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## TOPIC OF THE MONTH February 2014

### FROM NOW FORWARD . . . AND SOME NOTES FROM MAUI

Although I am not a “big fan” of the sutras, I do like to study them. Just because something was written as an “ancient text” does not always mean it has merit . . . and in just the same way -- because some study proves some scientific “fact”, does not mean it is truth. For example all those years we thought saturated fat was bad for us . . . it is not! Studies were mis-read, mis-leading, politically adjusted, and “interpretations” seem to benefit some benefactor more than mankind.

However I like this little blip from David Life on the very first sutra, in my simple words it basically says:

From now on, just allow the yoga to arise naturally in you :) )

Excerpts from David Life's January 2014 focus of the month -- Jivamukti Yoga

Atha yoga-anushasanam (Patanjali's Yoga Sutra 1:1)  
Now this is yoga as I have perceived it in the natural world.

Atha means “now.” But it's more than just “now”; it means now in terms of “hereafter,” or “going forward.” The importance of that nuance is that it implies that whatever has been happening will now, hereafter, be different.

The word shasanam can be understood as a set of rules, a discipline applied to us from the outside, a set of instructions for what we're supposed to do next. But when we put the word anu, which literally means “atom,” in front of it, it means the instructions or ways to act that come from the inside. For example—“I'm thirsty, so I'll go get a drink of water.” It's that simple, [how internal direction comes to us] -- we don't think of it as a rule that when you're thirsty you have to go drink water, or when you're hungry you eat, we just do it.

In this sutra, Patanjali is telling us that yoga is one of these things that comes naturally. It flows from us, through us, and basically if we could just get out of the way, then it would be free to manifest in our lives.

### NOTES FROM MAUI

I just returned from 6+ weeks in Maui practicing and studying with Nancy Gilgoff :) refining my practice and teaching, taking my knowledge deeper.

In my practices we spend time making sure I know the vinyasa counts for all three series (among other endeavors). The vinyasa counts in the ashtanga practice serve a purpose; they help align you with your breath. An in Sanskrit means “Wind”, Nyasa means “to place”. So you are placing your body with your wind. We do this for several reasons:



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- ॐ It removes fidgets and mind stuff from your practice! Puts you in your meditative state. We have many scientific studies; Stress, real OR imagined negatively impacts our bodies. While you are breathing with bandhas, now you also have to pay attention to placing your body with your breath -- this focus pulls you away from all your crazy thoughts, disconnecting the energy drains and pulling our energy back into our body. This keeps us in the present moment, not worrying about something that has already happened or that never will happen . . . as the mind likes to conjure.
- ॐ It keeps flow and intensity in the practice increasing the heat in our blood helping to remove toxins from the organs to the bloodstream where our body can get rid of them.
- ॐ It makes your practice move quicker :) If you practice 6 days per week, this is important! Most days our practice should be efficient, cleansing our bodies and minds and allowing us to get on with our life.

Here are some little updates on some vinyasa counts in my practice and/or teaching I am refining for those who are ready for it. If this sounds foreign to you; keep practicing! One day it will make sense. If this sounds like something you almost understand, then see me and I'll explain and show you books with the specific vinyasa counts for you to read. If you totally get this . . . then you've been bitten by the ashtanga bug ;) This is a good thing.

In Primary:

- ॐ The parivrittis in the standing poses; **Parivritta Trikonasana** and **Parivritta Parsvakonasana** - In the vinyasa out of these two poses I used to turn my gaze down to my foot for balance, this is unnecessary. Just keep your gaze at your palm as you come up and switch. Keeping the gaze lifted makes your ascent and transition to the other side smoother.
- ॐ Vinyasa out of **Utkatasana** and **Virabhadrasana B** - Over the years I have seen much confusion about this vinyasa out and I have seen it done many different ways . . . Well, hooray for technology, Sharath shares it here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bwUiUJ\\_Oow](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bwUiUJ_Oow) In yoga mala pg. 63 it states the vinyasa count as: "Then doing recheka and puraka, press the hands to the floor by the sides of the feet, put the whole weight of the body on the two hands, and lift the body off the floor"

And for Virabhadrasana vinyasa out page 67: "Next, place place the hands on the floor on either side of the right foot and, without allowing the legs to touch the floor, lift both the left leg and bent right leg completely off the floor with only the strength of the hands; this is the 11th vinyasa".



ॐ



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ॐ **Bhujapidasana** vinyasa out when in the full pose, as you lift up with an inhale do NOT extend your legs to titthibhasana, tuck them back to bakasana without extending into titthibhasana.

Here are the correct vinyasa counts: from Down Dog:

- Inhale Jump around your arms and squeeze your arms with your legs - this is actually the 7th vinyasa in Pattabhi Jois's vinyasa counts.
- Exhale Hover your Esophagus - hold 5 breaths (8th vinyasa)
- Inhale come up to 7th vinyasa (legs hugging arms) this is 9th vinyasa
- Exhale take back your legs (10th vinyasa) to bakasana
- Hold for inhale (an UNCOUNTED vinyasa), Exhale to Chaturanga

Beginners should go down to top of head until they can control their descent, then they are ready to work on hovering the chin. It's actually ok for people to bonk down on their head in the beginning . . . it opens the 7th chakra . . . So in yogi slang terms . . . bhujā = no titthi, kurmasana and supta kurmasana = yes titthi . . .

