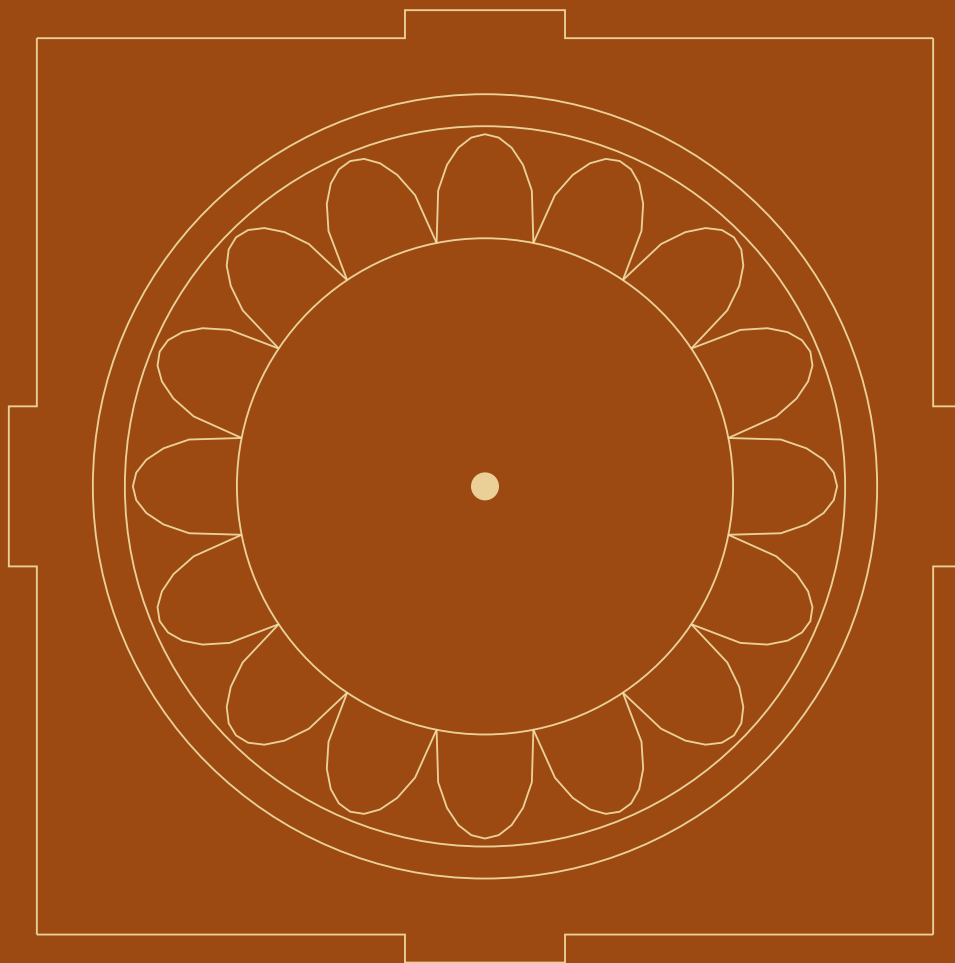


PRACTICE

108 Sun Salutations: A 12-Week Progression

The documented history, the twelve positions and the twelve names of the Sun, and a safe path from 12 to 108 salutations



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Free sample

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teacher or medical advice. Questions: administration@lacangel.fr

Before you begin

In many Indian homes, the day still begins facing east. Someone pours water towards the rising sun, someone murmurs the Gāyatrī, someone bows. On the ghats of Rishikesh at dawn you can watch all three at once: a pilgrim offering water from a brass pot into the Gaṅgā, a student flowing through a sun salutation on a folded blanket, an old man standing with joined palms, eyes closed, until the light reaches the far bank. None of them is doing exactly the same thing, and all of them are saluting the sun.

This book is about one of those gestures, sūrya namaskāra (सूर्यनमस्कार), the salutation to the sun, and about one particular way of offering it: 108 times in a single morning. It takes you there gradually, over twelve weeks, from twelve salutations to one hundred and eight, and it tells you honestly what this practice is, where it comes from and who should not attempt it.

