



Bobbi Misiti
2201 Market Street
Camp Hill, PA 17011
717.443.1119 befityoga.com

TOPIC OF THE MONTH

April 2011

The Sun Salute – Surya Namaskara

Surya means sun, and namaskara is a greeting, so we are greeting the sun :)

The sun is the soul of the world. Rig Veda 1.115.1

Worship of the sun was created because the sun is a powerful symbol of spiritual consciousness and health of body & mind. Sun Salutes worship the outer and inner sun (our heart).

The Sun Salutes are the foundation stone of yoga. Sun salutes help gather the strength of the mind in one direction and aid in mental focus. Without bringing the mind into a state in which it can control the body risk of injury is higher. Without its focusing of mental energies, yoga practice amounts to little more than exercises.

The ancient yogic texts don't say put your energy into getting a bind or a jump through or some cool arm balance ... The yogic texts say to put your effort into moving in rhythm with your breath (vinyasa), bandhas, and drishti. The sun salutes help us do this.

Surya Namaskar or the sun salutes are the foundation of our practice. Although they seem very physical sun salutes are devotional in nature. Their main focus is on a moving meditation . . . moving in synchronicity with inhales and exhales, having bandhas, and drishti. This is where we establish our moving and breathing synchronization which is the heart of this practice--it connects our body, mind, and breath calming the mind while energizing our body, making space for good thoughts, and building a firm foundation which will support the rest of our practice.

In yoga philosophy the Sun represents health and vitality — mentally and physically. By practicing sun salutes they bring health to our body and peace of mind to our head. Health is our greatest wealth, both in the body and mind. When practiced with a meditation in mind the sun salutes gather the strength of the mind developing inner happiness and aiding in mental focus.

Sun Salutes from the inside out — For the heart and mind

Sun salutes and yoga postures stir up a lot of energy in our body. Left undirected this energy can stir up negative issues, if we make the conscious effort to direct this energy we can use it more productively, it is helpful to start your practice with an intention. In Sanskrit this is known as Bhavana, which means “to be” or “to become”. So in essence you can “dream it”, use your intention to help direct your energy in your practice — dream the positive effects you want from the practice and focus your mind on that. This helps give our practice inner significance — an inner meaning with a practical method that improves health, clarity of mind, and is spiritually up-lifting.

There is a mantra that goes with the sun salutes to help us develop the meditative side of our practice, it is actually more a meditation than a mantra that you just recite. The Rig Veda outlines a meditation that goes with each position of Surya Namaskar A (below). I have found it useful to repeat this meditation in sanskrit with each position, and again in English while holding down dog for 5 breaths.

Here is the mantra from the Rig Veda — with the sun in my mind I meditate on the following:

Om Bhadram Karnebhih Shrnnyaama Devaah =

Om, Oh Deva may we hear with our ears what is Auspicious (conducive to success)

Bhadram Pashyema-Akssabhir-Yajatraah

May we see with our eyes what is Auspicious and Adorable

Sthirair-Anngais-Tussttuvaamsas-Tanuubhih



Bobbi Misiti
2201 Market Street
Camp Hill, PA 17011
717.443.1119 befityoga.com

May we be playful in life with Steadiness in our Bodies and Minds
Vyashema Devahitam Yad-Aayuh
May we offer our lifespan allotted by the Devas for the Service of god/mankind
Svasti Na Indro Vrddha-Shravaah
May Indra, the Deva of Great Wisdom and Glory, grant us well-being by bestowing us with wisdom
Svasti Nah Puushaa-Vishva-Vedaa
May Pushan, The Sun God, the Nourisher, and the provider of great knowledge grant us well being by
Nourishing us and Granting us Knowledge
Svasti Nas-Taarkssyo Arisstta-Nemih
May Tarksya, a Mythical Bird of great Protective Power who has a thunderbolt to dispel our misfortunes,
grant us well-being by protecting us from mis-fortunes.
Svasti No Vrhaspatir-Dadhaatu
And May Brihaspati, the Guru of the Devas, grant us Well-Being
OM Shanti, Shanti, Shanti
Om, may we recognize we are all one, Peace from Nature (regarding storms and natural events),
Peace with each other, and Peace Within.