ॐ **Supta Konasana** roll out . . . No pause! One quick inhale from inverted to seated. I have a much harder time controlling my landing. Up til now I would inhale from inverted to seated balance, pause, then land on the exhale with control. Taking out the pause to stay within the vinyasa count makes it much harder to control your landing -- so be careful landing your calcaneuses . . .

ॐ **Baddha Konasana B** - Do NOT pull feet out to get head to soles . . . Nancy says when you pull your feet out it is a hip opener, when you keep your heels in tight to your perineum it is a groin opener. These are very different in the body. She said eventually you will get the crown of your head to the soles of your feet even with your heels pulled into your perineum.

Removing fidgets from your practice helps train you for life . . . On your mat if your hair is messed up, or your mat wrinkled . . . you don't stop and fix it -- you keep breathing and moving, you accept it and deal with it and go on with your practice (most times anyway!). This helps train you in life to roll along with your predicaments. To flow with life.

While on the topic of vinyasa; **I want to talk about taking vinyasas** -- what most people think of when you say vinyasa is the Chaturanga (push up) position, upward dog, downward dog flow done between postures. These are vinyasas too -- some understand vinyasas only to be these transitions. In reality the entire practice of Ashtanga Yoga is vinyasa; placing your body with your breath in and out of every pose.

So the transitioning vinyasas between postures and between sides; its funny, the longer I practice the LESS of these I do. I asked Nancy about this; she not only understood but encouraged this behaviour :) When she learned the practice (40 years ago this year!), she was too weak to do these transitioning vinyasas so she learned the series without many of them. When I too first learned this practice from Beryl Bender Birch we did a lot less chaturanga, updog, downdog vinyasa transitions; seems they keep increasing as the practice has grown in popularity.

I don't want to discourage you if you like doing these vinyasas between sides and all the postures and you feel great . . . however if you struggle with your practice, have wrist pain or shoulder pain, or practice 6 days per week -- then all these vinyasas could be over-training to your body. The practice is not about how many chaturangas you can do -- the postures of a particular series have a lot more benefit than chaturanga does . . .



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If you do full primary with all the transitioning vinyasas it totals 50. 50 vinyasas in a little over an hour can be too much for most people -- especially if you are doing this everyday. Once in a while in your practice I would recommend doing all these vinyasa -- like once per week in a led class if that feels good to you. Or if you are only practicing part of a series, then the added heat and work of taking the vinyasas between sides could be beneficial.

For the past 16 years I have been teaching yoga, 10 years prior to yoga taking over my life ;) I was a personal trainer. I know from my studies in those days what builds strength in the body (heavy weight, few reps), what builds muscular hypertrophy (reaching momentary muscular failure with a weight that only allows you to perform 8-12 reps), and what builds endurance (15-25 reps) -- beyond that, the joints are at risk for overuse. For many years I ignored this gut feeling in my body that I did not need all these vinyasas! I am strong, I came into this practice strong and tight -- more push ups are not what I needed! But I did them because I could.

Now I am a bit wiser (I hope!) and find that my skipping vinyasas between sides and between some of the postures (upavishta konasana to supta konasana for example) leaves me feeling stronger after my practice. And the integrity of my vinyasas stays strong all the way to rest pose :)

### **7TH CHAKRA OPENING**

Another benefit with vinyasa-ing wisely is having strength for some of the other fun ashtanga "tricks". One of them being jumping from down dog to tripod headstand (the first headstand in 2nd series). I first saw the super yogis from the old days do this in the 3rd series arm balances, and I thought 'oh thats for the super yogis', it felt too much about strength and control and not enough internal benefit, so I ignored it and just continued on my way practicing . . .

It came up in Maui this year; Nancy said it is done to open up the 7th chakra . . . a little thump on the head to open the 7th chakra. Hopefully not too hard of a thump. I have heard about opening the root chakra by lifting up and thumping yourself to the floor while sitting in lotus . . . so now I am working on jumping from down dog to tripod headstand in hopes of the 7th chakra opening . . .

You can also get the chance to do this in Primary, so you can work on opening your 7th chakra before you get to second series . . . in learning bhujapidasana as you get your ankles crossed and start to think about the tip forward, initially you will tuck your chin and gently klunk the top of your head down on the floor, as you get control of this descent you will . . . over the years . . . hover your esophagus above the floor . . . by the time you are able to do this hopefully you will have learned intermediate up to tripod headstands so you can continue the 7th chakra opening ;)

This may also be reason for the supta konasana roll out -- the landing opens the 1st chakra . . .

And **headstand lift off** . . . Another question I got to ask Nancy this year: I have seen pictures of Sharath lifting his head off the floor after completing sirsasana (headstand). I have never heard anyone cue this or talk about it, but I played around with it in sirsasana in my home practices for many years. I finally got the chance to ask Nancy; she said it is done at the end of headstand to help the natural float that is supposed to happen in sirsasana . . . you just float up a bit, keeping your head as it is (She does not like it when people lift their head up) and eventually one day it will happen without muscular effort . . .