What this book gives you

A documented history. The homage to the sun is Vedic and ancient. The flowing sequence of positions is much more recent: it was printed, named and spread in the 1920s by Bhawanrao Pant Pratinidhi, Raja of Aundh, and then reshaped in Mysore and in other schools. Chapter 1 separates the two, with sources you can read yourself, including the Raja's own book, which is freely available online.

The twelve positions, one by one. The sequence in twelve positions taught in many hatha schools in Rishikesh and across India, with steps, breath, what to watch for and a gentler option for each position (Chapter 3); the rhythm and the pace (Chapter 4); the two Sun Salutations of the Ashtanga Vinyasa school, A and B, described for reference, and three gentle forms: chair, wall and half salutation (Chapter 5).

The twelve names of the Sun and the six seed syllables, in devanāgarī, transliteration and meaning, and the way the Raja of Aundh combined them (Chapter 6).

A progression of twelve weeks, week by week, with rest days and lighter weeks built in, and a clear table of the signals that mean "slow down" (Chapter 7).

The day of the 108: how to prepare, how to organise it in nine rounds of twelve, how to count with a mālā, what to drink, what to do afterwards (Chapter 8).

What research says, with every study checked on PubMed and its real size stated (Chapter 9).

A printable part: a one-page recap, a poster of the twelve positions with their mantras, a counter of the 108 salutations in nine rounds of twelve boxes, and a journal for the twelve weeks (Chapters 10 and 11).

Read Chapter 2 before your first long session.

One hundred and eight salutations is a real physical effort: an hour or more of repeated forward bends, lunges and push-ups from the floor. It is not suitable during pregnancy, with heart disease, uncontrolled high blood pressure, glaucoma, a hernia, acute back pain, or a wrist, shoulder or knee injury that is not healed. If you live with a medical condition, take medication for the heart or blood pressure, are over 65

and inactive, or have not exercised for a long time, talk to your doctor before starting the programme. Stop at once and seek help if you feel chest pain, unusual breathlessness, palpitations, faintness or confusion. Emergency numbers: 911 (United States, Canada), 999 or 112 (United Kingdom), 112 (India and the European Union), 000 (Australia).

How to use this book

Read Chapters 1 and 2 first: the history will give the practice its meaning, the precautions will keep you safe. Then learn the twelve positions slowly from Chapter 3, preferably with a teacher for a few classes if you have never done them. Choose your form (the twelve-position sequence, or one of the gentle forms of Chapter 5). Start week 1 of Chapter 7. Print the counter and the journal of Chapter 11 and keep them by your mat.

You will need nothing more than a non-slip mat or rug, a little space (the Raja of Aundh asked for a flat, non-slippery strip of ground about seven feet long), a bottle of water, a clock, and, if you wish, a mālā of 108 beads.

A word on the sacred

The sun salutation is used today as exercise, and the Raja of Aundh himself presented it as a health system for schools, open to people of every faith. It is also, by its very name, a prostration before the sun, and in India it is still accompanied by mantras. This book gives you both. Chant the names if they speak to you; practise in silence if you prefer. In both cases, practise with attention: that is the respect the tradition asks for.

Chapter 1. The sun and the salutation: what is ancient, what is modern

The sun in the Veda

The oldest Indian texts are full of the sun. In the Ṛgveda, the sun is seen under several names and as several gods: Sūrya, the visible disc and its light; Savitr, "the impeller", the power that sets the world in motion each morning; Mitra, the friend and guardian of agreements; Pūṣan, the nourisher and guide of travellers; the Ādityas, the sons of the goddess Aditi. Several of these names will come back in the twelve names of Chapter 6.

The most famous of all Vedic verses is a prayer to Savitr. It is the third book of the Ṛgveda, hymn 62, verse 10, and is called Gāyatrī after its metre or Sāvitrī after its god:

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि । धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

tat savitur vareṇyaṃ bhargo devasya dhīmahi / dhiyo yo naḥ pracodayāt //

"May we meditate on that desirable radiance of the god Savitr, who shall inspire our thoughts." (Ṛgveda 3.62.10, our translation; text checked in the GRETIL edition of Aufrecht's Ṛgveda.)

For three thousand years this verse has been recited at the junctions of the day, sandhyā, especially at dawn, facing the sun. It is not a sun salutation in the modern sense: there is no sequence of postures in the Veda. But it is the root of the gesture. When you stand at the front of your mat with joined palms, you are in the posture of the person who recites the Gāyatrī.

