



## To the Sun, with Love

A sense of gratitude and celebration can carry you through **108 sun salutations** and leave you saturated with love, a startling sense of clarity, and a lot of sweat.

By Shannon Wianecki

**WHEN I TELL PEOPLE** that I do 108 sun salutations each Sunday, their eyes widen with awe. They think it requires Olympic stamina. Really it's only a matter of gratitude.

A sun salutation is a series of yoga postures. Its Sanskrit name, *surya namaskar*, stems from *surya*, "sun," and *namas*, "to bow to" or "to adore." Yoga practitioners in India have been bowing to the sun for at least a century, and possibly as long as 2,500 years. Since the number 108 is considered extremely auspicious, many celebrate equinoxes and other special occasions with 108 sun salutations.

I first attempted the practice under the guidance of my teacher, Myra Lewin. I was entranced as she intoned *Vande gurunam*, the Sanskrit chant

honoring the lineage of yoga teachers. Then the movements started—an eternity of them.

Sweaty, dizzy, and dehydrated, I completed around 60 my first time. I can't be sure, because I couldn't count—or think at all, beyond wanting to quit. The second time, my teacher suggested that I approach the practice as an act of devotion. Who does not adore the sun? So, with each upward movement of my arms, I thanked the sun for nourishing the earth. I thanked the divine for giving me a strong body. My movements became fluid as one prayer led to the next.

Five years later, it's my favorite practice, one I happily anticipate each week. On the rare occasion that I dread it, I know my spiritual footing is off. Time to reassess what I'm doing.

I've learned so much from this practice: that I can commit and finish something difficult, that there is an inexhaustible power within me only gratitude can ignite. I carry this knowledge into my daily life. After purchasing my first new car, I woke in a cold sweat over the five-year loan I'd just signed. Reminding myself to breathe, I pondered: car payments can be like salutations. With each one, I can give thanks for safety, fuel efficiency, and the abundance that allows me mobility.

Yoga helps me transform every action into a spiritual endeavor. Every moment presents an opportunity for growth. The practice of *surya namaskar* is about surrender, not force. Letting my breath lead me, I can observe my thoughts and physical state from a place of serene

Start each movement with a breath.



**1 Tadasana** (mountain pose): Stand with feet directly beneath the sitting bones, hip width apart, second toes pointing forward. Lift your toes to direct your weight equally between the pads of the feet and the heels. Keep the arch in your feet as you inhale, rotate the shoulders back, and raise your arms with the breath. Extend through your torso to the top of the head. Don't arch the lower back.



**2 Uttanasana** (forward bend): Exhale, bending forward from the hips. Release the head completely.



**3 Ardha Uttanasana** (half forward bend): Inhale and fully extend the spine, rising halfway up from the hips, until muscles engage on either side of the spine.



**4** Exhale while jumping back to the **plank position**. Press your hands against the floor directly beneath the shoulders, with your body straight behind you. Look forward. Continue exhaling as you lower down to your knees, chest, and chin.

## Your Sun Salutations

Correcting your form is essential prior to doing this practice. Otherwise, you could drive injurious habits home. Make each movement as mindful and precise as possible, especially as you near the end, when fatigue can lead to sloppiness. For more thorough instruction and personalized suggestions on

detachment. Doing anything 108 times allows the impurities to surface. When my left foot doesn't come as far up as my right, when joints crackle, it's an indicator that something's awry.

A year ago, my right elbow began exhibiting sharp pains around the 60th salutation. Eventually I traced it back to how I work at my computer. I bought a more ergonomic mouse, and I focused on how I placed my hands on my yoga mat each time, ensuring that my wrists weren't kinked. The pain vanished. Without this early warning, I would still be injuring myself at my computer every day—courting carpal tunnel syndrome.

The advice “Don't give up before the miracle” applies to this practice. If I quit halfway, I'd never experience the

marvelous detoxification that occurs once my body and mind find the rhythm. Sweat is simultaneously cleansing and moisturizing. I sweat a little in the 30s, but at 50, fat drops roll off my forehead. My nose generally starts to run around 70. At 100, I feel saturated with love and a startling clarity.

In actuality, the practice includes 109 salutations—the final one an offering to the guru within. Afterward, I stand with eyes closed and feel the prana (life force) coursing through me. Then, to balance the repetitive movements, I do some twists, backbends, inversions, and a 10-minute *svanasana* (corpse pose).

After this sacred practice, I reward myself with fresh, hydrating coconut water. I feel rejuvenated and energized—ready for a new week. ◀

correcting your alignment, consult a certified yoga teacher.

There are many versions of *surya namaskar*. This one substitutes baby cobra for upward dog, as 108 times can be too much for the shoulders. The entire series might take between 40 and 50 minutes. Faster is not better!



**5** Inhale as you slide forward to **baby cobra**: Press your legs together, reach your tailbone slightly toward the heels, lift and extend the chest, and raise the hands one inch above the floor.



**6** **Adho mukha svanasana** (downward-facing dog): Exhale, press into your forefingers and thumb pads, raise your tailbone, and lift your knees off the floor. Avoid hyperextending the elbows.



**7** Inhale, jumping up to **uttanasana** (forward bend): Use the breath to “float” up. Aim for a silent takeoff and landing. Exhale and release the head completely.



**8** **Tadasana** (mountain pose): Inhale, and rise to standing, hands in namaste.