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TOPIC OF THE MONTH
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Vinyasa

Vinyasa is the way to go
So jump on back and feel the flow
Upward dog and downward too
Pick yourself up and jump on through

A very loose translation of vinyasa is “flow” or connecting movements; when most people talk of vinyasa during our practice of postures they are referring to the “connecting” push-up position (chaturanga) into up dog and down dog that we practice between our postures.

A more literal and correct translation of vinyasa breaks down to: Nyasa which means “to place”, and the prefix Vi translates as “in a special way” or some people translate Vi as Vin to mean wind. Thus vinyasa means to place in a special way or place your body with your wind. Both translations are quite valid in my understandings. We now have a mental and physical way to approach our practice—with Awareness. (We can also take Vinyasa “off the mat” and apply it to our lives outside of the yoga studio, we can place our thoughts, actions, and words in a special way—with awareness and sensitivity.)

Vinyasa is to align you with your breath.

In Ashtanga Yoga the entire practice is vinyasa, from the first sun salute to the last hop (or crawl ;) through to rest pose, moving in this way makes the entire practice meditative. In other forms of yoga you get into a pose, hold it for 3–5 minutes during that time you are into your breathing and meditative state, then you break the state, come out of the pose, re-align, go into the next pose and get into your meditative state again, etc. In Ashtanga yoga, you try not to break “the state” for the entire practice. Ashtanga was one of the first methods to introduce the concept of vinyasa, now many other forms also incorporate vinyasa but use vinyasa in the looser term referring mostly to the physical postures--the connecting chaturanga, up dog, down dog postures. And most people think of vinyasa as these movements--which it is--but it is NOT ONLY those movements. All of the ashtanga poses have a vinyasa count into and out of them, for example in trikonasana the vinyasa count is:

- ☪ the first vinyasa is to step open to the right,
- ☪ the 2nd vinyasa is to catch the toe and look to your thumb and breath 5 times,
- ☪ the third vinyasa is to come up and turn your feet,
- ☪ the 4th vinyasa is to hold the pose on your left side,
- ☪ the 5th vinyasa is samasthitih.

This method trains us to move with our breath and **remove fidgets and extra “mind stuff”**. You breathe and move with the vinyasa counts.



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Why then all the chaturangas/updogs/downdogs between the poses? This does make the practice more challenging. There is a reason though (as I've learned with every little aspect of the ashtanga practice!),

- ☪ first being to remove fidgets and “mind stuff” from our practice. Mind stuff being worrying about work or what we're going to eat . . . fidgets being picking fuzz off our mats or toes, fixing our hair or clothes, looking at the clock, bathroom breaks, etc.
- ☪ second the build up of heat in the body--all those chaturangas and updogs/downdogs build heat. It is the heat that aids in the removal of toxins from the body--internal cleansing.
- ☪ also these vinyasas give us a continuity via the breath and from posture to posture; we are not just switching from one posture to another but ebbing and flowing linking our postures and our breath
- ☪ they build strength and endurance in our body
- ☪ the up dog and down dog give a counter pose, especially in the primary series where we do a lot of forward bending.

The method of vinyasa is an important part of the Ashtanga practice, maybe even the heart of it (vinyasa includes the breath). Pattabhi Jois likes to quote the sage Vamana who says: 'Oh Yogi don't do asana without vinyasa' (in Sanskrit: “Vina vinyasa yogena asanadin na karayet”)

I would like to add . . . our western mind takes something good . . . and then thinks more of it will be better . . .

VINYASA (as in chaturanaga, up dog, down dog between poses) IN MODERATION; as in all things ;) As Ashtanga yoga has gotten more popular many extra vinyasas have been added. Krishnamacharaya warns that too many vinyasas are not good for your joints. We need enough vinyasa to keep our heat for internal cleansing and to keep a rhythm with our practice helping to control the mind. No more no less . . . As you place your body with awareness pay attention to not deplete your own system of energy by taking too many vinyasa, your yoga practice should give you energy for your day, not deplete you of your energy.

Pattabhi Jois on Vinyasa

Vinyasa: *Vinyasa* means breathing and movement system. For each movement, there is one breath. For example, in *Surya Namskar* there are nine *vinyasas*. The first *vinyasa* is inhaling while raising your arms over your head, and putting your hands together; the second is exhaling while bending forward, placing your hands next to your feet, etc. In this way all *asanas* are assigned a certain number of *vinyasas*.

The purpose of *vinyasa* is for internal cleansing. Breathing and moving together while performing *asanas* makes the blood hot, or as Pattabhi Jois says, boils the blood. Thick blood is dirty and causes disease in the body. The heat created from yoga cleans the blood and makes it thin, so that it may circulate freely. The combination of the *asanas* with movement and breath make the blood circulate freely around all the joints, taking away body pains. When there is a lack of circulation, pain occurs. The heated blood also moves through all the internal organs removing impurities and disease, which are brought out of the body by the sweat that occurs during practice.



Sweat is an important by product of *vinyasa*, because it is only through sweat that disease leaves the body and purification occurs. In the same way that gold is melted in a pot to remove its impurities, by the virtue of the dirt rising to the surface as the gold boils, and the dirt then being removed, yoga boils the blood and brings all our toxins to the surface, which are removed through sweat. If the method of *vinyasa* is followed, the body becomes healthy and strong, and pure like gold.

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After the body is purified, it is possible to purify the nervous system, and then the sense organs. These first steps are very difficult and require many years of practice. The sense organs are always looking outside, and the body is always giving into laziness. However, through determination and diligent practice, these can be controlled. After this is accomplished, mind control comes automatically. *Vinyasa* creates the foundation for this to occur.