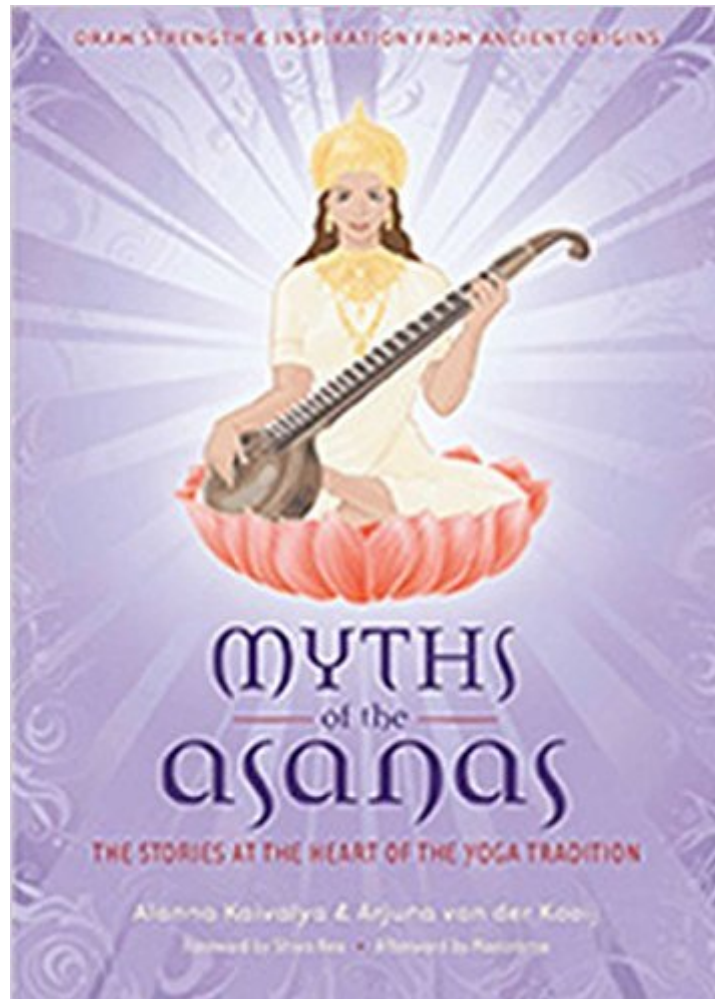


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# Myths Of The Asanas: The Stories At The Heart Of The Yoga Tradition



## Synopsis

Practitioners around the world reap the physical benefits of yoga, assuming poses and frequently calling them by their Sanskrit names. While many know that hanumanasana is named for the deity Hanuman, few understand why this is the case. Behind each asana and its corresponding movements is an ancient story about a god, sage, or sacred animal, much like Aesop's fables or European folktales. *Myths of the Asanas* is the first book to collect and retell these ancient stories. The myths behind yoga's spiritual tradition have the power to help students of all levels realize their full potential. Meditating on the tolerance of trees while standing in tree pose can help one become more tolerant. Learning how the disfigured sage Astavakra came to be the teacher of a king can liberate us from anxieties about our external appearance and our self-imposed limitations. Marveling at Hanuman's devotion to Ram can serve as a source of spiritual strength and determination. With more than sixty beautiful illustrations to frame the stories, *Myths of the Asanas* will add a new dimension to your practice and study of yoga.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It is good that the writers are honouring the tradition of Yoga by linking the asanas to the myths. I also liked the fact that they recognise the links between the myths, asana practice and the development of personal qualities like loyalty, faith, generosity and persistence. If you are looking for a children's book, or if you just want an easy read on the myths, or perhaps (if you are a yoga teacher) an easy reference point for stories to mention in class, then this could be the book for you. However, if you want more, if you really want to delve into the meanings of the asanas, then

