

# The Singing Curves of Yoga

Yoga postures, asanas, have special qualities which make them different from shape making, gymnastics, exercise, or even dance. This is an attempt to point to some of those qualities.

## Everything Waves

Despite the fact that, through our senses, we construct a nice, solid model of the world in which to operate, eat breakfast at tables, avoid being run down by buses and all the other activities essential for surviving daily life, everything can be seen as waves. Light, sound, touch, taste and smell all caused by, generally tiny, vibrations. The more closely we look at things the more they are made of little vibrations, waves.

*“All natural objects vibrate at different frequencies.”*<sup>1</sup> Solidity and stillness are convenient illusions we use to get by. Ok, that's a rock, its not going to suddenly jump up and bite us. Even very big things, though, vibrate. One of the biggest things around, the super-massive black hole at the centre of the galaxy, with a mass of billions of suns, vibrates in, a very low, B flat, 57 octaves down from middle C.

When one thing vibrates at the same frequency as something else we get this enhanced effect, called resonance. The body of a violin enhances the sound of its strings; the soprano breaks the glass; soldiers marching in step can destroy a bridge.

*“Resonance is a way of getting a large return for a relatively small effort, by making an effort at just the right time and pushing the system the way it ‘wants’ to go.”*<sup>2</sup>

Think of pushing a child on a swing.

Resonance can produce surprising and powerful effects. Tickle a special ruby at just the right frequency and, bingo, it emits a stream of coherent laser light.

## Crucial Curves

When we look at vibrations, or waves, they are composed of curves. Curves have different qualities, they may be flaccid and loose, angular and bent like a tangled ball of string or a crumpled sheet. Some curves,

---

<sup>1</sup> Levitin Daniel 2007 “This is your brain on music”

<sup>2</sup> Gribbin John 2004 “Deep simplicity”

however, sing. The simplest of these is a sine wave, the mathematical shape of a single, pure note, indeed of all music. Music is composed of sine waves laid one upon another, this is how a CD works.

There are many examples of such resonant curves. A skilled potter knows by instinct and touch when the line of a pot is just right. Look at the exquisite curve of a Sung vase, for example, apparently small and humble, but whose line can hit the eye from across a crowded room.

Nigel Forster, master guitar maker of Newcastle and yoga adept, eloquently describes the invention of the violin, springing out of the power of the double-curved Brecian Bow. *“Brecia was the centre of bow making in the 1500 and 1600's and Brecian bows were the most powerful around. The English Army used them. Brecian bows have a distinctive curve and re-curve which gives them their power and projection. Brecia is where the Violin was invented. It did not evolve - it was invented by the Amati family in Brecia in the mid 1600's. Amati taught both Stradivarius and Guarneri, the greatest violin makers. The curve and re-curve of a Brecian and Cremonese fiddle is very similar to that of a Brecian bow. The remarkable thing about Cremonese fiddles is not their tone but their incredible projection.”*<sup>3</sup>

A crucial quality of singing curves is their balance, not too tight, not too loose, like the double-curved spine of a healthy person. Defining this balance may be tricky but it's easy to sense. We may not all have perfect pitch, in the West it's educated out of most of us, but we all know when a note is out of tune. Balance is a key quality of asana. We need both strength and flexibility just as Nigel describes the top of a good guitar: *“To both sing and have a long life, the top has to be very strong in some areas and flexible in others.”*<sup>4</sup>

## Yogic Curves

The body moves, not in straight lines, but in curving waves. As an example try standing in Trikonasana, arms extended, and with each exhalation bring the hands onto the hip bones. As you observe the path the hands trace it will be a curve, part of a wave. The whole body moves like this. Vinyasa, the flowing movement that connects postures, makes this self-evident, as does dancing, though not like dad.