This mantra is asking for longevity, hearing and seeing what is pleasant, happiness, health and equilibrium in our bodies and minds, so that we may live a long life free of disease to provide a good service to mankind. The mantra then goes on to ask for Wisdom, Knowledge, nourishment, to be protected from mis-fortunes, and asks for general well being.

Sometimes I even tweak some of the English words I repeat in Down Dog to suit me or my day or what is swirling in my world to some version of this below (you also can do the same, make it fit you):

- ★Please bestow upon me the good fortune of having only good thoughts
- ★Of hearing and speaking only Satya words and seeing good things-- not evil (Satya is the Sanskrit word for truth, but it means truth that does not hurt--so you want to speak the truth no matter what, but you don't want to hurt with it no matter what . . . very difficult!)
- ★Of having a sound, strong, light, and pain free physical body
- ★that I may live a long life teaching and speaking words of value and wisdom that many people benefit from, and attain yoga, helping to spread the yoga joy ;).

There is also a mantra for Sun Salute B. Surya Namaskar B is said to benefit the heart — when a beginner first starts practicing sun salute b they find themselves quickly winded, but if you keep with it you will get a stronger and a more cardiovascular-ly fit heart from practicing them giving you a strong heart.

The Rig Veda states that whoever is suffering from heart trouble will find their trouble eliminated if they practice Surya Namaskar B. This is because the surya namaskar b mantra destroys the inner enemies (which if left to manifest will become our outer enemies). The Vedas describe 6 poisons that surround the spiritual heart, recitation of this mantra helps to rid these poisons from our body. They are:

- Desire (kama)
- Anger (krodha)
- Greed (Lobha)
- Delusion (moha)
- Pride (mada)
- Jealousy (matsarya)

According to the Rig Veda by removing these poisons from our body heart disease will disappear.

The mantra for surya namaskar B is long and complicated, instead I focus my attention on breathing around your heart while holding down dog. I focus on having my breath totally encompass my heart, front to back, side to side, top to bottom, keeping the heart area open and allowing prana to circulate around the heart. Remember this is more dhyana (meditation) than an actual recitation.

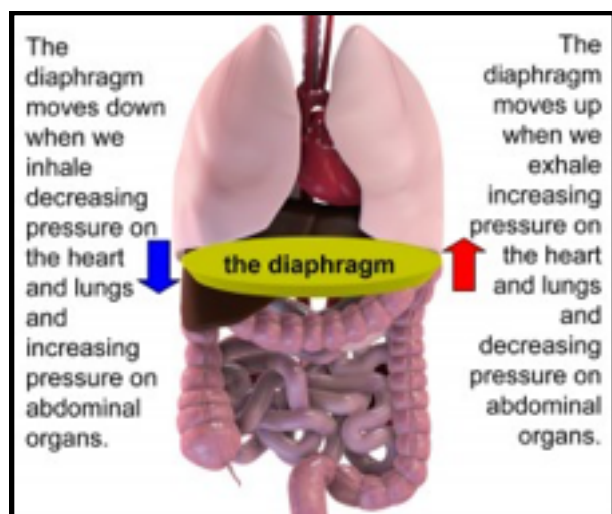


As you begin your practice with sun salutes focus your attention on these meditations, and on your breath--it is important to keep your inhales and exhales the same length as this promotes body and mind equilibrium. This also sets your intension for your practice and helps develop the awareness in our practice that reduces the risk of injury while connecting our body, mind. and breath at the start, which helps us maintain that connection throughout our entire practice.

According to the sages--the first duty is to take care of the body which is the means to the pursuit of spiritual life. Sedentary lifestyle leads to pain. The practice of Surya Namaskara cures this affliction; sun salutes lead to greater health, creativity, and productivity.

Sun Salutes from the Inside Out for the body

Along with waking us up! The sun Salutes improve our respiratory system, activates our digestive system, and promotes heart health.



As we inhale and extend our spine lifting our face and heart to the sky — while we hold our pelvis level with the strength of our abdominals — we are creating space above and below the diaphragm allowing more room for it to move up and down in the abdomen which allows for deeper breathing, improving our respiratory system.

Then as we exhale and bend forward the ribs and pelvis come back together like an accordion squeezing and soaking all the tissues and organs in the abdomen helping their function and restoring elasticity.

