

COMMON SANSKRIT TERMINOLOGY

ASANA

Yoga poses are referred to as 'asana', and when someone uses the term 'asana practice', they are simply referring to the physical practice of poses. For convenience, the Sanskrit word 'asana' has come to mean 'pose', however more correctly the translation means 'seat'. With this translation in mind, one can consider asana to be the 'seat of any given yoga pose'. Note that the Sanskrit name of yoga poses ends with 'asana'. For example, *Tadasana* (Mountain Pose), *Trikonasana* (Triangle Pose).

PRANAYAMA

Breathing regulation exercises in yoga are called 'Pranayama'. More correctly, pranayama refers to the regulation of 'prana' which is life force energy carried on the breath.

SAVASANA

Translated as "Corpse Pose", Savasana is a pose in which students relax resting flat on their back. This pose is usually the final pose of a yoga class, however, it's use is not limited to the end of a class.

DRISHTI

A drishti is a focused gaze held on a steady point, with eyes either open or closed. Used in meditation or while holding poses, a drishti can help maintain balance in a pose, enhance concentration and focus, and is said to 'help you to see the world as it really is.'

SURYA NAMASKAR

Translated as 'Salute to the Sun' (or 'Sun Salutation'), Surya Namaskar is a particular sequence of asana joined together in a vinyasa style flow that effectively strengthens and stretches major areas of the body, improves posture and balances the body and mind. Traditionally performed 108 times facing the rising sun, Surya Namaskar is regularly used as a warm-up sequence in a yoga class.

BANDHA

Translated, Bandha means 'Dam', and refers to a muscular contraction used in yoga to block, contain and re-direct the flow of prana (life force) in the body. Consider how a dam is used to block, re-direct or contain water. Bandhas can be applied in different areas of the body to control the circulation of the energy system. Two commonly used bandhas are:

1. Mula Bandha (Pelvic Floor Lock, or 'Root' Lock)
2. Uddiyana Bandha (Abdominal Lock, or the 'Upward Flying' Lock).

MUDRA

A Mudra is a gesture (usually of the hands) used to affect the body's subtle energy system. Rather than executing an isolated muscular contraction to manipulate prana (as per bandha activation), a mudra is typically a body position which facilitates an alteration of our energy system. Translated, mudra means "seal". (Consider the seal of a bottle containing the contents within). By changing the position of our hands, we have the ability to influence our physical, emotional and mental energies. Mudras help to link the brain to the body, and can aid concentration, soothe pain, stimulate endorphins, change mood and increase vitality! Two common mudras used in a yoga class are:

1. Anjali Mudra (Hands joined in a prayer-like position at the chest - used commonly during asana practice and in salutation to another)
2. Gyan Mudra (The index finger and thumb tip connected with the remaining fingers extended - used commonly in meditation and pranayama).

CHAKRA

In yoga, chakras are major hubs for the energy system of the body. They are structured as 'spinning wheels' of energy within us, keeping us vibrant and healthy. The direct translation of the word chakra is 'wheel'. (Consider a spinning 'pin wheel' driven on wind energy). There are 7 main chakras which run along the spine drawing in, charging and emanating pranic energy (life force). Each chakra has a Sanskrit name and is associated with different expressions of life. They 7 main chakras are:

1. Root Chakra (Connectivity to earth and tribe)
2. Sacral Chakra (Femininity and creativity)
3. Solar Plexus Chakra (Personal power and identity)
4. Heart Chakra (Love)
5. Throat Chakra (Expression and communication)
6. Brow Chakra (Insight and clarity)
7. Crown Chakra (Connection to pure consciousness)

MANTRA

Mantras are utterances that quieten the mind and foster positive states of being. Derived from two Sanskrit words, 'Manas' (meaning 'to think' or 'mind') and Tra (meaning 'vehicle'), a mantra is literally a vehicle for the mind, transporting us beyond our thoughts. In yoga, there are many Sanskrit mantras (from simple one syllable mantras like 'Om' to lengthy and complex mantras), as well as modern, English mantras. In yoga, mantras can be recited repeatedly as a form of meditation, and can also be chanted just once (especially in synchronisation with others) to centre and unite energies. An example of this is the united chanting of a single 'Om' at the start or conclusion of a yoga class.