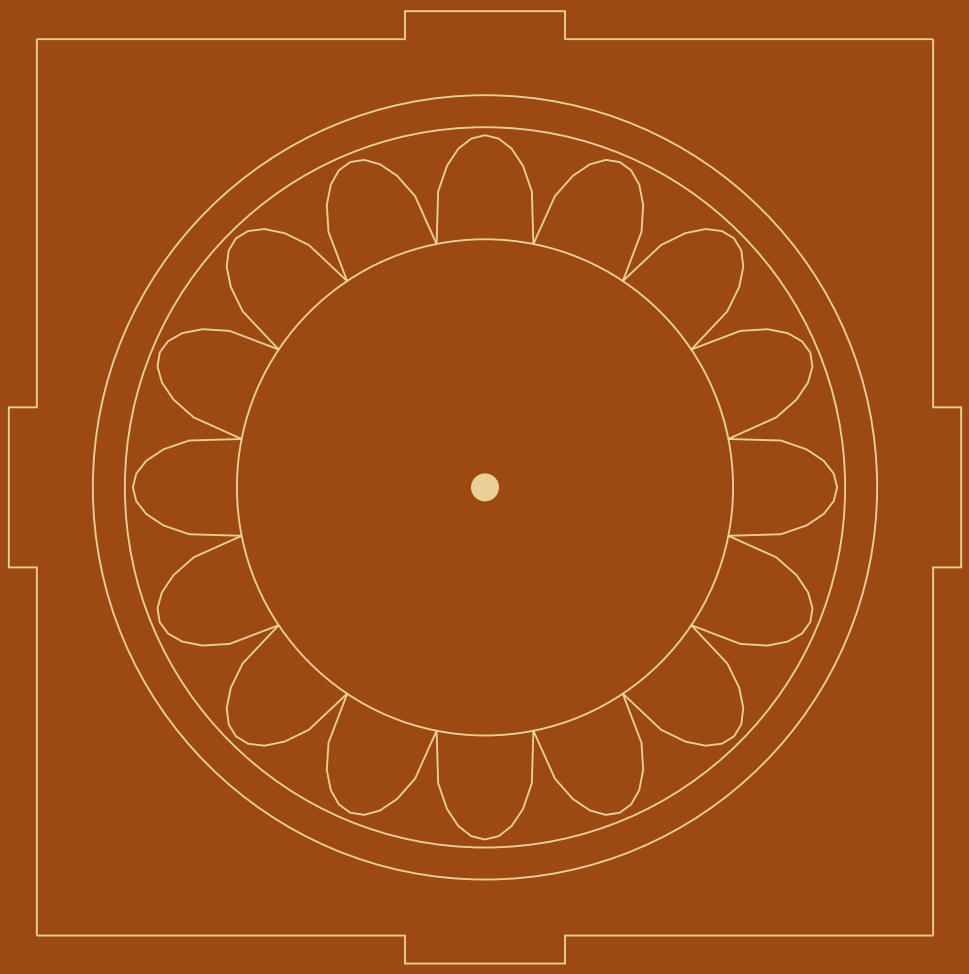
PRACTICE

Vinyasa: Breath-Linked Movement from Krishnamacharya to Today

What vinyāsa really means, the documented history from the Mysore palace to the flow class, how to build your own sequences, and eight timed flows from 20 to 60 minutes



विन्यास

vinyāsa

YOGIDE

Free sample

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Before you begin

"Inhale, arms up. Exhale, fold." Every day, in thousands of rooms around the world, a class begins with these words. The body moves, the breath sets the pace, and for an hour nobody quite stops. This is vinyasa, one of the most practised styles of yoga outside India, and also one of the least understood. Many people who love it think the word means "flow" or "fast". It does not.

Vinyāsa (विन्यास) is an old Sanskrit word for placing something in a particular way. In the hands of T. Krishnamacharya, at the Mysore palace in the 1930s, it became a method: every movement placed on a breath, every posture approached through an ordered series of steps, a krama (क्रम). That method is the common root of Ashtanga Vinyasa, of the individual teaching later called Viniyoga, of the "vinyasa krama" taught by Srivatsa Ramaswami, who studied with him for thirty-three years, and, at several removes, of the flow class on your local timetable.

This book does four things.

First, it explains what the word means, and the two senses in which Krishnamacharya used it, so that you can tell a vinyasa from a sequence of push-ups.

Second, it tells the history briefly and honestly: the palace hall in Mysore, the students who carried the method in different directions, the claims that cannot be verified, the scholars who read the story differently, and the American "power" and "flow" styles of the 1990s. What is old is called old; what is modern is called modern.

Third, it teaches you to build your own flows: how the breath leads, how movements fall into families, how a sequence climbs to a peak and comes back down, what each posture needs as a counterpose.

Fourth, it gives you eight complete sequences, from 20 to 60 minutes, timed breath by breath, with a gentler option for every demanding step, and a chapter on wrists, shoulders, lower back and hypermobility.

> **About the translations.**
>
> All translations of Sanskrit verses in this book were written for Yogide from the Sanskrit text. They are not copied or adapted from any modern published translation. Krishnamacharya's own books, and those of his students, are cited and summarised; they are never quoted at length.

