

Sanskrit made simple

Do you get white in the face when you hear *Urdhva Mukha Svanasana*? Can you tell it apart from *Adho Mukha Svanasana* and *Prasarita Padottanasana*? Do you know what to do when the teacher calls for *Sirsa Padasana*? Not clearly visualising *Triang Muka Eka Pada Paschimotanasana*? Don't worry, it's easier than you might think!

What makes identification of asana's (postures) easier, is to know that those long Sanskrit words are in fact like a string of pearls. For example, *Urdhva Mukha Svanasana* has 4 words in it:

Urdhva (upward), Mukha (face), Svana (dog) Asana (posture).

The languages of the Western world have developed from one original tongue. No written record exists of this mother tongue, but strong similarities between words in different western languages, called Indo-European languages, point to a common origin. The oldest languages of the Indo-European family are Sanskrit (2000 BC), Greek (800 BC) and Latin (500 BC). French is a direct descendant of Latin, and about half of the English words come from French. The Anglo-Saxon side of English, related to German, is also part of the big Indo-European family of languages.

For example: janu (knee in Sanskrit) is genou in French, and is pronounced exactly the same! When you open the glossary (verklarende woordenlijst) of "Light on Yoga" from the famous teacher BKS Iyengar, you see a lot of Sanskrit translated. Often, in the text of the explanation of the pose, first the name is explained and then the pose. This will help you in understanding the internationally used Sanskrit names for yoga poses.

Another example? Ud = up, higher in range, or to inflate. Jaya is victory, triumph, success. That makes Ujjayi (= Ud + Jaya) Inflated, High, Victorious, and Ujjayi Breath the Victorious Breath!

The asana (posture) names in Sanskrit can be divided in four categories: animal names, anatomical parts, objects and deities & sages. Additionally, names of 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.

So I would say –play with those names! As soon as we know some of them, we can break everything up. The best thing is that Dutch, French and English is so related to Sanskrit that when we pronounce Sanskrit as if it was Dutch, the pronunciation is in most cases almost perfect!

Sanskrit yoga names are all glued together. When you break them up it becomes comprehensible.

Ready to play? Let's take a closer look!

Anatomy

Pada	Foot / leg	Jattara	Stomach
Hasta	Hand	Anga	Limb / step
Anguli	Fingers	Bhuja	Arm
Anghusta	Big toe	Sarvanga	Whole body
Janu	Knee	Sava	Corpse
Sirsa	Head	Paschima	West direction, back side of the body
Mukha	Face	Purva	East direction, front side of the body
Karna	Ear		
Jathara	Stomach, belly		

Animals

Svana	Dog	Kapota	Pidgeon / dove
Bheka	Frog	Kurma	Turtle
Baka or Kaka	Crow	Matsya	Fish
Ustra	Camel	Shalabha	Locust/grasshopper
Go	Cow	Simha	Lion
Bhujanga	Snake/serpent	Mayura	Peacock

Characteristics

Adho	Downward	Upavistha	Seated
Urdva	Raised/upward	Prasarita	Spread out
Utthita	Extended	Ardha	Half
Parivrtta	Revolved	Salamba	With support
Baddha	Tied / bound	Nirlamba	Without support
Supta	Reclining/sleeping	Kona	Angle
Uttana	Intense stretch	Pida	Pressure
Sthiti	Stability	Sama	Equal, streight
Manas	Mental activity	Yama	Control
		Parivartana	Turn over / revolve

Numbers

Eka	One	Sapta	Seven
Dwe	Two, both	Ashta	Eight
Tri	Three	Nava	Nine
Chatur/chatwari	Four	Dash	Ten
Pancha	Five	Ekadash	Eleven
Shad	Six	Dwidash	Twelve

Objects

Parigha	Gate latch	Mudra	Seal
Hala	Plough	Prana	Breath/lifeforce
Vrksa	Tree	Danda	Stick/staff
Tola	Scales	Chandra	Moon
Vira	Hero	Surya	Sun
Nava	Boat	Dhanura	Bow
Tada	Mountain	Asana	Pose/posture/seat
Setu	Bridge	Padma	Lotus
Dhany	Bow		

Sages and Deities (you find some stories of Sages and Deities in Iyengars' "Light on Yoga").

Bharadva	A sage and the father of the famous archer, Drona, who trained the cousins who would later become rivals and fight the famous war that the Bhagavad/Gita was written about.
Garuda	The king of the eagles. Garuda once provided transportation and carried lord Vishnu to the aid of devotee Gajendra who was in a life threatening situation.
Marichi	Son of Brahma and Grandfather of Surya, the sun god.
Matsyendra	Lord of the Fishes. Shiva discovered a fish, who had completely learned his teachings of yoga. Shiva gave him divine form to then spread the knowledge of yoga.
Virabhadra	The great warrior who sprang to Shiva's aid to seek revenge on his father-in-law.
Nataraja	One of the names of Shiva, the lord of the dance.
Hanuman:	Chief of the monkey army. One of Rama's greatest devotees who came to his aid. Hanuman made huge leaps across the sea, first to find Sita and then to save Rama's brother.

We have a quiz for you: name the pose!

1. Three angle pose

2. Reclining bound angle pose

3. Pose where you take the head to one knee (or where you stretch the head of other knee)

4. Pose where you hold the body stiff like a stick, with only four limbs touching the floor

5. Downward facing dog pose

6. The pose where you put pressure on your ears

7. The pose where the whole body is supported

8. Headstand or head balance

9. One leg out to the side in supported shoulderstand

10. Spreading the feet intensely pose

Answers:

1. Tri-Kona-Aasana = Trikonasana
2. Supta-baddha-kona-asana = Supta Baddha Konasana
3. Janu-sirsa-asana = Janu Sirsasana (also means "head of the knee" stretches back)
4. Chatur-anga-danda-asana = Chaturanga Dandasana
5. Adho-Mukha-svana-asana = Adho Mukha Svanasana
6. Karna-Pida-Asana = Karnapidasana
7. Salamba-Sarvanga-Asana = Salamba Sarvangasana
8. Sirsa asana = Sirsasana
9. Parsva-eka-pada-sarvangasana = Parsvaika Pada Sarvangasana
10. Prasarita-pada-uttana-asana = Prasarita Paddotanasana

Note: You will see that the words are glued together into the full Sanskrit name. When you separate them the words get clearer. See the description of the meaning of the Sanskrit names also in "Light on Yoga" book by BKS Iyengar.

What to expect for your examen?

We expect you to know the Sanskrit names of the poses we teach you, and the English (or Dutch) names too.

For pronunciation of numbers:

Serious version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtwXL-25pCo>

There is a whole lot to find on the internet, so find it and share it with your peers!