



## SURYA NAMASKAR: A TRADITIONAL YOGA

Pravinsinh Ajitsinh Gohil

Physical Instructor

B. A. College Of Agriculture, AAU. Anand

### ABSTRACT

In a great number of societies, light has been a representation of consciousness and self-illumination for a very long time. "The world begins with the coming of light," stated Jungian analyst Erich Neumann in *The Origins and History of Consciousness*. "The world cannot begin until light arrives." The spiritual universe of all peoples has been shaped and shaped by the opposition between light and darkness, which has informed and shaped it. The sun is, without a doubt, the most important source of light for us. When we direct our gaze towards the star that is nearest to us, we could see nothing more than a large yellow ball. The Hindus, on the other hand, have adored the sun, which they refer to as Surya, for thousands of years. They recognise the sun as the physical and spiritual centre of our planet, as well as the originator of all life itself. According to the Rig Veda, Surya "begets and feeds mankind in various manners" (III.55.19), which is one of the many other names that Surya is known by. Furthermore, Savitri, also known as the Vivified, is another name for Surya. Furthermore, according to Alain Danizlou's writings in *The Myths and Gods of India*, the sun "must contain the potentiality of all that is to be known." This is because the sun is the source of everything that exists. The sun is considered by Hindus to be the "eye of the world" (loka chakshus), since it is able to perceive and unite all individuals within itself. It is also considered to be a picture of the divine and a connection to it.

KEY WORDS: Namaskar, Yoga, Tradition, Sanskrit, Mudra.

### INTRODUCTION

In order to show respect to the sun, many people do the dynamic asana sequence known as Surya Namaskar, which is more generally referred to as Sun Salutation. This is one of the ways that people pay homage to the sun. "Namaskar" is derived from the Sanskrit word "namas," which may be interpreted as "to bow to" or "to adore." There are two possible translations for this word. In addition, the well-known phrase that we use to conclude our yoga classes, which literally translates to "you," is derived from this root. Namaste is the name of the expression. Both at the beginning and the end of each Sun Salutation method, the Mudra, which is a gesture consisting of linked hands that are touched to the heart, is done. It is not a coincidence that the heart holds this place; the heart is the only organ that is capable of knowing the truth.

The teachings of the ancient yogis state that each of us is a small version of the entire universe, embodying "rivers, seas, mountains, fields...stars and planets...the sun and moon" (Shiva Samhita, II.1-3). Therefore, every one of us is a little version of the entire world. Their arguments suggest that the sun that is visible to the outer world is, in reality, a representation of our own "inner sun," which is analogous to our subtle or spiritual heart. This is the case because the sun is a symbol of our own "inner sun." The place where one can find jnana, which is the seat of awareness and higher knowledge, is located here. In addition, this is said to be the place of the embodied self, which is referred to as the Jivatman in many different religions. It can seem strange to us that yogis think that the seat of wisdom is placed in the heart, which is the portion of the body that we often associate with our emotions, rather than in the brain. This is because the heart is the part of the body that regulates our emotions. In yoga, on the other hand, the moon is used to symbolize the brain. This is because the moon is a symbol of the moon since it reflects the light of the sun but does not generate any light of its own. Having this kind of information is not only advantageous when it comes to dealing with everyday concerns, but



it is even essential to a certain extent for the lower levels of spiritual practice. This is because the lower stages of spiritual practice are more difficult. When it comes down to it, however, the brain is inherently confined in the things that it is capable of knowing and is prone to what Patanjali refers to as "misconception" (viparyaya), which is a mistaken knowledge of the self.