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### **Pain Story**

One time when Nancy was in Mysore with Pattabhi Jois, as she got to urdhva dhanurasana she struggled doing it. Pattabhi Jois came to her and said "back pain? Do more!" And she said "no guruji it's mind pain, I have some stress today.". He said "mind pain, take rest".

So interesting point; back pain = do more, mind pain = take rest!

Nancy said if she had learned that sooner she would have told him all the times she had mind pain!

Many of us think if we have pain that we need to not practice -- this is NOT true! If you have pain you practice gently, being mindful of your pain not to exacerbate it but to heal it. Breathing and moving will help your body bring blood flow to the painful area which improves the healing process. Learning to modify your practice due to pain is part of growing up in the practice -- maturing with it and learning how to use it each day as a tool for your health, body, mind, spirit, emotions . . . whichever is in need of support that day.

### **Alternating the Series :)**

Nancy changed her studio schedule! Something she rarely does. She changed the led 2nd day from Tuesday to Wednesday, she did this so it is easier to alternate between practicing primary and intermediate. Sunday is also a led day -- a led primary, which means Monday Mysore class would be a good day to do 2nd . . . then Tuesday would be a good day to do Primary (not 2nd series again), so Wednesday would be a better day for led 2nd (aka intermediate).

Once you learn 2nd, it is beneficial to alternate your practices, one day primary, next day 2nd. In the new method you are held in primary for a very long time, then once you learn 2nd you do 2nd 5 days per weeks and primary only once (I never liked this about the new method). Nancy does not like this either. She said each series has its benefits and it's best to alternate your practices between the series. When she left Mysore after her first four month visit where she learned both series in their entirety (plus pranayama) Pattabhi Jois wrote out each series and told her one day primary, next day second . . .

Before I started third I did that for many years, it felt very good on my body. Once I learned third I began practicing 3rd series 3x per week, second series twice, and primary only once. I missed primary series for a few years and would sometimes sneak in a second day of it . . . So I decided to alternate this year, first day primary, second day second series, third day thirds series, fourth day primary, 5th day second, 6th day third . . . I love it :) As Nancy said, each series has its benefits, no matter how much you advance you still need primary series detoxing; alternating the series seems the best for our health of our bodies and minds.

Speaking of Second Series . . . **WHEN TO START SECOND SERIES** has become major debate in the ashtanga circles . . .

When to start 2nd series? Someone from my studio just came back from CA where she visited a studio that would not let her do second series . . . Again this is a big difference in the "new method" of ashtanga vs. the "old method" of ashtanga. In the new method as taught by Sharath, you need to fully be able to do one posture before moving onto the next. And you need to bind in supta



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kurmasana, stand up from drop backs, and according to some teachers you need to float in your jumps . . . Well this excludes many yogis from EVER learning second series.

As I learned it, second series is not an advancement to primary, its a counter balance. I learned second series from Manju Jois in 2000. He gave me the entire series in one class . . . As I learned it, its not a big deal. SECOND SERIES IS NOT A BIG DEAL! It's a few postures . . . Primary series detoxes your organs, second series detoxes your nervous system. And second series balances out your spine with back bending postures after all the forward bending postures of primary.

Some say who teach the new method that starting second series before you can bind in marichyasana D or stand up from drop backs will fry your nervous system . . . WELL I SAY TRYING TO LEARN DROP BACKS AFTER 1 TO 1-1/2 HOURS OF FORWARD BENDING WILL FRY YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM . . .

HOWEVER, with that being said I would like to add that both methods, old and new are beneficial. Just find the one that suits you. If you enjoy staying in primary and like the linear approach of "mastering" (not that we ever master a pose) one posture before learning the next, then fine :) That's what you need. Or, if like myself, you keep hurting your back from 3 years of just forward bending and your spine needs back bending, or you have hip or knee pain, then finding a teacher that teaches the older method may be what is for you.

I like what Manju has said about this, he states you give everyone all the tools and let each person decide what they need. Here is a quote from one of his workshops:

"There's not a set of rules," he said. "You always have to give all of the tools to the people. If they have a problem, it's like a child, you give them a different toy to play with that will help them--then they can do it all the time."

Manju said teachers hold back because "it's all control. I don't like that. You have to encourage them [students] to learn. One way or the other, you teach them, but you have to give to them. Yoga is all about giving, not just taking."

### **BREATHE LOUD ENOUGH TO DROWN OUR YOUR THOUGHTS**

One of my favorite quotes from Nancy. And another difference I am hearing in how ashtanga is being taught; in classes in Maui you hear breathing :) I like this. It helps you stay with your breath, and pay attention to the quality of each breath. It also helps me put more effort into my breathing (than say a posture -- or my thoughts ;) I have heard some teachers teach our breath as a quiet breath. Which may be ok too, I don't know. I do know I love to practice beside Harry and his breathing :) Which is why I have my "spot" in that sweet little tomato farm yoga studio.