



Worshipper at a tree shrine near Asi Ghat, Varanasi, North India. Photograph by Robert Moses. September 2009

NAMASKAR

THE MEANING AND THE BENEFITS

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THE WORD *NAMASKAR* IS DERIVED from the root *namaha*, which means paying obeisance or salutation.

**स्वावधिक उकृष्टत्व प्रतिबोधकः
अनुकुलो व्यापारः क्रिया - न्यायशास्त्र**

Namaha is a physical action expressing that 'you are superior to me in all qualities and in every way'.

WORLDLY BENEFITS

By doing namaskar to a deity or a saint, their virtues and capabilities are unknowingly impressed upon our minds. Consequently we start emulating them, thus changing ourselves for the better.

SPIRITUAL BENEFITS

Increase in humility and reduction of ego. Enhancement in the spiritual emotion of surrender and gratitude. Gaining the *sattva* component and faster spiritual progress. We receive the highest amount of *sattva* component from the posture *mudra* of namaskar.

By doing namaskar to deities or saints we receive subtle frequencies emitted by them, e.g. frequencies of *sattva* or bliss.

WHY IS IT NOT APPROPRIATE TO SHAKE HANDS?

A hand shake transfers undesirable *raja-tama* components! In short, in a handshake, the *raja-tama* components in one person will get transferred to the other person, thereby lowering his *sattvikta* (purity levels). While practicing spirituality, our objective is to perform acts which increase our *sattvikta*.

If at all namaskar is done by merely joining the palms, it is just a formality. As the act is not based on faith, the benefit derived from it is minimal. Along with faith it is essential that every religious act be correctly performed according to the *Science of Spirituality*, so that it gives complete benefit. Understanding the science will help in strengthening faith in the act. Such an act correctly performed with faith, will yield corresponding benefits.

HOW DOES ONE DO NAMASKAR TO AN INDIVIDUAL OF THE SAME AGE GROUP?

When meeting someone of the same age-group do namaskar by joining the fingers and placing tips of the thumbs on the *anahat chakra* (at the centre of the chest). This type of namaskar increases the spiritual emotion of humility in the embodied soul. *sattva* frequencies from the universe are attracted by the fingers

Editors note: Considering the current popularity of the word *namaste* as a greeting, we thought it would be useful to publish this article on the inner meanings of this traditional salutation, and the different ways it can be performed, based on scriptural references. This article was sent to Nāmarūpa by a friend. It was originally published by SANATAN SANSTHA, *The Sanatan Society for Scientific Spirituality*, founded by Dr. Jayant Athavale. See www.sanatan.org for information.

(which act as an antenna) and are then transmitted to the entire body through the thumbs which have awakened the *anahat chakra*. This activates the soul energy of the embodied soul. In addition, by doing namaskar in this manner to each other, frequencies of blessings are also transmitted.



WHAT IS CORRECT METHOD & SCIENCE OF DOING NAMASKAR TO A GOD?

A. While paying obeisance to god, bring the palms together.

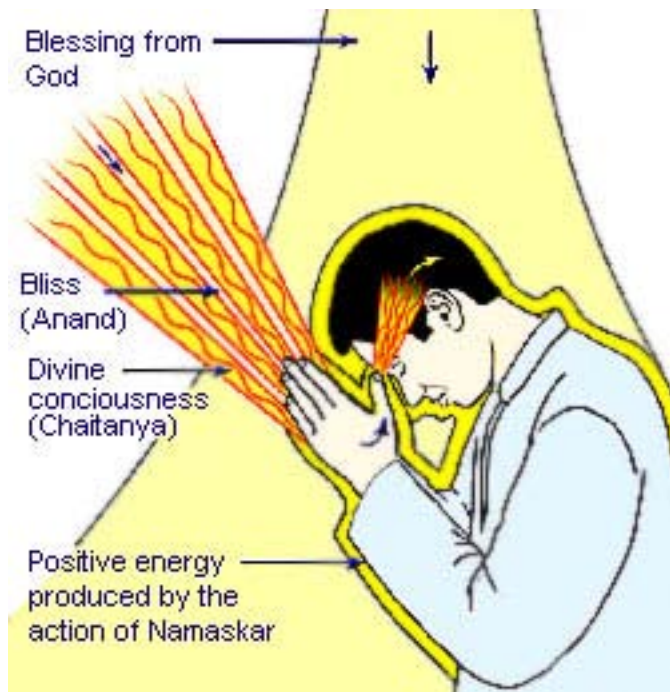
1. The fingers should be held loose (not straight and rigid) while joining the hands or palms.
2. The fingers should be kept close to each other without leaving any space between them.
3. The fingers should be kept away from the thumbs.
4. The inner portion of the palms should not touch each other and there should be some space between them.

