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YOGA
THE LIVING LEGACY OF
SOUTH ASIAN HERITAGE



Welcome to this special yoga workshop eBook, created in celebration of South Asian Heritage Week and organised by Wise Thoughts.

Yoga is one of South Asia's most treasured gifts to the world—a holistic practice that nurtures physical health, mental clarity, emotional balance, and spiritual well-being. Rooted in ancient wisdom and refined over thousands of years, yoga continues to offer valuable tools for navigating modern life with greater awareness and resilience.

This workshop and accompanying eBook invite you to explore the rich heritage of yoga, its cultural origins, and its practical applications for everyday well-being. Whether you are completely new to yoga or an experienced practitioner, we hope these pages inspire you to connect more deeply with yourself and the timeless traditions that continue to enrich lives across the globe.

We thank you for joining us and wish you a meaningful and enjoyable experience.



INTRODUCTION

Yoga is one of South Asia's most influential spiritual and philosophical traditions, with roots in ancient Indian thought, especially the Vedic world. Over time, it developed from early contemplative ideas into a family of practices and philosophies that include meditation, ethical discipline, breath control, devotion, self-inquiry, and physical postures. Its long history shows that yoga was never only an exercise; it was a holistic path for the body, mind, and spirit.



Vedic origins

The earliest references to yoga are usually linked to the Rig Veda, the oldest of the Vedic texts, where the word “yoga” is associated with discipline, harnessing, and mental focus. These early roots connect yoga to the broader South Asian heritage of Sanskrit learning, ritual, meditation, and the search for truth. In this setting, yoga emerged as part of a living spiritual culture rather than as a single invented system.

Later Vedic and post-Vedic writings, especially the Upanishads, deepened these ideas by turning attention inward. They explored the nature of the self, consciousness, liberation, and the control of the senses. In this way, yoga became increasingly associated with inner transformation, not simply external ritual.

Yoga Sutras and classical yoga

The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali are the most influential classical texts on yoga philosophy. They define yoga as the calming and mastery of the fluctuations of the mind, and they present a practical path toward liberation through disciplined practice. This is the foundation of what is often called classical yoga.

Classical yoga is usually understood through Patanjali's eight-limbed path, which includes ethical conduct, personal observances, posture, breath regulation, sensory withdrawal, concentration, meditation, and samadhi.

The system is not limited to bodily movement; it is a complete method for transforming habit, attention, and consciousness. That is why the Yoga Sutras remain central to both philosophical study and therapeutic applications today.

Hatha yoga

Hatha yoga developed later than the classical sutra tradition and placed greater emphasis on the body, breath, energy, and physical techniques. It became especially associated with postures, cleansing practices, breathwork, and subtle-energy ideas involving prana, nadis, and chakras. While many modern people think yoga mainly means hatha yoga, historically it is only one branch of a much larger tradition.

Hatha yoga helped make yoga more accessible by giving practitioners concrete tools for working with the body and nervous system. Its techniques were often linked to preparing the practitioner for deeper meditation and inner stability. In South Asian tradition, the body was not seen as separate from spiritual development but as one of the primary means through which transformation could happen.



Jnana, Bhakti and Raja

Among the major spiritual paths of yoga:

Jnana yoga is the path of knowledge and self-inquiry. It emphasises discernment, study, reflection, and the direct search for truth about the self and reality. Rather than relying mainly on ritual or physical practice, it seeks liberation through wisdom and insight.

Bhakti yoga is the path of devotion. It centres on prayer, chanting, love, surrender, and a personal relationship with the divine. Bhakti has played a major role in South Asian religious life because it makes spiritual practice emotionally accessible and socially inclusive.

Raja yoga is often identified with Patanjali's eight-limbed system and is sometimes described as the "royal" path of disciplined meditation and mental mastery. In many modern discussions, Raja yoga is presented as the integrative system that unites ethics, concentration, and meditation into a complete discipline. Together, Jnana, Bhakti, and Raja yoga show how diverse the yoga tradition is: one can approach liberation through knowledge, devotion, or disciplined mind-training.



