

“Nature” or source in the Samkhya system (darshan) of Indian philosophy is called *Prakriti*. It is the material nature in its germinal state, eternal and beyond perception. When prakriti (matter, female) comes into contact with purusha (pure consciousness, male), it starts on a process of evolution that leads through several stages to the creation of the existing material world.

Prakriti is made up of three gunas (qualities of matter: Sattva, Rajas and Tamas), which are the constituent cosmic factors that characterise the whole of nature. But all material manifestations of nature (mineral, vegetal and animal) are made primarily of a combination of the 5 elements. These five elements are earth, water, fire, air and ether (light, life, consciousness, space).

#### 1. **The Earth** (*Prithvi*) Element

The Earth element is the main principle of stability. Earth is sometimes called “Humid fully manifested”. The Earth element is solid, gross, hard, and dense. The Earth element gives form and shape, structure, and strength.

#### 2. **The Water** (*Jala*) Element

It refers to the water that flows through our veins and the circulatory system in the body. The water element contains the qualities of liquidity and fluidity. The Water will impart on the vital quality of binding. The water element is the main principle of cohesion.

#### 3. **The Fire** (*Agni*) Element

It refers to the internal warmth that is produced by certain postures, especially standing postures. The fire element generates heat, power and resolve. In our practice the fire is experienced as intensity and abundance.

#### 4. **The Air** (*Vayu*) Element

It refers to both the breath and creating space in a body. The breath is the main basics of yoga. The pace of the breath regulates the speed of the movement. The Air Element is related to movement, to constant motion. The qualities of the air element include sensitivity, motion, cool and subtle presence.

#### 5. **The Ether** (*Akasha*) Element

The qualities of the ether element include light, subtleness, and are related to actions such as expansion and non-resistance. It feels like stillness; but also freedom and awareness.

When we practise asanas that relate to elements of nature, we are able to reconnect with these elements in ourselves. Our body/mind is also part of nature and by focusing on the body, breath, and mind we can reach a higher level of inner mindfulness.

Surely enough when we are in the presence of something truly beautiful in nature, we can feel it in our body/mind; whether it is a starry night sky, an ancient tree, a sunset, a full moon or a full bloomed flower. We feel so small. However this feeling of smallness means that we are not trapped inside our own egos anymore. We become a part of nature and not apart from it. In this process of shrinking the ego, we sense, not just at the head level but at the heart level, that there is a joyous, loving interconnection between us and all life. By seeking unity with our own primal nature within our Yoga practice, our deepest heart becomes clear and peaceful.

Here are a few postures that may illustrate that point:

#### **Tree Pose** (*vrksasana*)

Tree pose, like all the other plants, refers to all elements: the earth in which the tree is planted, the water and the fire of the sun that is the tree’s food, the air that allows photosynthesis and finally the space that contains all other elements.

However, the essence of Tree Pose is to find balance. Balance is not found in this pose in a rigid manner, such as one might associate with a balanced ballet position. In Tree Pose, your body may sway, like a tree does in the wind, but your foot stays rooted into the ground. This freedom for your body to move and find its balance while you envision being rooted in the ground develops your spiritual acceptance of your body's position in space.

**Lotus Pose** as well as all the meditative postures variations (*padmasana*)

The lotus flower is a symbol of purity, and the Lotus Pose is a frequent pose for meditation and pranayama, or breathing exercises. Breath is the purifying power in the human body; deep, slow breathing purifies and energises our bodies. This spiritual meaning of the lotus flower is transferred into yoga asana practice in the form of the seated meditation posture.

**Flower Pose** (*Vikasitakamalasana*)

A true floral yoga pose! It is also known as Flowering Lotus. The benefits of this pose are increasing balance and core strength. This pose helps mindfulness. If you do this exercise with several people at once and you put your feet together, you can form a new, bigger blossoming flower together! (to keep in mind for later in the year). This is how to do it:

*Sit on your seat bones, bend your knees and put the soles of your feet together. Lengthen your back, take a deep breath and then raise your legs a bit. Balance your seat bones and cross your arms crosswise under your legs. Your palms are facing up.*

**Sun salutation** (*Surya Namaskar*)

Due to a beautiful combination of the variability and repetitive nature of Surya Namaskar, it allows individuals to perform a self-motivated practice without getting bored or mindless; and since it is repetitive in nature one becomes able to immerse oneself in the practice. Adding mantras during the practice provides harmony within and produces soothing vibrations that remove fatigue. Visualising the sun in one's heart centre brings a sense of peace and wholeness.

The body is equipped with the innate intelligence to produce energy from the sun directly. The mind, through the solar plexus; the body, through physical movement; and the spirit, through the chants, all get a boost from the practice of Surya Namaskar. Therefore, it is a complete workout for mind, body and soul.

**Moon salutation** (*Chandra Namaskar*) is a sequence which reveres and honours the energy of the moon. Sun and moon salutations complement each other perfectly, as they embrace the opposite interconnected energy.

Chandra Namaskar is considered more yin in nature than the intrinsically yang Surya Namaskar. As such, Chandra Namaskar is a more cooling, meditative sequence of postures, which ideally is practised in the evening. It can also be used in the same practice as Surya Namaskar in order to balance their dynamic energy.



*Sixt Fer à cheval, cascades, 2010*