Note: The stage of awakening of spiritual emotion *bhav* is important to the seeker at the primary level. Hence, for awakening *bhav*, he should keep space in between the joined hands, whereas a seeker who is at the advanced level should refrain from leaving such space in between the palms to awaken the unexpressed *bhav*.

B. After joining the hands one should bow and bring the head forward.

C. While tilting the head forward, one should place the thumbs at the mid-brow region, i.e. at the point between the eyebrows and try to concentrate on the feet of the deity.

D. After that, instead of bringing the folded hands down immediately, they should be placed on the mid-chest region for a minute in such way that the wrists touch the chest; then only should the hands be brought down.



UNDERLYING SCIENCE IN THIS ACTION

A. The fingers should not be stiff while bringing the palms together because this will lead to a decrease in *sattva* component from the vital and mental sheaths and thus increase the *raja* component in them. By keeping the fingers relaxed, the subtlest *sattva* component will get activated. With the strength of this energy, embodied souls are able to fight powerful distressing energies.

B. In the *namaskar* posture, the joined fingers act as an antenna to assimilate the *chaitanya* (divine consciousness) or the energy transmitted by a deity. While joining the palms, the fingers must touch each other because leaving space between the fingers will result in accumulation of energy in that space. This energy will be immediately transmitted in various directions; therefore the seeker's body will lose the benefit of this potent energy.

C. About the space to be maintained between the palms:

For a seeker at the primary level, it is advisable to leave space between the palms; it is not necessary for a seeker at an advanced level to leave space between the palms.

D. After joining the palms, bow a little. This posture puts pressure on the navel



and activates the five vital energies situated there. Activation of these vital energies in the body makes it sensitive to accepting *sattvik* frequencies. This later awakens the *atma shakti* (isoul energy). And later, *Bhav* is awakened. This enables the body to accept in large measures the *chaitanya* emitted by the deity.

E. Touch the thumbs to the mid-brow region. (Please see images above.) This

posture awakens the *bhav* of surrender in an embodied soul, and in turn activates the appropriate subtle frequencies of deities from the universe. They enter through the *ajna chakra* (sixth chakra) of the embodied soul and settle in the space parallel to it at the back interior of the head. In this space the openings to all the three channels converge; namely, the moon, the central and the sun channels.

Due to the movement of these subtler frequencies in this space, the central channel is activated. Consequently it facilitates the speedy transmission of these frequencies throughout the body, leading to purification of both the gross and subtle bodies at the same time.

F. After doing namaskar, to completely imbibe the chaitanya of the deity (that has entered the hands by now), instead of bringing the folded hands down immediately, place them on the mid-chest region in such a way that the wrists touch the chest.

The *anahat chakra* is located at the centre of the chest. Akin to the ajna chakra, the activity of the anahat chakra is also to absorb the sattva frequencies. By touching the wrists to the chest, the anahat chakra is activated and it helps in absorbing more of the sattva component.

EFFECT OF THIS POSTURE

By doing namaskar in this manner, the deity's chaitanya is absorbed to a greater extent by the body, as compared to other methods of doing namaskar. This gives maximum distress to negative energies. The negative energies that have manifested in a person are unable to touch their thumbs at the mid-brow region in namaskar.

QUESTION

What is the reason for not wrapping a cloth around the neck while performing circumambulation, doing namaskar, ritualistic worship, sacrificial fires, chanting and while visiting Guru and deities?

ANSWER

When a cloth is wrapped around the neck, it does not activate the *vishuddha chakra* (in the throat region) and hence an individual gets less benefit of the sattva component.



WHY SHOULD ONE ALWAYS DO NAMASKAR TO ELDERS?

ऊर्ध्वं प्राणा ह्युत्क्रामन्ति यूनः स्थविर आयति ।
प्रत्युत्थानाभिवादाभ्यां पुनस्तान्प्रतिपद्यते

When an elderly person arrives, the vital energy of the young person starts rising and when he gets up and does namaskar, it returns to normal.

Manusmriti 2.120;
Mahabharat, Udhhyog, Chapter
(Section) 38.1, Sr. no. 104, 64-65

EXPLANATION

As the sojourn of the elderly person is gradually towards the southern direction, that is, towards the region of Lord *Yama* (towards death), his body starts emitting raja and tama frequencies on a high scale. When such an elderly person comes in the vicinity of any younger individual, these frequencies start affecting the younger person. A subtle magnetic field is created between the two. Consequently, the vital energy of the younger person is pulled upward. This way the younger person can suffer due to sudden momentum to his vital energy. When this younger person does namaskar to the elderly person, some amount of the central channel of his kundalini system is activated and the sattva component in it starts

increasing. Consequently the raja and tama components in him are influenced by the sattva component and the vital energy comes back to normal state. Hence on arrival of an elderly person, it is customary for the younger individuals to do namaskar to them.'