### **HISTORY AND PRACTICE OF SURYA NAMASKAR**

The origins of the Sun Salutation are a topic of dispute among those who are considered to have a high level of professional understanding in the field. This sequence is thought to have begun during the Vedic period as a ritual prostration that was conducted before sunrise, according to those who adhere to conservative beliefs. During this ritual, traditionalists assert that mantras, gifts of flowers and rice, and libations of water were all delivered to the participants. It is stated by them that the sequence is at least 2,500 years old, and there is also the potential that it is maybe several hundred years older than that. The King of Aundh, which at the time was a kingdom in India but is now a part of the state of Maharashtra, is often credited with being the first person to do the Sun Salutation. According to the assertions, this took place in the early part of the 20th century. According to the assertions of those who are sceptical regarding the historical period in which this incident took place; this technique was then introduced to the Western world in the 1920s or 1930s. There have been a great number of various variants of the Sun Salutation throughout the course of its history.

This is true regardless of how ancient the Sun Salutation is or what it might have looked like when it was first performed. There are over twenty-dozen different modifications that Janita Stenhouse describes in her book *Sun Yoga: The Book of Surya Namaskar*; yet, there are some of these modifications that are very similar to one another. We have twelve "stations" that are comprised of eight distinct postures, and they are all included within the context of this particular sequence. There is no difference between the first four stations and the last four stations; nevertheless, the order in which they are completed is quite different from one another. This series will begin with the stance known as Tadasana, which will also serve as the final destination for the series.

### **A BASIC SUN SALUTATION**

The eight basic postures, in order of performance, are:

- Tadasana (Mountain Pose)
- Urdhva Hastasana (Upward Salute)
- Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)
- Low Lunge (Anjaneyasana)
- Plank Pose
- Chaturanga Dandasana (Four-Limbed Staff Pose)
- Urdhva Mukha Shavasana (Upward-Facing Dog Pose)
- Adho Mukha Shavasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose)

Either an inhale or an exhalation may be used to facilitate a smoother transition from one position to the next. This can be accomplished by employing either of these two exercises. As you progress through the workout pattern, it is essential that you pay close attention to the manner in which you are breathing. If you find that your breathing becomes laboured or stops completely, it is advised that you either slow down your breathing or stop altogether and rest throughout the entire procedure. Also, it is recommended that you take a break from the process. It is recommended that you breathe in via your nose rather than through your mouth at all times. Breathing in this manner is the proper way to do it. The reason for this is because nasal breathing not only slows down your breathing but also filters and warms the air that is coming in. This is the reason why this is the case. The sequence is given a thoughtful character as a result of this, and the risk of hyperventilation happening is



much reduced. Before beginning the sequence, you should bring your hands together in Tadasana. This is the first step in the series.

Ideally, you should do this action in the middle of your chest. To keep your body in the position of Urdhva Hastasana, you must first take a deep breath in and then bring your arms up over your head. Following that, exhale while lowering your arms and folding your torso into the Uttanasana position. This will help you focus on your breathing. To proceed, take a deep breath in, stretch your body into a brief backbend with your fingers or palms pushed to the floor or blocks, and then exhale while bringing your left foot back into a lunge stance. This is the next phase in the process. This takes us to the next stage. During the exhalation, lower yourself into the position of Chaturanga Dandasana and then proceed into the pose. After taking a few deep breaths, pull your body into a plank posture and hold it there. As you bend your arms into an upward dog position, your torso should be arched upward and your arms should remain bent. In order to do this, you should do it as you are taking a deep breath in. You should first inhale and then exhale back into the Downward Dog position. While doing so, you should lunge forward with your left foot. Your left foot will go forward as a result of this. Uttanasana is the name of the pose that you should achieve by bringing your right leg forward while exhaling. The next step is to elevate your chest and stretch your arms over your head in order to accomplish the position of Urdhva Hastasana. This should be done while taking a short, deep breath in. After you have finished lowering your arms on an exhale, you should return to Tadasana, which is the starting pose. Tadasana is the posture that you should focus on. One thing to keep in mind is that this is only a half-round; in order to finish a full round, you will need to do the sequence over and over again, rotating from left to right and right to left. Take this into consideration at all times. Before attempting to integrate many poses into a single one, it may be beneficial for individuals who are just beginning their journey into the world of yoga to first rehearse each individual stance that they will encounter. It is common practice to begin the Sun Salutation in Tadasana with the sacred hand motion that was discussed before.