Through extensive experiment it can be found that every asana has a flowing movement that leads naturally into and out of it. Take as example a very simple posture like Uttanasana. As you reach down to the mat, or wherever your body allows, the balance in the feet

---

<sup>3</sup> [www.nkforsterguitars.com](http://www.nkforsterguitars.com)

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*

changes. If you bend the legs as that happens, the spine extends more easily out of the pelvis and hips. As you re-balance the feet and straighten the legs, the spine is helped to lengthen. As you move with the breath deeper into the posture, that process can be felt as a wave, moving through the feet and legs and progressively releasing the spine. Of course, this is not all that is going on. This is not meant to be a complete description of Uttanasana, but merely an example of the wave-like nature of asana.

## Stillness

I am fortunate to live by the side of a wild, mountain river and spend some time watching it. For most of its course it runs over rocks and man-made weirs that cause waves that appear to stand still. When the river is in flood these waves become bigger and, apparently, stiller. The more water, or energy, flowing through the standing wave, the more clearly it is defined.

Asana shares this quality. Releasing into stillness is not diluting energy but rather focussing or concentrating it. So, to return to our example, the process of releasing into Uttanasana can be felt as focussing ever more clearly on the sensations of the breath-body movement even as, to the untrained eye, apparent movement ceases. As the body opens and releases so energy is allowed to flow more freely, the body-mind is clarified. Asana can be seen as a process of tuning so that, as tension is released ever deeper resonances become apparent; the louder chords of being.

## The Body As Container

We are so used to treating our bodies as containers. All of our culture encourages this. There are mirrors everywhere, most particularly in other peoples' eyes. We think of ourselves as a size whatever. Do I look good in this? The image we hold of our bodies is imag(e)ined through the gaze of others and is a thing of a certain size and shape, sexy or sagging but contained, limited, an object.

When we look inside, however, when we practice yoga and focus on what it feels like to be alive, those limits disappear. From the inside the body is infinite. This is one of the greatest gifts of asana. There is no limit to how sensitively the awareness can reach down into muscles sinews and joints, into the deepening balance, homeostasis, of the whole body.

The breath-awareness moves through every cell, and who knows how much deeper, revealing that everything is connected.

## Interconnectedness

John Muir, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century naturalist, once said, *“When we try to pick out anything by itself we find it hitched to everything else in the universe”*.<sup>5</sup> Modern day quantum physics demonstrates how literally and profoundly this is true. *“The collision of two atoms can, and does, change the future of the universe.”*<sup>6</sup> Seth Lloyd – Professor of Quantum Mechanical Engineering, MIT. Everything is connected, it just doesn't feel that way most of the time because we are used to separating things in order to survive. That's a tree it will not bite me but in the tree there's a bear who might.

Yoga asana addresses this head on, initially by providing direct experience of inter connection between different, and distant, parts of the body; as, in our Uttanasana example, the evident connection between the feet, the legs and the spine as the wave of the breath passes through the body. As the practice deepens so the sense of interconnection deepens. In particular the essential connectedness of movement, breath and awareness start to become apparent. The beautiful Sanskrit word for this feeling is Samapatti – coinciding, letting everything come together.

So asana, posture, and pranayama, breath awareness, are intimately connected as are body and mind. How I think is profoundly affected by how I sit and move and breathe.

## Coherence

When waves come together, when they share phase and frequency and other qualities, they are called coherent. Laser light is coherent. Quantum particles, viewed as waves, are coherent before we try to measure them. Before human senses get involved the universe, in some sense, consists of a coherent wave, everything together and we know not where.

As the waves of the body-mind come together, as we release control – letting go until it breathes us, asana provides a readily accessible method for, not just listening to the deepest music of the universe, but realising that, in some mysterious way, we are it.

mac [www.elementalyoga.co.uk](http://www.elementalyoga.co.uk) January 2009

---

<sup>5</sup> Taken from Doyle Lawrence R. “Cosmic double slit experiment.” SETI

<sup>6</sup> Lloyd Seth 2006 “Programming the universe”