The forward and backward bending of the sun salute alone can improve digestion by helping to move matter through your body. When you combine the movements with deep breathing you get even more benefit; your diaphragm sits just on top of your liver and stomach so as you breathe and

bend, the diaphragm also massages the stomach and liver aiding them in doing their jobs. The space created in the abdomen by the sun salutes also helps to give your stomach the room it needs in your abdomen. Sometimes between stress and an immobile rib cage your stomach gets pushed up against your diaphragm where it starts to adhere to the underside of your diaphragm further restricting movement.

The vigorous nature of the Sun salutes are competent at improving our heart function, especially when done mindfully with deep breathing. The heart is also massaged by the diaphragm as we improve our mobility of the ribs and diaphragm.

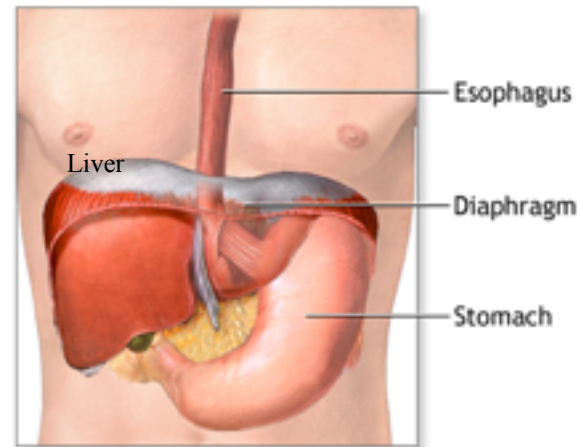
And specifically on the stress response (which helps with heart health), the improved elasticity of the diaphragm and ribs makes the diaphragm stronger and able to easier stretch low enough on inhalation into the abdomen to draw in sufficient air to get the breath into the lower lobes of the lungs. This is where there is more oxygen, AND this is also where the receptors to the parasympathetic nervous system lie — the calming side of our nervous system. People do now realize that as they lose lung elasticity they lose the ability to breath deep into their lower lobes of the lungs restricting their breath to the upper lobes of the lungs which house the receptors for the sympathetic nervous system (triggering our stress response). When this happens over long periods of time the stress hormones start to break down your body's tissues.

The improved elasticity between our heart and lung, diaphragm and, stomach and liver junction — just from bending forward and backward with your breath as we do in sun salutes helps prevent a host of diseases that can start from this area of the body:



Bobbi Misiti
 2201 Market Street
 Camp Hill, PA 17011
 717.443.1119 befityoga.com

- ☯ Moving/Breathing Synchronicity – Connecting the moving and breathing synchronicity is the most important lesson in the sun salute. Pay attention to envelope your movement with your breath, at first this may seem challenging (especially in sun salute b) but over time with practice it will become easier. When we synchronize our moving and breathing it is very calming to the mind while energizing to the body, removing stress.
- ☯ They build heat in the body, helping to prepare our body for the practice; and even more importantly it is the heat that helps with the removal of toxins from our organs to our bloodstream to our kidneys and liver where they are processed and removed.
- ☯ They alternate forward and backward bending give a profound stretch to the spinal column and abdomen, keeping the body healthy. The alternating stretch on the legs between up dog and down dog is also very therapeutic for the knees.
- ☯ Improve digestion
- ☯ Improve stomach function by keeping the stomach from adhering to the underside of the abdomen (which leads to heartburn issues, digestive issues and could lead to a hiatal hernia)
- ☯ improve heart function
- ☯ improved lung function
- ☯ Surya Namaskar is good at reducing stress.
- ☯ Improved Sleep
- ☯ Help with weight control (remember the study published in BMJ proving that we break down most of our fat to CO2 and exhale it out of our body — and this is more effectively done with nasal breathing than mouth breathing)
- ☯ Reduce back and neck pain
- ☯ Improved strength for the back and abs
- ☯ The postures generate prana (energy in our body) by helping all systems move; blood to flow, hormones to secrete, neurons to move, lymph fluid to creep along, and cells to regenerate.



ADAM

Breathe deep into all 5 lobes of your lungs as many times each day as you can, you have approx. 26,000 times each day to do that.

The practice of Surya Namaskara brings happiness, health, and sunlight to the spirit.