

Namaste

Written by Shelley Lowther
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It is perhaps the most common question a new yoga student has, but may never ask: "What does Namaste mean and why do people say it in yoga class?"

"Nama" means "bow," "as" means "I," and "te" means "you," so, literally, Namaste means "I bow to you." I have heard many expounded translations, but one of the most beautiful and complete is from Ram Dass, the Western Buddhist and 1960's activist:

I honor the place in you in which the entire universe dwells.

I honor the place in you which is of love, of truth, of light and of peace.

When you are in that place in you,

And I am in that place in me,

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We are one.

While the word Namaste is often used in India as a greeting, an everyday salutation, it has, as illustrated by Dass, a much deeper meaning to yogis. It signifies the deep respect that yogis have for themselves and those around them. It represents the Divine spark in all of us, the miracle that is human life.

The word Namaste is often spoken along with the gesture. We close our eyes, bow our head and press the palms together at the heart, the Heart Chakra, or energy center. This gesture is also known as Anjali Mudra, which literally means Heart Gesture. It represents the yogic belief that there is a Divine spark in each of us, located deep within the heart chakra.

The heart chakra represents love. In Namaste, we bring our hands to our Heart Chakra to signify the presence of the Divine love in all of us and to increase the flow of that energy. By closing our eyes and bowing our heads, we are decreasing the distractions around us and tuning in to that Divine energy.

Namaste has a special significance between teacher and student. At the end of a yoga class, the teacher will often bow her head, bring her hands to heart center and offer the gesture of Namaste to indicate the mutual respect between teacher and students. Likewise, students respond in the same manner to indicate their gratitude for the class and for the energy offered by the other students.

The gesture is symbolic of the harnessing of vital energy, of a collaboration between spirits for a common goal. Yoga has been described as a deeply personal practice that is best practiced in a room full of people, allowing practitioners to create energy and feel the cosmic vibration that comes from letting go of ego, of competition and of just being in the moment. The energy and synergy created in a yoga class is embodied in Namaste.

To paraphrase John Friend, the founder of Anusara Yoga, on the meaning of Namaste: *I see*

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you; I see the Divine in you; I see your resplendent essence, and all I can do is bow.

Namaste.