you need to know how to do it. For this, there are much better books on the market. Swami Sivananda Radha's 'Hatha Yoga; the Hidden Language' brings the ancient yoga myths and the symbolism of nature together with the asanas in a more helpful way. It helps you to move to a deeper level, to take the asanas as reflective and meditation postures, observe how each one affects the mind and the body, make connections between what you are experiencing as you do your asana practice and your daily life. It also helps you to move towards deeper understanding, making your own discoveries. Another book worth mentioning is Swami Lalitanada's 'Inner Life of Asanas'. This is a more personal illustration of working with asanas. She takes many of the poses covered in 'Myths of the Asanas' and explores insights she has had from her practice. Swami Lalitananda provides instruction and takes yogic themes (such as developing awareness, exercising choice and moving towards union) to demonstrate by example, how to bring the teachings and our experiences together in our practice.

After reading an excerpt from "Myths of the Asanas: the Ancient Origins of Yoga" in the October 2010 issue of "Yoga Journal" magazine, I got online and ordered a copy of the book from .com. A student of the works of Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung, I immediately recognized the authors' understanding of, and respect for the mythic tradition. The writing, like magic realism, is reminiscent of children's literature, yet contains deep truths relevant to those in all stages of life. The book is a collection of short stories: synopses of the myths which correspond with the asanas or postures familiar to contemporary practitioners of yoga. Highly informative, but not patronizing, each short section is a relaxing read which gives those who practice yoga a greater understanding of the longstanding tradition in which we take part. I have enjoyed the book and recommend it to anyone who practices yoga or is interested in mythology/collective consciousness. My only complaint is, however, like so many things "yoga" the presentation is uber-feminine, specifically the cover art. Not everyone who practices yoga is female. Is it too much to ask the marketing gurus to take a more androgynous approach?

Highly recommended for yoga students and teachers or anyone interested in learning more about the stories behind the poses. I've always found these stories to be a bit confusing and hard to remember, but this book is written in a way that makes them very real and relatable. The graphics are lovely as well. This is a book to return to time and time again.

Yoga teachers have to read a ton of information and sometimes it becomes overwhelming (the yoga

practice! the spiritual growth!) This book does a great job of summarizing many of the asana's origins in a light hearted way without dumbing it down. You'll find yourself enjoying the poses a little more and maybe even smiling a bit when you hear them called out in class.

It was great to finally find a book that breaks down the story for a lot of the yoga asana's in a crisp, concise way, all in one place. I love this book and as a yoga teacher, it is a great resource for theming my classes. For my latest class, our peak pose was Hanumanasana, and it was lovely to incorporate the story from these pages, as well as a few quotes. I will use this book again and again as a yoga teacher.

The stories and Sanskrit names of asanas used in this book are essentially from Hinduism. Yet the authors and those who have written recommendations in this book have done so without using the word Hinduism. This has been a trend in the West for some time, but it does not change the fact that Yoga came from Hinduism. Genuine traditions/schools have no reservations or fear in stating that Yoga is for everyone, but it is deeply rooted in Hinduism. The stories are essentially Hindu, the tales Hindu children grow up with. But for yoga practitioners who have not heard these stories or known that the asanas are not just a physical culture/exercises as practiced in many places in the West, this book will be an eye-opener. The information in the book has a lot of value for such beginners. For those who want to go deeper into Yoga, there are original works and translations available from many authentic traditions. These are written by Yoga masters, Gurus and Swamis, and available in selected book stores and University libraries. To name a few, Swami Sivananda Radha, Swami Lalithananda, Swami Rama, Swami Veda Bharathi, Swami Kavalayananda, Swami Vishnudevananda are masters who have a lot to offer. Those who want almost all aspects of Yoga Science and Philosophy in one volume in English can refer to Mircea Eliade's intimidatingly scholarly (to the average reader) work 'Yoga: Immortality and Freedom' (This book does not instruct on how to do asanas). Until one is ready for the study of Yoga in the higher levels, stories from Hindu scriptures will immerse the practitioner in Yoga science and philosophy. The book is well-written in an entertaining way for the popular audience, using selected versions of stories.

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