

Unit 2.2. Principles of Yoga and Yogic Practices (Asana, Pranayama, Shatkarma, Bandha & Mudra, Dhyana)

BVoc Yoga & Naturopathy - Semester 1

Theoretical Subject 1: Basics of Yoga

Unit 2.2: Principles of Yoga and Yogic Practices

(Āsana, Prāṇāyāma, Śatkarman, Bandha & Mudrā, Dhyāna)

2.2.0 Orientation: From Body to Breath to Mind

Yoga practice unfolds as an inward gradient: **stable body** → **regulated breath** → **quiet senses** → **focused attention** → **meditative clarity**. Classical anchors:

- **Pātañjala Yoga Sūtra 2.46:** “स्थिरसुखमासनम् ।” — Āsana is steady and easeful.
- **Yoga Sūtra 2.47:** “प्रयत्नशैथिल्यानन्तसमापत्तिभ्याम् ।” — Perfection in āsana comes by relaxing effort and attuning to the infinite.
- **Yoga Sūtra 2.49:** “तस्मिन् सति श्वासप्रश्वासयोगतिविच्छेदः प्राणायामः ।” — With posture established, prāṇāyāma is the regulation/interruption of inhalation and exhalation.
- **Yoga Sūtra 3.2:** “तत्र प्रत्यैकतानता ध्यानम् ।” — There, the uninterrupted stream of similar cognition is dhyāna (meditation).

A simple way to remember the arc:

Āsana → Prāṇāyāma → Pratyāhāra → Dhāraṇā → Dhyāna → Samādhi
(body) (breath) (senses) (placing) (flow) (absorption)

2.2.1 Āsana (Posture)

Definition and purpose. Āsana is not mere exercise; it is *consciously organized stillness*. Stability and comfort cultivate **autonomic balance**, optimize **breath mechanics**, and prepare the system for subtler practices.

Core principles (student’s checklist).

- **Steadiness & ease:** seek a point where effort sustains form but *does not* disturb the breath (YS 2.46).
- **Relaxed effort:** release excess tension; let alignment do the work (YS 2.47).
- **Breath-synchrony:** movement follows the breath, not vice versa.
- **Symmetry & counterpose:** balance flexion/extension, compression/expansion.
- **Non-violence:** no pain in joints, no breath-holding strain.

Functional families and effects.

Family	Key aims	Illustrative āsanās	Typical effects
Standing & grounding	Axial alignment, balance	Tādāsana, Vīrabhadra variations	Postural integrity, proprioception
Forward folds	Parasympathetic shift	Paścimottānāsana, Uttānāsana	Calming, back-line length



Family	Key aims	Illustrative āsanās	Typical effects
Backbends	Ventral opening, energy	Bhujangāsana, Setu Bandha	Chest mobility, alertness
Twists	Rotational hygiene	Ardha Matsyendrāsana, Bharadvājāsana	Spinal mobility, digestive tone
Lateral bends/hip work	Pelvic balance	Trikoṇāsana, Baddha Koṇāsana	Gait ease, low-back comfort
Inversions/semi-	Circulatory aid, focus	Viparīta Karaṇī, Sarvāṅgāsana*	Venous return, steadiness

*Advanced inversions require preparation and screening (e.g., glaucoma, uncontrolled hypertension, acute cervical issues—avoid).

Application snapshot.

- **Study focus:** 8–12 min of gentle standing + seated folds → 4–6 slow breaths per pose → brief Śavāsana.
- **Sedentary strain:** hip openers + thoracic extension + mindful diaphragmatic breath to counter chair-posture.

2.2.2 Prāṇāyāma (Breath Regulation)

Classical frame. With posture steady, the practitioner refines the **flow, volume, rhythm** of breath (YS 2.49), which in turn clears mental dullness (YS 2.52: “ततः क्षीयते प्रकाशावरणम् ।” — *Then the veil over clarity thins*) and prepares the mind for concentration (YS 2.53).

Why it matters. Breath sits at the junction of **body and mind**: small changes in rate and depth shift **autonomic tone**, affect **heart-rate variability**, and reshape **attention**.

Gentle methods for first semester.

