# **Models of Asana**

# **(or what the heck is all this wiggling about on a mat in aid of?)**

This workshop is a practical exploration of the purpose of yoga asana. It introduces different ways of thinking about the body-mind under three categories of ‘physical models’, ‘energy models’ and ‘psycho-emotional models’.

We will explore the variety of reasons that bring people to their yoga mats and ask ourselves to be clear about our own intentions.

The aim is to better inform ‘how’ we practice yoga, by clarifying our goals and motivations, and by shaping our perspective of the way that asana ‘works’ in ways that help us to achieve those goals.

I’m offering a path for the day but we’re going to walk it together so it is a good idea to expect to learn from each other. To assist this I propose some rules of engagement…

Be open to new ideas

Listen deeply to everyone in the group

Pause before you speak

Speak from the heart (and I experience)

Be clear and concise

Smile if possible

Remember this is just another story!!!!

**Session 1 - Purpose of Asana**

Background intro – asana teaching and practice in the West coupled with the much wider philosophical context set in the language and cultural context of India. Trying to make sense of what I was practicing and why. Also what I was teaching and why.

Provide three headings under which the purpose(s) of asana might be considered.

**Physical** – anything to do with your body

**Psycho-emotional** – anything to do with the way you think and feel

**Psycho-spiritual** – anything to do with the way you think about and relate to the world and your place in it

Meta – plan exercise brainstorming the reasons for asana practice under the headings given. Speak from the I.

Conclude with observation that such a wide spectrum of asana intentions might clearly encourage variable ways of thinking about the vehicle performing the postures ie the body.

**Session 2 – overview of models and exploration of physical models**

3 broad groupings – physical, energetic and psycho-emotional.

Arbitrary and overlapping

Not mutually exclusive and indeed often complementary

We’ll explore examples under each heading (some classical yoga others NOT). Correlate to panchakosha (particularly the first four) but emphasize not trying to re-work.

Annamaya kosha, the food sheath.

Pranamaya kosha, the energy sheath

Manomaya kosha, the mind sheath

Vijna namaya kosha, the intellect sheath

Anandamaya kosha, the bliss sheath

**Physical model explorations (link to Annamaya kosha)**

**Divide into sub-groups and then teach each example as a whole group individual exploration. Then invite a sub group example...doesn’t need to be an asana (any relevant movement will do).**

**7 individual explorations = 7X10 = 70 minutes**

**plus 4 sub group explorations = 4x15 = 60 minutes**

**Total = 2 hours 10 mins**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Skeletal** |  |
| bones as centres of movement | Standing back bend |
| bones as weight bearing structures | down dog |
| bones as joint structures | prep for lotus |
| **Myofascia** |  |
| Interconnected form | paschimottanasana |
| **Proprioception** |  |
| Holistic awareness | Prone back contact, Janu sirsasana A |
| **Rolfing** |  |
| Ease in gravity | Samastithi, |
| Expansional balance | ekam and dve mvts |

**Session 3 – energetic models (link to pranomaya kosha)**

15 mins per category (take examples from main group to expand each exploration if required)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Lines of energy | Virabhadrasana II, trikonasana, |
| midline | Marichyasana C, savasana |
| chakras | Lotus |
| Balloon figures / amoebas | Revolved Trikonasana, parsvakonasana, |

**Session 4 – psycho-emotional models (link to manomaya kosha and vijna namaya kosha)**

**Introduction and examples only – these are very individualistic explorations and therefore harder to generalise and define separate categories.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The body-mind | Fear – back bending and the moro or startle reflex – so if strongly present, fear reduction is more useful than any amount of technique or physical attention. |
| Body as life story | Emergent memories, pain, activation or dissociation patterns – all associated with past experience  What story am I telling? |
| Sthira sukham – steady / comfortable or kind and firm | A philosophy of posture / effort / perfection in asana |
| Pattern busting techniques | Change gear – go faster or slower –  Fear faster? Strong physical patterning slower?  Just do – surrender to practice / beginner’s mind  Fatigue / doubt / lethargy  What is present? PIER –  physically, intellectually, emotionally, relationally?  Are you sure?  ELSA |

**Session 5 – Conclusions**

**Recap – scope of intentions**

1. **Highlight potential for change of intention and/or unexpected overlap**

**eg you may need to explore your psycho-emotional response to backbending in order to learn to do drop backs and fulfil your ambition to ‘be like Kino Macgregor’.**

**Eg2 the territory of finding your way into handstand might provide rich psychological and emotional lessons that help fulfil your intention to become a calmer person**

1. **All models of what is happening in asana are just stories (and have pros and cons)**
2. **The different models may also be viewed as tools in a tool box – different usage and if one doesn’t work try a different one**
3. **Using a variety of models encourages you to explore for yourself and can help avoid getting stuck in ‘practice patterns’**
4. **You don’t have to use them all at once but as you become more familiar with them they seem to ‘arise for consideration’ at appropriate times**