There are several variants of this pose. There are a considerable number of variants in which this holds true. I like to refer to it by one of its other names, which is the Hridaya Mudra, which literally translates to "Heart Seal." I find this term more appropriate. In spite of the fact that the majority of students are familiar with it as the Anjali Mudra, which literally means "Reverence Seal," I would rather refer to it by one of its other names. Your palms and fingers should be brought together in front of your chest, and your thumbs should be placed gently on your sternum. This is the correct position. This particular position is referred to as the "chest position." It is recommended that you apply a small amount of pressure on the bone that is located around two-thirds of the way down by the sides of your thumbs.

If you want to prevent your dominant hand from dominating your non-dominant hand, it is vital to make sure that your palms are spread out and that they are rubbed against one other in an even manner. This will help you avoid the situation in which your dominant hand dominates your non-dominant hand. It is possible to strengthen the scapulas against the back by applying pressure to them and spreading them out over the back torso. This is accomplished by pushing and spreading the palms. The reason for this is because the palms are spreading out and exerting pressure on the back. An attitude of resolve and a mind that is continuously turned inward towards the heart are both necessary components for doing the Sun Salutation. This is a portion of the exercise that is absolutely necessary. This is because the sequence finally consists of a modest adoration of the light and recognition of one's own individuality. This is the reason why this is the case. In view of this reality, it is of the utmost importance to engage in the practice of Sun Salutation. It is especially crucial to be as vigilant



and correct as you possibly can with each movement as you get closer to the finish of your rounds. This is because exhaustion might cause you to become less careful, so it is important to avoid being less careful during this time. Aim to maintain a level of awareness and precision that is as high as you possibly can.

### **DEEPENING THE PRACTICE**

Despite the fact that the sequence itself is rather simple, it is not uncommon for students who are just beginning their academic careers to have difficulty with two components of the series. This specific pose, which is referred to as Chaturanga Dandasana, is the first of several to be performed in the following order: It is fairly uncommon for trainees who do not possess adequate strength in their arms, legs, and lower abdomen to end up in a heap on the floor as they are attempting to lower themselves from the plank position. All of this is due to the fact that they are making use of their lower abdominal muscles. The therapy for a short period of time involves bending the knees to the floor quickly after the plank position, and then lowering the body down until the chest and chin (but not the belly) are softly resting on the floor. This is done in order to alleviate the discomfort. This basic approach is one that may be utilised to ease the discomfort that is being experienced. Moving the foot forward into the lunge posture is the second challenging component of transitioning from the Downward-Facing Dog position to the Lunge position. To successfully finish the shift, this is a necessary need. In the beginning, beginners typically begin by firmly thumping their foot on the floor around halfway to the hands. After that, they fight to move it forward the entire distance. This is a typical way of doing work.

As a consequence of this, a great number of individuals who are just beginning their journey are unable to take the whole step in a calm and easily manageable manner throughout the entirety of the process. This sensation of pain is caused by two causes: having a weak belly and having tight groins. Both of these characteristics add to the discomfort. While you are in the Downward Dog stance, instantly bow your knees so that they are parallel to the floor. This will allow you to finish the pose. To begin, the foot should be pushed forward between the hands. Next, the rear knee should be straightened into the lunge position. Finally, the foot should be moved back across the hands. At long last, the lunge position needs to be finished properly. There are two traits that are extremely required for gaining success in Sun Salutation, as well as in every other area of yoga practice. These qualities are dedication and consistency. In the beginning, you might want to try to practice four times a week; however, the best practice would be one that you execute each and every day. If you are just starting out, you might want to try to practice this way. You should make every effort to avoid skipping more than a few days in a row if at all possible; otherwise, you could find that you have to restart the process all over again from the very beginning. It is recommended that you execute Sun Salutation outside, facing east, as this is the direction in which the sun rises. This is the most effective way to perform the yoga pose. In the past, this was the standard approach. This movement is a representation of the beginning of the individual's experience of awareness and jnana through the individual's own experience.