Method	How it's done (essentials)	Indicative effects	When to choose
Dīrgha (long, even breath)	Smooth nasal inhale/exhale; expand ribs + abdomen softly	Baseline calm, CO ₂ tolerance	Daily settling; pre-study
Nāḍī-śodhana (alternate-nostril)	Inhale-exhale through one nostril at a time (no holds initially)	Balance, attentional stability	Exam stress, evening wind-down
Bhrāmarī (humming exhale)	Soft humming on exhale with closed lips	Limbic soothing, sleep prelude	Anxiety spikes, pre-sleep
Ujjāyī (soft)	Gentle glottal whisper, even cycles	Pace awareness, inward focus	During mindful movement

Safety notes. Avoid force and prolonged retentions in pregnancy, acute cardiac/respiratory illness, or uncontrolled hypertension. Stop if dizzy, panicky, or breath-hungry; return to quiet nasal breathing.

2.2.3 Śatkarman (Six Purificatory Acts)

Classical source (Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā 2.23):

“धौतिः बस्तिस्तथा नेतिस्त्राटकं नौलिका तथा ।

कपालभातिश्चैतानि षट्कर्माणि प्रचक्षते ॥”

Dhauti, Basti, Neti, Trāṭaka, Naulī, and Kapālabhāti are known as the six purificatory acts.

Intent. To remove excesses, support mucosal health, regulate secretions, and prepare for prāṇāyāma and meditation. In contemporary curricula, emphasis is on **simple, safe** procedures.

Practice	One-line description	Indicative uses	Cautions
Jala Neti	Isotonic saline nasal rinse	Nasal hygiene, breath ease	Sinus infection/bleed—defer

Practice	One-line description	Indicative uses	Cautions
Trāṭaka	Steady gazing (e.g., wick/flame/point)	Visual focus, tear film health, attention	Ocular strain—short bouts only
Kapālabhāti	Brisk passive exhale, spontaneous inhale	Clears nasal passages, alerting	Avoid in pregnancy, hernia, severe hypertension
Naulī	Abdominal churning with exhale	Abdominal tone, digestive massage	Advanced; avoid in GI disease, pregnancy
Dhauti/Basti	GI/colonic cleansings (varied methods)	Specialized, therapeutic contexts	Only under expert supervision

Modern stance. For first semester learners: **Jala Neti** and **Trāṭaka** are sufficient foundations. Others belong to supervised/advanced modules.

2.2.4 Bandha & Mudrā (Neuromyofascial Locks & Integrative Seals)

What they are.

- **Bandha** = gentle, intentional **locks** that regulate pressure systems and cue prāṇic “directionality.”
- **Mudrā** = **seals/gestures** that integrate posture, breath, attention (including **hasta**—hand—mudrās).

Representative forms and effects.

Practice	Essentials	Indicative effects	Typical cautions
Mūla Bandha	Subtle pelvic-floor lift on exhale	Pelvic stability, upward cue	Avoid over-bracing; pelvic pain
Uḍḍiyāna Bandha	Abdominal lift under ribs (usually after exhale)	Diaphragmatic recoil, visceral massage	Avoid in pregnancy, hernia
Jālandhara Bandha	Chin lock with lengthened neck	Baroreflex cue, focus	Cervical issues—gentle/omit
Mahā Mudrā	Seated fold + bandha coordination	Deep steadiness, interiorization	Hypertension/glaucoma—screen
Viparīta Karaṇī Mudrā	Gentle inversion—seal	Venous return, calming	Acute glaucoma/HTN—care
Jñāna/Chin Mudrā (hasta)	Thumb-index union, palms up/down	Attentional cue, breath awareness	Generally safe

Pedagogic insight for students. These are **subtle** practices; less is more. When the breath smooths and the mind quiets, you are “doing it right.”

2.2.5 Dhyāna (Meditation)

Classical frame.

- **YS 3.2:** “सत्र प्रत्ययैकतानता ध्यानम् ।” — *Meditation is the unbroken flow of a chosen cognition.*
- **YS 1.2-1.3:** Stillness of mind-waves reveals the Seer resting in its own nature.
- **Bhagavad Gītā 2.48:** “समत्वं योग उच्यते ।” — *Equanimity is called Yoga.*

From concentration to contemplation.

