



# COUNTING IN ASHTANGA YOGA

## Why Do We Count in Ashtanga Yoga?

Ashtanga Yoga is a structured practice that requires focus and discipline. It is designed to clear and sharpen the mind through the harmonious integration of *prāṇa* (breath), *āsana* (posture), and *drishti* (gaze).

At first glance, Ashtanga may appear to be purely physical, but at its core, it is a moving meditation.

Counting plays an essential role in this meditation, helping the practitioner stay deeply connected to each breath and posture and preventing the mind from drifting.

## How the Count Fits into the Practice

In the Ashtanga system, there is a precise order when it comes to counting: the count comes first, followed by the breath and the posture.

The link between breath and movement is called a *vinyāsa*, and every *vinyāsa* is given a specific count. Each sequence is made up of a set number of these counted

*vinyāsas*.

For example, *Sūrya Namaskāra A* (Sun Salutation A) consists of nine *vinyāsas*, beginning and ending with *Samastitihi*, the neutral standing posture, which is

considered “count zero.”

## The Mālā Analogy

Guruji Sri K. Pattabhi Jois often explained the relationship between count, breath, and posture through the image of a *pushpa mālā* – a loop of natural flower beads traditionally used in Hindu and Buddhist meditation practices.

A *mālā* is a circle of beads held together by a single thread. If the thread breaks, the beads scatter, and the garland loses its form. Similarly, in Ashtanga yoga, the breath is the thread and the counted

*vinyasas* are the beads.

If the breath stops or becomes irregular, the deeper meaning and benefits of the practice are lost.

Within each sequence, there is also a key posture held for five breaths, representing the special bead in the *mālā*.

In *Sūrya Namaskāra A*, for instance, this special bead is *Adho Mukha Svanāsana* (Downward-Facing Dog).

## Benefits of Learning the Count

Focus and Presence – The rhythm of the Sanskrit count steadies the mind and keeps awareness in the moment.

Calm Effect – The Sanskrit numbers have a powerful, calming effect on the mind and connect you to the ancient roots of the practice.

Depth of Practice – The count enriches the physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of each sequence.

Mental Clarity – Memorizing and following the count strengthens

concentration and sharpens memory.

Elevated Awareness – A steady count guides the practitioner toward a higher state of consciousness.

Counting is far more than a practical guide. It is what weaves breath, posture, and attention into one seamless meditation – the living heart of the Ashtanga tradition.