South Asian heritage

Yoga belongs deeply to South Asian civilisation. It grew alongside Sanskrit literature, Vedic philosophy, temple traditions, ascetic movements, Ayurveda, and later Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain traditions. Its ideas spread across the region through teachers, texts, lineages, and lived practice, creating a shared cultural inheritance that is both philosophical and practical.

This heritage matters because yoga is often reduced in the modern world to fitness alone. In its original context, yoga was part of a much wider worldview that linked conduct, consciousness, health, and liberation. Its South Asian roots remind us that yoga is not just a technique but a tradition of meaning, ethics, and inner work.

Yoga therapy and well-being

When used as yoga therapy, yoga can support well-being by reducing stress, improving body awareness, calming the nervous system, and encouraging healthier patterns of breathing, movement, and attention. The tradition has long connected yoga with healing, and it often overlaps with Ayurveda in its understanding of mind-body balance. In traditional thought, well-being comes not only from treating symptoms but from restoring harmony across the whole person.

Yoga therapy may help people living with anxiety, chronic tension, low mood, or stress-related discomfort because it combines movement, breath, meditation, and ethical self-regulation. Its value lies partly in its flexibility: practices can be adapted to different ages, abilities, and health needs. The deeper idea is that better awareness can reduce suffering and strengthen resilience.

Living tradition

Yoga endures because it speaks to universal human concerns: suffering, attention, discipline, love, meaning, and freedom. Its many branches show that there is no single way to practice yoga, but many paths that can suit different temperaments and goals. Whether through meditation, devotion, study, or breath and posture, yoga aims to unify what feels scattered and to cultivate a more balanced life.

In that sense, yoga is both ancient and living. Its roots lie in South Asia's spiritual heritage, but its relevance continues wherever people seek clarity, healing, and inner strength. As a tradition, it remains a powerful bridge between philosophy and everyday well-being.



Surya Namaskar

Sun Salutation is a sequence of 12 poses in yoga. The sequence involves moving between various poses, alternating between forward and backward bends, and lunges. The sequence begins and ends with the Pranamasana, which is also known as the Prayer Pose.

Surya Namaskar, or Sun Salutation, is widely practised as a short, full-body yoga sequence that can support both physical and mental well-being. It is known for improving flexibility, strength, circulation, breathing, and focus, while also helping reduce stress and boost energy levels.

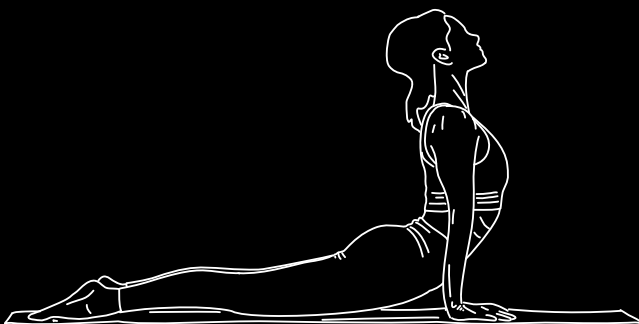


Surya Namaskar is a full-body yoga sequence that strengthens the arms, shoulders, back, core, hips, and legs while improving flexibility, posture, balance, and body tone. Its flowing movement can also raise the heart rate and support circulation, helping the body feel more energised.

Mentally, the coordinated breath and movement can reduce stress, calm the mind, and improve focus, sleep, and emotional balance. It may also support digestion, breathing, and nervous system health through its bends, stretches, and steady breathing.