- **Dhāraṇā** places attention (e.g., breath/mantra).
- **Dhyāna** sustains the stream without effortful re-placing.
- **Samādhi** is absorption where the object’s form alone shines.

Practical gateways.



- **Breath awareness:** feel the tide of inhalation–exhalation at nostrils or abdomen.
- **Mantra japa:** gentle mental repetition (e.g., Om), reflecting on meaning (YS 1.27–28: “तस्य वाचकः प्रणवः। तज्जपस्तदर्थभावनम्।”).
- **Loving-kindness (maitrī) attitude:** soft goodwill stabilizes affect and attention (cf. YS 1.33).

Common experiences. Restlessness, sleepiness, and daydreaming are normal early companions; the antidotes are **kind awareness, posture refresh, and breath recalibration.**

2.2.6 Integrated View: “Dose-Response” Over a Semester

Practice input (per session)	Frequency	Likely outcomes by 8-12 weeks
20-30 min āsana (balanced families)	4-5×/week	Postural ease, fewer aches, better energy pacing
6-10 min gentle prāṇāyāma (e.g., nāḍī-śodhana)	4-5×/week	Calmer reactivity, study focus, sleep onset ease
8-12 min seated dhyāna	4×/week	Clarity, equanimity, sustained attention
Jala Neti (as needed) + Trāṭaka (2-3×/week, short) routine		Nasal clarity, visual focus, steadier gaze

Unit Summary

Āsana stabilizes the *frame* with **steadiness and ease**, creating conditions for breath-led regulation. Prāṇāyāma refines the **bridge** between body and mind, thinning the veil over clarity and preparing attention. Śatkarman, when appropriately chosen, support **hygiene and readiness**. Bandhas and mudrās provide **subtle levers** for pressure and prāṇa regulation, encouraging interiorization. Dhyāna matures practice into **unbroken, calm awareness**, the affective signature of which is **samatva—equanimity**. Across these elements, the hallmark of Yoga practice is **non-violent intensity, breath-synchrony, and inward orientation.**

Key Terms

- **Sthira-sukha** — steady-easeful balance in posture
- **Prāṇāyāma** — conscious regulation of inhalation/exhalation parameters
- **Śatkarman** — six classical cleansings (dhauti, basti, neti, trāṭaka, naulī, kapālabhāti)
- **Bandha/Mudrā** — locks/seals integrating posture-breath-attention
- **Dhāraṇā/Dhyāna/Samādhi** — placing / flowing / absorbing attention
- **Samatva** — equanimity; even-mindedness in the Gītā sense

Self-Assessment

MCQs

1. According to **YS 2.46**, the defining qualities of āsana are:
a) Speed and stretch b) Strength and sweat c) Steadiness and ease d) Effort and endurance
2. **YS 2.49** defines prāṇāyāma chiefly as regulation of:
a) Heartbeat b) Metabolism c) Inhalation–exhalation flow d) Body temperature
3. The verse naming the **śatkarman** occurs in:
a) Yoga Sūtra b) Bhagavad Gītā c) Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā d) Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā only
4. **Jālandhara Bandha** primarily influences:
a) Knee stability b) Cervical length and baroreflex cue c) Hip rotation d) Foot arches
5. **YS 3.2** defines dhyāna as:



- a) Breath-holding prowess b) Unbroken flow of similar cognition c) Rapid mantra repetition d) Eye fixation alone

Answer key: 1-c, 2-c, 3-c, 4-b, 5-b

Short Answer

1. Explain how the principle “**prayatna-saithilya**” (relaxation of excessive effort) refines āsana practice.
2. Describe two gentle prāṇāyāma methods and the contexts in which each is helpful.
3. List the six **ṣaṭkarman** and identify which two are most appropriate for beginners, with reasons.

Reflective Prompts

1. Over one week, notice one daily trigger where breath pacing reduced reactivity. Describe what changed.
2. Draft a 25–30 minute personal practice weaving **āsana** → **prāṇāyāma** → **dhyāna**. State your intention for each segment and one marker you will observe (e.g., breath smoothness, mood steadiness).

End of Unit 2.2: Principles of Yoga and Yogic Practices