

Namasté: I Bow to You and You Bow to Me
by Karen Allgire, MFA, RYT, Certified Iyengar Yoga Instructor
Copyright Karen Allgire 2007

There is a beautiful song on the *Yoga Kids* video that sums up the meaning of namasté in a simple, yet profound way.

*The light in me sees the light in you.
Bow to me, I bow to you.
Namaste, namaste, I am the light and the light is me.
Namaste, namaste, I bow to you and you bow to me.*

In the context of yoga class, *namasté* often is used as a word of greeting or parting, expressing mutual good will, appreciation and respect. In India and South Asia, it often is used when either “hello” or “goodbye” would be used in English, but the meaning of namasté is much deeper. “Nama” means to bow, “as” means I, and “té” means you. So namasté literally means “I bow to you.” The word namasté is normally accompanied by a gesture. The palms press together with the hands placed just in front of the breastbone and a slight bow of the head is made while saying namasté. As a deeper form of respect, it also can be done by placing the hands together in front of the forehead, bowing the head and then bringing the hands down to the heart.

These gestures are rich with meaning. When we bring the folded hands to the breastbone, we come into a more centered state as our awareness is brought to the heart center. The physical position opens the chest and allows a fuller and more relaxed breath. Folding the palms together in front of the heart is a universal gesture of reverence. It helps connect the head to the heart and brings a moment of reflection. The bow of the head symbolizes the ego surrendering to the deep inner wisdom of the soul. The head is humbled to the heart in this quietly profound salute.

There also is symbolic meaning when the two palms touch. In this gesture, or *mudra*, one hand denotes the higher spiritual nature while the other denotes the worldly self. Joining the hands represents integration of spirit and matter. In another description, the right hand represents the feet of the divine and the left palm represents the head of the devoted aspirant. The feet of the divine are considered the ultimate balm for all suffering and the head represents the individual ego. Symbolically joining the head to the feet of the divine, we surrender and become receptive to the flow of divine grace and solace.

Namasté is the recognition of the divinity within us and within all beings. When we humble the head to the heart, we sublimate the ego’s control and recognize the deeper wisdom that resides within us. In that same salute, we also humble ourselves in recognition of the divinity within others. When we say namasté, we acknowledge that everyone is our teacher, that everyone deserves love and respect and that we all have infinite capacity for spiritual awakening.

There are many translations of namasté, or the more respectful form, *namaskar*. While some are similar, it is inspiring to reflect on the various shades of meaning in each translation.

- ❖ Reverence to the divine within you.
- ❖ The light in me sees the light in you.
- ❖ The spirit in me meets the same spirit in you.

- ❖ I greet that place where you and I are one.
- ❖ I salute the light of God in you.
- ❖ Reverential salutation to your inner being.
- ❖ I recognize that within each of us is a place where divinity dwells, and when we are in that place, we are one.

As we become accustomed to using the term namasté, it easily can become a casual greeting or yoga class convention. It is good to stay mindful of the deeper meaning of the word and gesture. When we offer each other this sacred salutation, we have the opportunity to remember that we are all connected to each other and to the divine. In that moment we can move beyond the constant demands of the ego for gratification and unite in a state that is timeless, silent and peaceful. In sharing namasté, we invite each other to experience a moment of unity, joined heart to heart, when we are all one. In that moment of connection, there are no divisions and no confusion, only peace and bliss.