DOING NAMASKAR TO ELDERS

Q: When travelling, prior to the commencement of a journey and upon returning, why should one do namaskar to elders in the family?

A: Namaskar to the elders in the family is one way of surrendering to the god principle in them. When an embodied soul bows in namaskar to an elder by surrendering to the god principle in him, at that time a sense of compassion is created in his body. This compassion percolates right upto his subtle body. At that time, energy of his mind is activated and in turn activates the five vital energies, which are located at the seat of the *manipur chakra* (situated in the naval region). Transmission of these five vital energies all over the body then awakens the soul energy. With the strength of the soul energy, the central channel gets activated and converts the expressed energy of spiritual emotion to the unexpressed energy of spiritual emotion. With the help of this unexpressed energy of spiritual

emotion, the embodied soul, through the medium of elders, gains the required deity's principle from the universe. For this purpose, while leaving the house on a journey, the embodied soul should do namaskar to elders and with the strength of sattva frequencies has to protect himself from distressing frequencies in the atmosphere. Similarly, returning from a journey, one should immediately do namaskar to elders and awaken the god principle in them, which would disintegrate the raja-tama particles from the air around him, which might have been brought along.

WHAT IS THE CORRECT METHOD OF DOING NAMASKAR TO SAINTS?

1. The portion of head, which should be placed at the feet :

We can imbibe maximum *chaitanya* through the *brahmarandhra* (the seventh chakra of the kundalini system located in the crown of our head). Since the brahmarandhra cannot be placed at a saint's feet, the part of head beginning above the forehead is to be placed at the feet. Due to this, maximum chaitanya emanating from Their feet can enter into the one doing namaskar.

2. The exact spot to place one's head on a saint's feet:

The big toes of saints emit maximum chaitanya; hence we should place our head on the big toe, than on their foot. If we are in a position to touch both the toes, then place the head on the right big toe.

3. The position of hands when placing the head on a saint's feet:

A. Some interlock their hands behind their backs at the waist and do namaskar. If we are in a position to touch both their toes, then we should place the hands one on each foot and the head should be placed on the big toe of the right foot. If we are in a position to touch one of Their toes, then place both the hands on it and keep the head on the big toe.

B. Some do namaskar by placing hands on the ground. This is also wrong because if the hands are placed on the ground then the chaitanya emanating from the saint's feet are absorbed by one and then returns to the earth through the hands of the one doing namaskar. Thus the person does not benefit from it.

C. Some cross their hands and place them on the feet of saints, that is, their right hand on the right foot of the saint and their left hand on the left foot of the saint while doing namaskar. Instead, our right hand should be placed on the left foot of the saint and our left hand on the right foot of the saint. This is convenient also. However, if a *guru* has started some procedure in a particular sect, then the hands are to be placed in that manner only.

D. The hands are to be positioned in such a way that the palms are placed on the feet.

SHOULD ONE DO NAMASKAR TO A DEAD BODY?

Q: If this be so, should we do namaskar to the dead bodies in *Kaliyuga* only as a custom? If it is a custom, can we discontinue it?

A: One can maintain respect for the dead person by doing namaskar and in addition set an ideal with regards to respecting elders. In *Kaliyuga* one will benefit from this at an emotional level and not at a spiritual level. However, one should not discontinue this custom; instead one could learn how to get spiritual benefit from it. Due to the



HOW TO DO NAMASKAR TO THE WOODEN FOOTWEAR PADUKA OF SAINTS?

The left paduka symbolises Lord Shiva and the right symbolises Divine Energy. The left paduka is the unmanifest saviour energy and the right is the unmanifest destroyer energy of the Supreme God. The saviour or destroyer energy of the Supreme God emanates from the 'pegs' of the paduka as per the need. When we do namaskar by placing our head on the 'pegs' of the paduka, some may experience distress due to the inability to tolerate the manifest energy emitting from it. Hence, while doing namaskar to the paduka, instead of the pegs, place the head on the foremost part i.e. the place where the saints place their toes.

deterioration of the sattva component in embodied souls, this practice has become a mere custom in *Kaliyuga*.

However, as per the saying, '*God exists where there is spiritual emotion*', while doing namaskar to a dead body if we have a spiritual emotion that we are doing namaskar to the god principle in it, then the god principle in the dead body awakens and we receive god's blessings. This happens because the god principle is immortal and has no limitations that a physical body has.