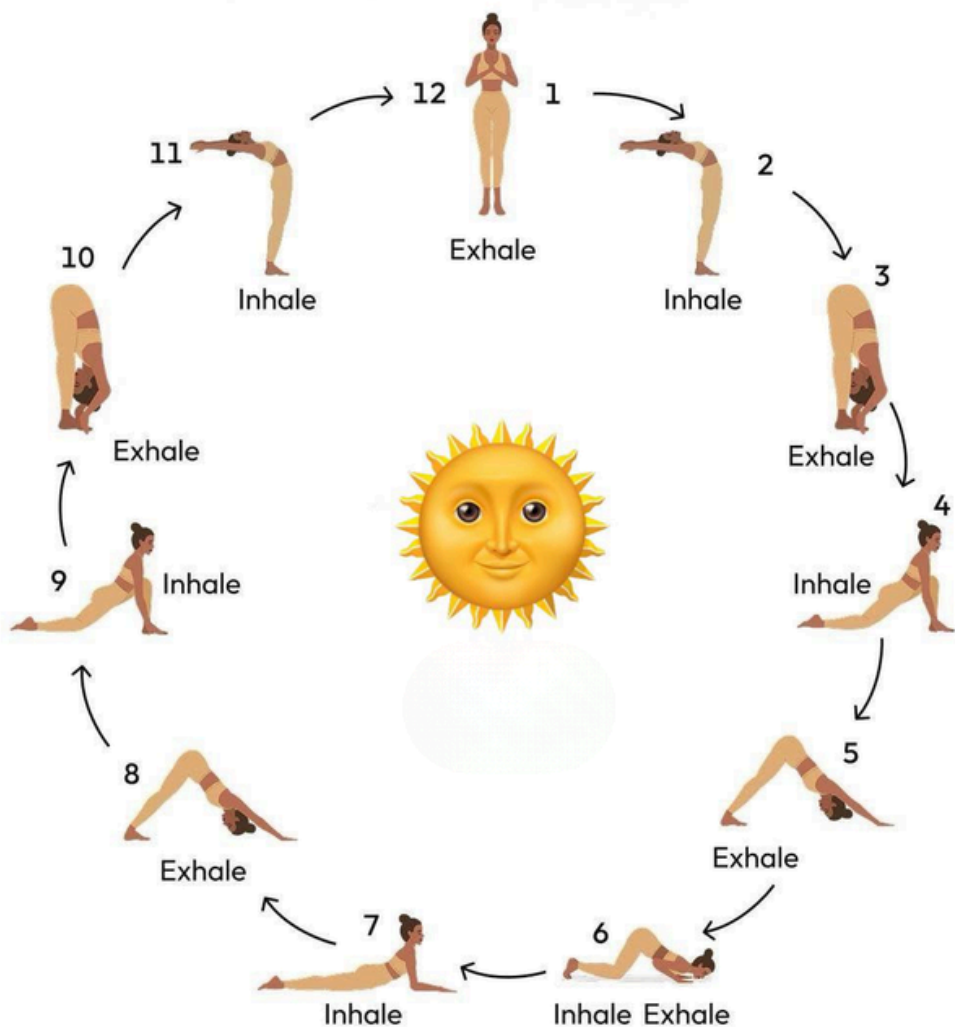
As a daily practice, Surya Namaskar is simple, equipment-free, and adaptable to different fitness levels. When used as yoga therapy, it can encourage gentle conditioning, stress relief, and greater body awareness.

header



Surya Namaskar

12 Steps Hatha



The 12 poses in Surya Namaskar:

1: Pranamasana (Prayer Pose): Hands in prayer, feet together.

2: Hasta Uttanasana (Raised Arms Pose): Inhale and lift arms overhead, back arch.

3: Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend): Exhale and bend forward, hands towards the floor.

4: Ashwa Sanchalanasana (Equestrian Pose): Inhale and lunge forward with one leg, the other leg back.

5: Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose): Exhale and lift hips up and back, forming an inverted V-shape

6: Ashtanga Namaskara (Salute with Eight Parts): Kneel down, touching the floor with eight points: forehead, chest, and both hands, knees, and toes.

7: Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose): Inhale and raise the upper body, keeping the hips low.

8: Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose): Exhale and lift hips up and back, forming an inverted V-shape.

9: Ashwa Sanchalanasana (Equestrian Pose): Inhale and repeat the lunge pose with the opposite leg.

10: Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend): Exhale and bend forward, hands towards the floor.

11: Hasta Uttanasana (Raised Arms Pose): Inhale and lift arms overhead, back arch.

12: Pranamasana (Prayer Pose): Hands in prayer, feet together.