> **Health first.**
>
> Vinyasa is physical and can be strong. Talk to your doctor before you start if you are pregnant or have recently given birth; if you have heart disease, high or low blood pressure, glaucoma or a detached retina, epilepsy, a hernia, osteoporosis, a recent injury or surgery, a spinal problem, or wrist or shoulder pain. Stop at once and seek help if you feel chest pain, breathlessness out of proportion to the effort, palpitations, faintness, a sudden severe headache, or numbness or weakness on one side. Emergency numbers: 911 (US, Canada), 999 or 112 (UK), 112 (EU, India), 000 (Australia). Chapter 11 gives the

> precautions in full; each sequence has its own.

How the texts are numbered

- **Yoga Sūtra (YS)**: we follow the Sanskrit text of GRETIL (Göttingen Register of Electronic Texts in Indian Languages), as in our companion book The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali, Sutra by Sutra.
- **Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (HYP)**: we follow the electronic text of GRETIL (version of 31 July 2020), as in Hatha Yoga Pradipika Explained. For the verses cited here (1.19, 1.69, 2.2), the number is the same in the public-domain translation by Pancham Sinh (1915), except 1.69, which is 1.68 in his edition.

How to use this book

Read Chapters 1 to 4 in one or two evenings: they change the way you will move. Learn the breathing rules of Chapter 5 before anything else, then practise Sequence 1 of Chapter 8 for a week. After that, read Chapters 6, 7 and 9 and begin to build your own flows. The chapter on precautions (Chapter 11) is not optional reading: vinyasa repeats the same loads hundreds of times, and small habits matter.

If you already practise Ashtanga, this book complements Ashtanga Vinyasa: The Primary Series, Pose by Pose, which teaches the fixed series. Here, the subject is the method behind all flowing sequences, and the freedom to compose your own.

Chapter 1. Vinyāsa: what the word means

Placing, in a special way

Vinyāsa is made of the prefix vi-, which adds the idea of "apart" or "in different directions" and, before a verb, of distribution, arrangement and order (teachers of the lineage often render it "in a special way"), and nyāsa, "placing, putting down", from the verb root as ("to throw, to cast") with the prefix ni- ("down"). The Sanskrit-English dictionary of Monier-Williams (1899) gives for vinyāsa: "putting or placing down", "arrangement, disposition, order", and also "movement, position (of limbs), attitude". The same word also names the putting together of words in a literary composition, and even the place where something is set down.

So a vinyāsa is, first, a deliberate arrangement. Nothing in the word says "fast", "flowing" or "linked". What it says is: each thing in its place, placed with intention.

Krama: the order of steps

The second word you need is krama (क्रम), "step", "going forward", "regular order, succession". A vinyāsa krama is an arrangement made in steps: a sequence in which each movement prepares the next.

This is the key to everything that follows. The modern question "what is a good flow?" is the old question "what is the right order?". A sequence is good when each step makes the next one possible, safe and meaningful; it is bad when it only keeps you busy.

Krishnamacharya's two senses

According to the scholarly summaries of his writings, T. Krishnamacharya used vinyāsa in at least two ways:

1. **Broadly**, for an appropriately formulated sequence of steps (krama) by which one approaches a given posture.
2. **Narrowly**, for one counted stage in the execution of a posture. In his book Yoga Makaranda (1934), the shoulderstand is introduced with words to this effect: this posture has twelve vinyāsas, and the eighth vinyāsa is the posture itself (āsana sthiti, "the staying in the posture").

The second sense explains the counts of Ashtanga (Chapter 3). The first sense explains this book: a vinyasa is a way of **arriving** in a posture and **leaving** it with the breath, step by step, as well as the posture itself.

Pattabhi Jois's sense, and the studio's

K. Pattabhi Jois, Krishnamacharya's student, used the word in a narrower way still: for the short, repeated linking movement between postures, built on the sun salutation. Most studios now use it in this last sense. When a teacher says "take a vinyasa", he or she means: from plank, lower to the four-limbed staff

(caturaṅga daṇḍāsana), lift into upward-facing dog (ūrdhva mukha śvānāsana), and push back to downward-facing dog (adho mukha śvānāsana), one movement per breath.

All three senses are legitimate. But if you keep only the third, you lose the idea that gives the method its value: **intelligent order**. A class that repeats the same link forty times without purpose is "vinyasa" in the studio sense and not at all in Krishnamacharya's.

Not to be confused with nyāsa

Nyāsa alone is also the name of a tantric rite in which mantras are "placed" on parts of the body by touch and attention. It shares the root and the image of placing, and nothing else. You may meet the confusion in some books; now you know.

Practise: one movement, placed

Stand with your feet together. For three breaths, raise the arms only on the inhalation and lower them only on the exhalation, starting the movement when the breath starts and ending it when the breath ends. Then do it three times out of rhythm: arms rising while you breathe out. Notice the difference. Write one sentence about what "placing" meant in your body.

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 45 pages.

Get it here:
https://yogide.com/books/vinyasa-breath-linked-movement-from-krishnamacharya-to-today/

One-time payment, instant PDF.