There is a potential that this would be a terrific technique of waking up in India, where the temperature is typically warm; nonetheless, it is extremely doubtful that it would be practical in the state of Michigan throughout the month of December. In today's modern times, the Sun Salutation is most frequently utilised as a type of preliminary warm-up exercise that comes before an asana session. There are ten to twelve rounds that I do at the beginning of each and every practice. Depending on the circumstances, I may also perform them after a few hip and groin openers during the practice. In addition, in order to convey my appreciation for the shift in the light, I continue to complete a couple of more rounds on each equinox and solstice, respectively. On days when you are only able to practice for a short period of time, you will discover that a vigorous Sun Salutation that lasts for ten minutes and five minutes spent in Shavasana (Corpse Pose) will be sufficient for you. This will



allow you to get the most out of your practice time. In order to get the most out of your practice, it is advised that you start with a cautious three to five rounds, and then progressively increase the number of rounds until you reach ten or fifteen. There are 108 rounds that are considered to be the benchmark, and it may take you more than a few weeks to attain that amount.

The quantity that is considered standard is the number of rounds. In the event that this appears to be a significant amount, it is essential to keep in mind that this is the typical figure. You have the option of time the sequence more gradually in order to create a moving meditation, or you may pace it quickly in order to generate heat and cleanse the body-mind simultaneously. Both of these options are available to you. You have the ability to choose any of these two alternatives when you are in the sequence. Vinyasa yoga styles, such as Ashtanga Yoga in the style of K. Pattabhi Jois, make use of a leaping variation of Sun Salutation in order to link the numerous postures that are included in the sequence that is predefined. This is done in order to maximise the effectiveness of the sequence. In the event that you are seeking for a Sun Salutation that is a little bit more challenging, you may want to check at this particular technique. Because of the flexibility of the sequence, it is not nearly as difficult as you might assume to construct some of your own variations of the Sun Salutation. This is because the sequence is an adaptable sequence. When it comes to the Sun Salutation, there are a multitude of different versions. One example of anything that might potentially make things more difficult is the inclusion of one or more roles, such as the following: Utkatasana, also known as Chair Pose, is performed after Urdhva Hastasana or after Lunge. This position causes the front leg to become straightened, resulting in a modified version of Parsvottanasana, also known as Side Stretch Pose. You are able to conduct a modified version of the exercise as a result of this. You are going to feel this sensation when your hands are lying on the ground right now. Put your mind at ease and make the most of the time you have to yourself by letting your imagination run wild.

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the course of thousands of years, Hindus have held the sun, which they refer to as Surya, in the greatest respect. They believe that the sun is not only the physical and spiritual centre of our planet, but that it is also the divine originator of all life. This is according to their beliefs. Surya is known by a tremendous number of different names in addition to Savitri, which is only one of them. The explanation that was given before is the reason behind this. The fact that the yogis believe that the seat of knowledge is located in the heart, which is the part of the body that we frequently identify with our feelings, rather than the brain, may appear to us as being peculiar. This is because the heart is the part of the body that is most closely associated with our feelings. On the other hand, one of the most prevalent practices in yoga is to consider the moon to be a metaphor for the intellect. Contrary to what most people believe, the moon does not produce any light of its own; rather, it is composed of light that is reflected from the sun.

This sort of information is not only beneficial when it comes to dealing with day-to-day difficulties, but it is even necessary to a certain extent for higher levels of spiritual practice. This being said, having this kind of information is useful. With this in mind, it can be deduced that possessing this information is not only advantageous but also essential.

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