Q: It is said that one should not do namaskar to a sleeping person. In *Kaliyuga* if one does namaskar by touching the dead body, then are the

chances of getting distress from negative energies not higher?

A: Yes it is; but while doing namaskar it is important that the action be performed with correct spiritual emotion. Since namaskar is done to the god principle in the dead body instead of activating raja, tama components, it activates the godly principle in the dead body and bestows sattva corresponding to the degree of spiritual emotion.'

'ONE HAND' TOUCH TO THE TEMPLE STEPS

ACTION: Touch the step with the fingers of the right hand and move the same hand over the head.

SCIENCE: The area around the temple is charged with frequencies of deities which leads to an increase in the sattva component. The presence of divine consciousness in the area charges even the stairs in a temple. 'Climbing' steps is one of the activities, which increases the raja component in the body. Hence, the raja component is already activated in the body of an embodied soul so by touching the steps with the fingers of the right hand, the sattva component and peace from the charged premise, get transmitted to the body through the right hand. In addition, from this action, the activated raja component in the body can be controlled through the medium of the *surya nadi* (sun channel). This means that, for a moment, the activities of the sun channel can be stopped. From this process, the embodied soul learns to enhance the sattva component through raja dominant actions. Therefore, it is very essential to perform the appropriate sattvik actions at each corresponding level, hence the method of touching the steps with fingers of the right hand and then moving the fingers or palm over the head. Even the dust present on the steps is charged with chaitanya and so we must respect it and derive spiritual benefit from it. If the embodied soul harbours the spiritual emotion that 'the chaitanya from the steps be transmitted all over my body from the dust on my hand', then it will give increasing benefit to the embodied soul. In addition if the ego of the embodied soul is less at that time then it gives even more benefit.

When any action is performed devoid of ego or 'ness it is treated as a 'non-action' *akarma-karma*.

DO'S AND DONT'S WHILE DOING NAMASKAR

Q: Why should the eyes be closed while doing namaskar?

A: Joining hands while bowing the head amounts to saluting god or the divinity in the person in front. The eyes are closed while doing namaskar to god or any respected person, to enable one to have the vision of god within us.

Q: Why should the footwear be taken off while doing namaskar?

A: *While sitting, partaking meals, sleeping, wishing and doing namaskar to Gurus and other elderly people, footwear should not be worn.*

Gautamsmruti 9

1. Footwear increases the raja-tama components in a person.
2. Paying obeisance (namaskar) with high raja-tama components will not help in activating the kundalini.
3. The ability to absorb the sattva component too is reduced, due to an increase in the raja-tama components, leading to little benefit from a namaskar.
4. Doing namaskar to a deity, with footwear on, may also invite the wrath of the deity.

Q: Why is it not advisable to hold any object while doing namaskar?

A: 1. While doing namaskar if an object is held in the hands, usually the fingers and their tips are in a curled position and not straight. As a result, the sattva component received is unable to enter the tips of the fingers.

2. The sattva component emitted towards the seeker, strikes the object held and bounces back. Also, at times, instead of the person absorbing the sattva component, the object may absorb it.

3. If the object in the hand is raja or tama predominant, and if it is touched to the forehead or chest while doing namaskar, then the raja-tama components from it

may enter the body of the one who is doing namaskar.

Q: While doing namaskar, why are men not supposed to cover their head, whereas women are advised to cover their head?

A: *One should not do namaskar with footwear on, covering the head or holding any objects. (But women should cover their head with their saris and only then do namaskar)*

Apastamb Dharmasutra 1.4.14.19

While doing namaskar the kundalini gets activated at the chakra which is touched by the folded hands. This leads to the absorption of the sattva component in greater proportion in the body. Sometimes due to the activation of the kundalini, sattva component starts entering the body through the head. But at times the distressing energies try to take advantage of this and mix black energy with the sattva component. The potential to activate the kundalini is higher in men as compared to women. Hence they are hardly affected by this negative energy. Contrary to this, as women are more vulnerable, they get affected by distressing energies to a greater extent and thus they can experience distress. That is why, when doing namaskar, women are advised to cover their head with the ends of their sari. This creates a barrier between the head and the distressing energies and prevents them from penetrating the body of the woman. However, to some extent this also blocks benevolent frequencies from entering the women. (Benevolent frequencies are subtler than negative frequencies; hence they enter a woman to some extent even though the sari covers her head.) However, the proper posture of namaskar gives maximum sattva component to an individual and hence women too get required benefits. This shows how god takes care of every devotee. Doing namaskar without these restrictions is equally effective if the devotee does it with spiritual emotion. ❖