



Svaroopaa® Vidya Ashram

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Spiritual Upliftment #5

The Ultimate Pose

By Swami Nirmalananda & Vidyadevi Stillman

Yoga's asanas (poses) did not come from a bunch of yogis playing charades in the forest. "Ooo! Ooo! I know! It's a frog! No, a rabbit!" "Bingo! You're right!" "Wow, this feels really good. My back feels better, my breath more open, even my mind is calmer. Hey guys, let's put this on the list." There are some yogis writing that the forest sages made up the poses, having their disciples stand like a tree, pose like a tortoise or move like a cat, but the origin of these sacred body positions was not conjured up by anyone's mind.

The sages in the Himalayas were living and practicing far from mainstream spirituality of the time, both Classical Yoga as well as Hinduism. Studying with the tantrics meant the new yogi began by receiving a transmission of energy from the Guru, an initiation called Shaktipat. Shaktipat awakens your inner power of upliftment, the sacred energy called Kundalini.

As this energy flowed up their spine from tail to top, different yogis had different experiences depending on their individual nature and readiness. Those who were more kinesthetic, rather than visual or auditory, experienced physical movements. Other yogis copied their spontaneous movements, which are today's yoga poses.

Vidyadevi says, "After I received Shaktipat, during meditation my body would move spontaneously into Fish Pose, with my chest lifting and my head leaning way back. Over time, this movement completely cleared up chronic neck and sore throat problems. Through the years, Kundalini has moved me into other poses as well, as gunk was cleared out of my spine. Some of the positions were painful, though beneficial, while others were pure ecstasy, with bliss pouring up my spine. I can see why ancient yogis copied others' spontaneous movements to get what I got. But what I got was much more than mere improvements in my body and mind. I got my Self."

Doing the moves in the photos and videos, too many yogis are pushing or forcing their body into the poses, without realizing they're tightening their spine in order to get the same look. When Kundalini moves you, the asanas are effortless and profoundly opening. In *Svaroopaa*® yoga we don't copy "the look." Instead we use the asanas to give you the openings Kundalini would provide by moving you into spontaneous poses. You get the results, amazingly deep and amazingly easy.

Many have already gotten Kundalini awakening through our core opening practice, but whether your Kundalini is awakened or not, your asanas are tremendously beneficial. It's incredible how they improve your physical condition along with your mind and emotions. Yet, these are side effects, not the real reason for the poses. Ultimately, your spinal decompression prepares you for the true meaning of "asana," to be able to relax into an easy, upright seated pose.

Sthira-sukham-aasanam — Patanjali's Yoga Sutras 2.46

Asana is the seated pose, easy and upright [as the beginning point of meditation].¹

This sutra is a "definition sutra," meaning it defines the third of eight pivotal practices known as the "eight limbs." We've looked at the first two of the eight practices in recent contemplation articles: yama and niyama, which are lifestyle practices. They are about how you handle the world and how you handle yourself in the world. Asana is the third limb, in which you begin working on your body.

Just like in English, Sanskrit words change meaning over time — except for "aasana." It is one of the rare Sanskrit words that has remained the same for 10-15,000 years. It means "to sit close to," as in "the disciples sat close to their Guru while He gave the teachings."

¹ Rendered by Swami Nirmalananda

What does the Sanskrit dictionary say? It begins with “sitting, sitting down,” and expands the meaning to “seat, place, stopping, dwelling, encamping, abiding.” It clearly doesn’t mean “to move fast, to jump around, or to hang from a trapeze,” as so many Westernized yoga trends offer.

The eight limbs take you through a process of interiorization. Your lifestyle practices have calmed your mind and emotions, so next you work with your body. Asana is not about the external world anymore. You leave your day behind to do your yoga class or home practice. You may think it’s for your health or for peace of mind, but it’s all for the purpose of learning how to sit. The seated pose is the single most important pose of all!

Since we are a Shaktipat tradition, you sit to give Kundalini (the meditative energy) time to climb your spine. This opens into the exploration of the inner realms of your own being, all the way to your inner Divinity. Every time. So easy. So deep.

Let’s say you were able to procure a seat on one of the rocket ships going into outer space. you’ve trained for this scientific mission to explore the farthest reaches of deep space. You’ve prepared your body for the rigors of deep space travel. Even now, you can easily find online workout plans to train like an astronaut, moving your body into different angles to stretch and strengthen. On the launch pad, after all your preparation, you are sitting in the rocket for lift-off. The rocket, powered by potent liquid propellants, will shoot straight up into the heavens.

Your asana practice works like this. Your preliminary yoga poses prepare you for your trip inward, and then you sit for “lift-in.” The energy that climbs your spine, Kundalini, is the rocket fuel. This energy takes you up toward the inner sky, the cosmic reality of your own inherent Divinity.

This energy does not move horizontally along the floor. This means you must get up from Shavasana and sit. You are propelled inward very quickly and deeply as you sit and repeat the mantra of this tradition, available from Swami Nirmalananda [online](#). You are now an explorer in the inner realms of your own being, discovering your own essence, the source of the universe.

This is why *Svaroopa*® yoga teachers emphasize the seated poses. Our first Teacher Training immersion, Foundations, begins with seated poses. We return to them many times in the two or more years of further training. Our final module focuses again on the seated poses, precisely because they are the most important poses. In this spiritual process of interiorization, the seated pose is the gateway to the progressively more powerful practices in the eight limbs.

How do you get to the point that you are able to sit? Just as Patanjali recommends, you work on your mind and lifestyle, and then cultivate your body’s ability to sit in easy, upright stillness. While the sutra defines what an asana is, the poses are not the point of the sutra. Funny, isn’t it? Poses are not the point of yoga practice. Sitting is the point.

Swami Nirmalananda says, “Simply sitting still quiets your mind. Patanjali explains this in His following sutras, describing how your breath smooths out and suspends into timelessness. It even happens when you watch the ocean or the night sky. Yet the inner awakening of Shaktipat offers more, a whole level of inner experience that Patanjali does not describe. For this, you have to study with a Shaktipat Master, as I did.”

Once you’ve received Shaktipat from such a Master, you have the experience that those yogis in the high Himalayas sought, the inner knowing of your own Divinity. *Svaroopa*® yoga is the Yoga of Grace, which is the revelation of your own Divinity. This is the gift given by such great beings. Not only mantra, but our core opening poses can invoke your inner awakening. To cooperate with it, after your yoga practice, sit. Settle into your easy upright seated position as a way to soften into the deeper dimensions of your own Being. Your Self is not so far away. Just sit.

THIS IS AN ARTICLE IN A YEAR-LONG SERIES ON “SPIRITUAL UPLIFTMENT,” OUR THEME FOR 2018, CO-AUTHORED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI, VIDYADEVI STILLMAN & RUKMINI ABBRUZZI.

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