

# the yoga mat of life

by Lila Conway

'Sthira sukham asanam', a verse from Patanjali's Yoga Sutras is frequently quoted in yoga classes and books. It simply means the posture should be steady and comfortable. This great yogi uses just a few words, of such depth and meaning, to highlight how the practice of yoga 'asana' (postures) should be.

'Sthira' means firm or steady and 'sukham' means comfortable. This refers not only to physical stillness in the posture but also being mentally and emotionally steady. During practice there shouldn't be any internal confusion, conflict or struggle. 'Sthira' speaks of being strong with endurance, vigilance and the ability to be fully present with a steady and focused mind. As Patanjali mentions in another sutra 'unsteadiness of the body is an indication of unsteadiness of the mind'.

Yoga is a way of life, we should strive to have a sincere, consistent, mild and steady practice, never overdoing or indeed not doing at all! Yoga postures are more than physical exercises. The mind must be connected too, as the mind is the source of strength, power and energy flow. Firstly, a firm, steady posture should be in place, then we can direct our awareness within, watching the ego and observing who the see-er or the experiencer actually is.

At times when we move into an asana there may be some resistance or slight discomfort to begin with, but through observation and breath, tremendous internal activity takes place. We, as the observer notice how this beautiful inner intelligence springs into activity, to calculate, readjust, realign and finally to restore balance. The initial discomfort has gone leaving us steady

and comfortable in the stillness of the present moment. A mindful practice reveals a higher intelligence beyond the limited ego, as the ego itself cannot bring about restoration of balance. When practising a difficult balancing posture our whole body becomes alert and alive due to intense focus and concentration. Of course if we just move mechanically or in an aggressive, competitive manner, we will not have the sensitivity to notice this and become more vulnerable to injury.

A yoga posture reflects how we move through life, a steady asana gives firmness (sthira) in our daily actions and interactions with people. Unless we find firm ground, we become flighty and unsteady. Once we firmly root, then we can grow tall without being uprooted. The process should be joyful and comfortable (sukham), otherwise the mind will rebel. If you have ever been unfortunate enough to twist a muscle in a yoga posture, for a long time the body will refuse to attempt it again because it holds that memory of fear. In life too, if we have had an uncomfortable situation in a relationship and have experienced pain and suffering, the mind will avoid similar situations, it doesn't want to go there again.

If we can practice with the principles of non-violence and self acceptance, we help to bring about a comfortable, relaxed and joyful practice. Finding steadiness and comfort in asana is a process of surrender on all levels of our being. Relax and let go. Be soft and mindful with your focus and attention gently flowing in one direction without distraction or diversion. Observe how a tremendous resource of energy is unlocked from within, bringing a deep sense of harmony, balance, peace of mind and happiness.

## Trikonasana - Triangle Pose (tri-three, kona-angle, asana-posture)

This asana gives an excellent lateral stretch to the spine, increasing flexibility of the spine, and giving an intense stretch to the trunk and legs.

### The Practice

- Stand with your feet approximately 3-4 feet apart. Check that your heels are in line with feet pointing forward. Stretch your arms out to the sides at shoulder height, making sure they are in line with each other. Keep your palms facing the floor and stretch your arms from the back of your elbows. Lift your chest.
- Turn your left foot 90 degrees to the left. Exhale as you drop the left hand down onto your shin or ankle, or if your flexibility allows, onto the floor inside or outside the left foot. Bring your weight into the left heel rather than sinking into the left hand.
- Raise your right arm up, open the chest as you reach the right fingertips towards the ceiling. Keep both arms and shoulderblades in line with each other.
- Turn your head without straining your neck. Gaze at the right fingertips.
- Draw the left thigh muscle upwards and move your left buttock and left ribs forward slightly.

- Extend the length of the right side of your torso.
- Stay in the pose for 20 - 30 seconds. Repeat on the right side.

**Practice tips:** It is more important to keep both legs straight and hips forward than to bend the knee and twist the hips in order to bring the hand to the floor. Beginners may wish to hold higher up on the leg.

**Caution:** Respect your body's limitations and inner wisdom, if something feels wrong, please do not do it.

The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga by Swami Vishnudevandanda comes highly recommended for deeper study.

For more details on Lila's yoga classes and retreats, visit her website: [www.yogaprema.org](http://www.yogaprema.org)



'Joy is eternal, it will never die: sorrow is illusory, it will never live'  
Swami Sivananda