Another hymn of the Ṛgveda matters for this book, because the Raja of Aundh used it. The last three verses of hymn 1.50, a hymn to Sūrya, begin:

उद्यन्नद्य मित्रमह आरोहन्नुत्तरां दिवम् ।

udyann adya mitramaha ārohann uttarāṃ divam /

"Rising today, you who are great with friends, climbing the higher sky..." (Ṛgveda 1.50.11, first line, our translation; GRETIL.) The verse goes on to ask the sun to drive away the illness of the heart and the yellowness of the body. The Raja quotes these three verses (1.50.11-13) as the hymns that followers of the Ṛgveda and of the Black Yajurveda add to their salutations.

Later literature keeps the devotion alive. The Rāmāyaṇa contains the Ādityahṛdaya, "the heart of the sun", a hymn that the sage Agastya teaches to Rāma before his battle (in the Yuddhakāṇḍa; the chapter number differs between editions). Temples to the sun were built across India; the one at Konark in Odisha, shaped as the chariot of the sun, is the most famous. Festivals of the sun punctuate the year: Makara Saṅkrānti in January, when the sun enters Capricorn in the Indian zodiac, and Ratha Saptamī, the seventh day of the bright fortnight of the month of Māgha (usually late January or February), which celebrates the sun's chariot.

The prostration

Namaskāra (नमस्कार) means "making namas", making homage, bowing. In India the full prostration, in which the body touches the ground, is the most complete form of homage. It is called sāṣṭāṅga praṇāma or sāṣṭāṅga namaskāra, "the bow with the eight limbs", because eight parts of the body touch the earth. You will find this gesture in position 6 of the sequence, aṣṭāṅga namaskāra.

So the two elements of the sun salutation are old: the homage to the sun at dawn, and the prostration. What is less clear is when, and where, they were joined into a fixed, flowing sequence of positions repeated many times. Here we must be careful, because many books and websites state that the sequence itself is thousands of years old. We know of no ancient text that describes it.

The Raja of Aundh and his book

The sequence enters history with a precise person and a printed book. **Bhawanrao Shrinivasrao Pant Pratinidhi** (1868-1951) ruled the small Maratha state of Aundh, in today's Maharashtra, from 1909 to 1947. He was a devoted practitioner and propagandist of the sun salutation. His book *Surya Namaskars* was first published in 1928. The fifth edition (1940, Aundh State Press) can be read in full on the Internet Archive, and we read it for this chapter. A British edition, edited with an introduction by Louise Morgan, was published in London by J. M. Dent under the title *The Ten-Point Way to Health* (1938); the preface of the fifth edition calls it the fourth edition, published in England.

What the Raja's book actually says is more interesting than the legends:

- **Ten positions, not twelve.** His salutation has ten positions, done "one after another without break", which make one namaskāra. Hence the English title. The modern twelve-position sequence adds a raised-arms position at both ends.
- **A family practice.** He says he describes "the mode of performing Surya Namaskars that was followed by the writer's worthy father, the late Chief of Aundh", who practised them for more than fifty years. He presents the method as ancient, designed by the ṛṣis; he does not claim to have invented it. Later accounts of his work report that he described the practice as already common in Marathi households.
- **Legs alternate at each salutation.** The right foot goes back first in the first salutation, the left in the second, and so on.
- **The breath through the nose only,** with the breath held in several positions: a detail that differs from most teaching today.
- **Mantras.** Each salutation is preceded, standing with joined palms, by om̐, one of six seed syllables (hr̥m̐, hr̥m̐, hr̥m̐, hr̥m̐, hr̥m̐, hr̥m̐) and one of the twelve names of the sun. He then combines them in pairs, in fours and all twelve together, so that a "round" (āvartana) is twenty-five salutations, taking "about 6 or 7 minutes" (Chapter 6).
- **For everyone.** His chart deliberately leaves out the Vedic hymns "so that it may be used by all Hindus, non-Hindus, Parsis, Christians, Mohammedans, Jews, etc." He hoped the exercise would become compulsory in schools.
- **Numbers by age.** He suggests about 25 to 60 a day for children of 8 to 12, 50 to 100 between 12 and 16, and above sixteen to "gradually increase the number up to 300 according to their capacity". He warns

against doing about a thousand a day for a few months and then dropping to about twenty-five, or stopping altogether.

