

Experience requires us to engage, process and then to move on, and it is our responses that determine whether we are further embroiled or moving towards liberation. Desikachar puts it simply: “The World exists to set us free.”<sup>10</sup> Responding with *vairāgya* is the movement from *bhoga* to *apavarga*.

## Sādhana: Dynamic and static āsana

One of the most important supports that we have when we come to practise āsana is the depth of the tradition. We can refer back to our teachers, and also to the wealth of literature that has enriched our understandings and our practice. We know that Patañjali has defined yoga as *citta vṛtti nirodha* (YS 1.2, see Chapter 1), but Desikachar has given us a very simple and structured *vinyāsa* which takes us towards this goal. “Without āsana practice, prāṇāyāma cannot be mastered. Without *prāṇa nirodha*, mind will not become stable.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, we need āsana to contain the body (*kāya nirodha*), then prāṇāyāma to contain the breath (*prāṇa nirodha*), and finally we contain the mind (*citta vṛtti nirodha*). He ordered the progression in this way because we start with the grossest, most tangible and therefore the easiest to manipulate (the body), and finish with the most subtle (the mind).

What does it mean to ‘contain the body’? To us, this means holding the body (relatively) still for a reasonable length of time in order to embody the qualities of *sthira* and *sukha* in a static posture.<sup>12</sup> This requires strength, stability and flexibility. To obtain these qualities, it is very useful to work with the breath, and to work with dynamic postures first as a preparation for static āsana. Looking at ancient texts like the *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā*, there is scant information on *vinyāsa krama*. For example, this is how it describes the lotus posture (*padmāsana*, fig 7.1):

10. This is the title of Chapter 12 of Desikachar’s book, *The Heart of Yoga* (op. cit).

11. This is from Desikachar’s commentary on Krishnamacharya’s version of the *Yoga Rahasya*, *Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram*, 1998.

12. See Chapter 9 for more detailed discussion on *sthira* and *sukha*.

*“Place the right foot on the left thigh and the left (foot) on the right thigh, cross the hands behind the back and firmly take the toes (the right toe with the right hand and the left toe with the left). Place the chin on the breast and look at the tip of the nose. This is called padmāsana; it destroys all diseases...”* HYP 1.46.<sup>13</sup>



fig 7.1

And this is how the symmetrical seated forward bend (*paścimatānāsana*, fig 7.2) is described:

*“Stretch out both legs on the ground without bending them, and having thus taken hold of the toes of the feet with the hands, place the forehead upon the knees and rest thus. This is paścimatānāsana”* HYP 1.28.



fig 7.2

Apart from the minimal detail on the route in and out, the texts are often very scant on how long one should stay in postures, or the order of postures and so on. In the ancient Sanskrit texts, there is little emphasis on dynamic āsana; postures are described as positions to stay in (often for a very long time) in order to cultivate meditative absorption. However, this emphasis on static āsana highlights the dangers of taking ancient texts too literally, especially if you don't have a teacher to help deconstruct them and make their teachings digestible and practical. For most people, straining to stay in something like the lotus posture in the

13. This is actually a description of what we now call *baddha padmāsana* – the ‘bound lotus’.

hope of gaining immortality is simply delusional and will not engender *sthira* and *sukha*: it will simply damage the knees!

Krishnamacharya was very precise in his teaching about dynamic āsana. In the modern Western world, the term ‘dynamic’ is sometimes equated with ‘strong’ or ‘intense’; but this is not the meaning we intend here. We understand the term dynamic to simply mean ‘moving’ – practising a posture dynamically means moving in and out of the form. What is the function of dynamic āsana, and why did Krishnamacharya stress its importance?

Dynamic postures involve large movements of the body. Moving completely in and out of the posture is a full-range movement (fig 7.3); we can also have mid-range movements (partial movements in and out of the posture, fig 7.4) and even micro-movements (subtle movements made while maintaining the posture, fig 7.5). These movements help to warm and train the body (and attention) to move slowly and carefully into and out of the pose. In other words, working dynamically prepares the body to stay in the pose. Mid-range and micro-movements can follow full-range movements of the body as we refine and intensify our practice:

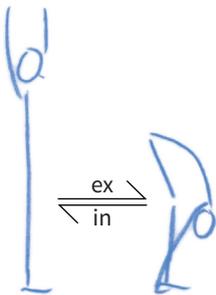


fig 7.3

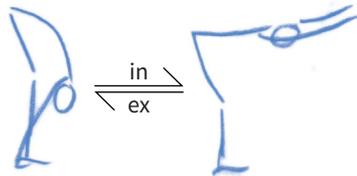


fig 7.4

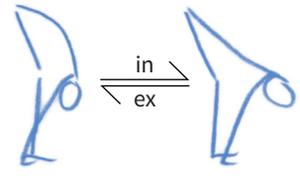


fig 7.5

There is another good reason to use dynamic posture work as preparation for static. If you are travelling at 50mph in a car and then suddenly slam on the brakes, the contents of the car will continue to move although the car has stopped. Similarly, sitting still after you’ve been rushing around with a busy mind can sometimes actually amplify your perception of the busy mind. If instead you change down through the