

Selected Reflections from my yoga journey...

*As part of my project, in addition to taking time each morning to practice sun salutations, I made sure to journal thoughts, feelings, and ideas that came to me during the practice or throughout the day. I selected these because I think they touch on relevant themes that reoccurred throughout my reflections and summarize the importance of rituals and yoga in creating my personal connection to the environment.*

- ❖ Today was my first morning sun salutations, and I have to admit – I was cranky when I had to wake up 15 minutes early to do yoga. Last night I was up late working and even getting those 15 more minutes would have seemed totally worthwhile at the time. But I persevered and got up. It was the best move I made all day – I was so energized and so much calmer and upbeat for the rest of the day.
- ❖ It's amazing how much yoga warms your body up. Within a few minutes I can feel my blood really moving and my joints stretching out. After even a quick 15 minutes of practice, it feels like my body is humming. I was doing some reading about yogic principles and came across some interesting material about *prana* – the yogic vital life force. *Prana* is brought into your body through breath (and sun light!), and revitalizes your body and mind. This must be the hum that I feel – a fresh breath of life and vitality.
- ❖ In addition to doing sun salutations every morning, I wanted to read a bit about the meaning of yoga and the traditional uses of it. I read today about the history of the sun salutation. The asana is over 2,500 years old. I was amazed by this. Think of the billions of people who have gone through the same motions that I still do today. In a way, practicing yoga brings you into a community of tradition, a timeless and maybe eternal lineage. Taking time in the morning to honor that lineage and the amazing history that we can be a part of is another added dimension of this experience that I am so grateful for.
- ❖ Yoga fact: The sun salutation is actually called *Surya Namaskara* which means “sun adoration.” The *Surya Namaskara* is a ritual prayer to the Hindu sun god Surya. In the Hindu tradition, the sun is the spiritual and physical heart of the world.

“O splendid and playful sun, we offer this prayer to thee; enlighten this craving mind; be our protector; may the radiance of the divine ruler guide our destiny; wise men salute your magnificence with oblations and words of praise”.

- Hindu mantra to Surya

- ❖ The splendid and playful sun (I really like that name and am going to keep using it) was shining this morning after what felt like weeks of rain, so I decided to do my sun salutations in the back yard. This was an AWESOME decision. The sun is the other source of yogic *prana* (vital force) and I was even more energized than I normally am when I got done. I

actually cannot describe how much better I feel every single day that I take time to do this – emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Yoga does the body good in every sense. I like to think it's because of the ritual nature of the sun salutations, the physical movement (endorphins!!!) and the connection with the natural world that tuning into the sun's movements gives me.

❖ I've noticed a marked change in how in tune I *feel* with my surroundings every day. I don't know if I can describe it accurately in words, maybe it's just a heightened awareness that is both physical and mental. There are days where I feel more connected, and I think it's because I have been taking the time to physically orient myself in nature each day. *Surya Namaskara* is a ritual prayer to praise the sun. Each morning, I point myself east and thank the sun for rising – I am physically aligning myself with an ancient and timeless cycle. We lack this in our lives today; we are so freed from the constant cyclic elements of nature that we are in un-rooted, disembodied. I think that our bodies know this. They crave a connection to the cycles that we are born from, and when this element is restored in our lives we can actually feel it on some level. When we talk about ways to connect with our environment, we can't neglect to think about this physical connection and the power it has to connect us with the natural world.

❖ We are a culture rich in diversity, but poor in rituals. In particular, we lack a thanksgiving ritual. Whereas some cultures spread out their thankfulness to the earth throughout the whole year, we pack it all into one day – Thanksgiving – and then dress it up in so much consumerist propaganda that we forget what it was really about – giving thanks to the Earth for sustaining us and for neighborly love. The ritual nature of things is important – if you do something a million times, you remember it. Rote memorization and muscle memory are a testament to this. As a society, we lack this muscle memory.

For me, yoga is my spiritual and physical ritual. Every morning (almost) for the past few months, I've gotten up and thanked the sun for rising in my own ritual way. This has created a mindfulness, an awareness, an intentionality about my movements that transcends my yoga practice and spills into other facets of my life. When you intentionally take time to be thankful for just one thing, you keep finding more and more things to be thankful for. We all need to find our own rituals, find ways to bring thankfulness into our lives on a daily basis and connect with nature on a deeper and more complete level.

❖ “*Namaste*” – “the divine in me honors the divine in me.” At the end of each practice, I say this phrase but until today I didn't realize its full meaning. The divine in me honors the divine in you. At the end of a practice, there is *prana* flowing through us – the divine vital force that we breathe in during each breathe. According to Hinduism, the source of that sacred divinity is the very air around us, the sun and the wind. Through our breath we integrate our bodies with the divine earth around us. Breath is a central part of yoga, and focuses your awareness on breathing and the tangible conduit that breath is with *prana*. *Namaste*

recognizes the physical embodiment of this force in each of us; it's there if we tune into it and become aware.