona-asana = Trikonasana
- b. supta-baddha-kona-anana = Supta Baddha Konasana
- c. Janu-sirsa-asana = Janu Sirsasana (also means 'head of the knee' stretches back)
- d. chatur-anga-danda-asana = Chaturanga Dandasana
- e. adho-mukha-svana-asana = Adho Mukha Svanasana
- f. karna-pida-asana = Karnapidasana
- g. samamba-sarvanga-asana = Salamba Sarvangasana
- h. head-pose = sirsa asana = Sirsasana
- i. parsva-eka-pada-sarvangasana = Parsvaika Pada Sarvangasana
- j. Prasarita-pada-uttana-asana = Prasarita Paddottanasana

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