- **Women.** A whole chapter addresses women, with advice on menstruation, pregnancy and the months after childbirth.

The book also makes many health claims in the style of its time (for instance about chronic constipation). We do not repeat them: they are not supported by modern evidence. Chapter 9 tells you what research does show.

Mysore and the modern schools

The second great centre of the modern sun salutation is Mysore. In the 1930s, under the patronage of the Maharaja Krishnaraja Wadiyar IV, **Tirumalai Krishnamacharya** (1888-1989) taught yoga in a hall of the Jaganmohan Palace. The historian Mark Singleton, in *Yoga Body* (Oxford University Press, 2010), reports that sun salutation classes were held at the same time in an adjoining hall of the palace, and argues that Krishnamacharya went on to make the flowing movements of *sūryanamaskār* the basis of his Mysore style. Norman Sjoman, in *The Yoga Tradition of the Mysore Palace*, suggested links with the exercises (*daṇḍ*) of Indian wrestlers. These are scholarly hypotheses, debated by other scholars; we present them as such.

What is certain is that Krishnamacharya's student **K. Pattabhi Jois** (1915-2009), who founded his institute in Mysore in 1948, made two sun salutations the opening of every Ashtanga Vinyasa practice. His book *Yoga Mala* (Kannada original 1962) calls them the first and second *sūrya namaskāra*; students today call them A and B, and a practice usually begins with five of each (Chapter 5).

Other schools fixed their own forms: the Sivananda tradition of Rishikesh, whose twelve-position sequence is close to the one in this book; the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger, whose manual *Surya Namaskara: A Technique of Solar Vitalization* (Swami Satyananda Saraswati, first edition 1973, revised 1983) links each position to a mantra, a seed syllable and a point of concentration; and many others. None of these forms is "the original". They are branches of a modern tree with very old roots.

Why 108, and the collective sessions

The number 108 is sacred in many Indian traditions: the usual *mālā* has 108 beads, deities have litanies of 108 names, and the *Muktikā Upaniṣad* lists 108 Upaniṣads. No single text gives "the" reason; several explanations circulate (12×9 , 27×4 ...), and the companion book *Sacred Mantras* presents them. For the sun salutation, the arithmetic is elegant: $108 = 9 \times 12$, nine rounds of the twelve names of the sun.

Collective sessions of 108 sun salutations are organised today by yoga centres and associations, in India and elsewhere, often around the festivals of the sun. One example we were able to check:

- On Ratha Saptamī 2021 (19 February), the Deccan Herald reported that a yoga trust in Jayanagar, Bengaluru, gathered more than 100 people, aged 10 to 70, from 5.30 in the morning to perform 108 sun salutations; another centre in the city performed 1,008 over fifteen hours.

This is a living custom in some schools and associations, not a scriptural rule, and we have found no ancient text that prescribes 108 salutations on a given day. Some groups choose Ratha Saptamī, others Makara Saṅkrānti, a solstice, the International Day of Yoga on 21 June, or simply a date of their own. You may choose yours.

Timeline at a glance

Period	What we know	Status
Ṛgveda (2nd millennium BCE, approximate)	Hymns to Sūrya and Savitrī; the Gāyatrī (3.62.10); RV 1.50.11-13	ancient text, verified
Epics and Purāṇas	Ādityahṛdaya in the Rāmāyaṇa; sun worship, sun temples	ancient, no sequence of postures
Before 1909	The Raja's father, Chief of Aundh, practises sun salutations for more than fifty years	family practice reported in 1928
1928	Surya Namaskars, first edition: ten positions, mantras, bīja	printed, verified (5th ed. 1940)
1930s	Sun salutation classes and Krishnamacharya's yoga in the Mysore palace	reported by Singleton (2010), debated
1938	British edition, The Ten-Point Way to Health, ed. Louise Morgan, J. M. Dent	published
1948-1962	Pattabhi Jois's institute (1948), Yoga Mala (1962): sun salutations A and B	published
1973	Bihar School manual on sūrya namaskāra	published
Today	Collective sessions of 108, e.g. Bengaluru 2021	press reports

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 46 pages.

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