

# AERYK'S YOGA MANIFESTO,

or a philosophical rant and worksheet on the Ashtanga Yoga Primary Series

Primary series is a challenging and rewarding practice and one can find places to progress and evolve throughout a lifetime. The skills required are complex, and the Asana are typically progressive with the skills of one required to master the next. The vinyasa part alone may take years to get the rhythm of, but the seed skills are implemented from the beginning. The breath pattern for example never changes. The pattern and count of Surya Namaskara is literally the same when the Asana are seated and the full vinyasa is enacted. Whether stepping, 'jumping' or floating forward and back the inhale brings the body forward while the exhale sends it back. There is no need for extra breaths before or after this move and the breath should be smooth and never held. If there is a need for extra breaths in Downward Dog, then there is an energy issue that should be addressed with the previous Asana, as the lessons have not been fully integrated. There is a similar philosophy at work throughout the whole practice. There should not be any extra breaths between Asana whether standing, seated, or even the closing sequence. The standing sequence for example counts the return to Samastithi on an exhale, but the next inhale IMMEDIATELY leads to the next Asana. It is true that a few Asana allow for extra breaths to achieve such as Supta Kurmasana, but the expectation is that one aspires to get there with a minimal amount of effort, breath and energy, and by using the tools provided; smooth Ujayii breath with bandhas and drishti. Further to the point, it is the expectation that this aspiration to work on the details not only extend to the other parts of the practice but be the driving force of the practice. Why not master the skills that challenge, as well as those that come easy?

## HOW TO USE THE WORKSHEET

The worksheet is a paper mirror to your practice and is therefore a tool to use thoughtfully and honestly. Take your time with each part and recognize how the asana skills stack with the asana themselves as one leads to the next. Notice how your own patterns emerge within the flow of the series.

This worksheet may take a week or so to fully complete, so be patient. Spend a couple of days on each 'Day' to observe your practice as it usually is. You want to be honest with yourself and not just record the 'best score' you can do. Of course, you can track your progress and see improvement over time too.

Day one: begin memorizing the asana names and order. Observe which asana names come easily and which don't. Are these unknown asana also challenging? Sometimes we can do the asana better if we know what it is called. Most of the Primary Series asana are shapes and directions of movement, right there in the title. There are a few animals thrown in too!

Day two: keep memorizing and observing. Bring more attention to your breath. This worksheet is mostly a breath diary. It may be helpful to practice 5-10 even Ujayii breaths just before Surya Namaskara to really get you ready for practice. Notice in Surya Namaskara where there are gaps in the smooth flow of breath; held in or out or not with the breath count. Notice if you take extra breaths between A & B, or between B and Padangustasana and more importantly WHY.

Day three: continue as before tracking your standing sequence. Pay attention to the final exhale that returns you to the front of your mat and the next inhale into the next asana. If you need to adjust your clothes or hair can you incorporate your fidgets into the breath? Finally, you are about to 'jump' (inhale) to the seated sequence... how many breaths does it take to 'jump,' unroll a rug, wipe a face, scratch, move the hamstrings etc and be ready?

Perhaps you are ready to start filling in your sheet. List how many extra breaths you need for the asana as well as any quality notes, like ‘my breath is rushed’ or ‘i spend 10 breaths in this asana to deepen it.’

Day four and beyond: continue memorizing and observing. Go through the seated asana (as far as you practice) and continue to reflect on your breath and the asanas. You can use more diary space to reflect on obstacles. Think about what kind of challenge it is; focus, understanding of the posture, a skill like twisting or bending, coordinating breath and movement (vinyasa), tired or low energy at that point, etc. Think too on how the specialty vinyasas (chakrasana, bakasana) challenge your breath count. Make sure to note in your closing section what you are typically doing for your backbend sequence like 3 from the floor, standing up, dropping back, grabbing ankles.

Remember too that shoulderstand is 10 counts, the following are 8, Sirsasana is 15, the rest are 10. It is vital to include a full closing sequence to integrate the energy in your body. If you don’t have much time, it is better to omit asana earlier on than to skip a great finish.

Every yogi is different, but there are certain criteria that are taken into consideration when one is ready to begin the Intermediate Series. A Vegetarian or Vegan lifestyle is helpful but not necessary to get started.

- Have you practiced Ashtanga for more than one year?
- Do you practice 5-6 times/week?
- Do you stand up from backbends?
- Have you finished primary series?

When you have sufficiently completed a Primary Series worksheet you can make your own for the Intermediate Series asana that you are working on, following the same guidelines of proper names and accountability for each asana, as well as the variations/skill exercises for the final asana.