

Fire Yoga

A “Do It Yourself” Guide

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What is Yoga

The literal meaning of “yoga” is “merging two into one”. Yoga is well-known today as a system of physical postures and breathing exercises that promote physical well-being and calmness of mind. That is only the outer meaning and purpose of yoga. The real meaning of yoga is to uncover the divine within one’s consciousness and merge the individual consciousness with cosmic consciousness. For that, physical well-being and mental calmness are useful but not sufficient. There is more to yoga than physical postures and breathing exercises.

Fire and Divinity

Fire is the creative, purifying and transformational agent. Fire represents energy. Modern forms of energy such as electricity and inner forms such as psychic energy that facilitates perceptions, thoughts and emotions and nerve currents that enable all sensory experiences, are all different manifestations of fire. Fire in its various forms runs the universe and is essential for various life processes within us, at the physical, mental and spiritual levels.

No wonder fire is considered sacred and a connection to divinity, in several religions. Hindus, Zoroastrians, ancient Greco-Romans, Buddhists and native Americans are some groups that are known to have treated fire as sacred and worshipped god in fire.

In Judaism and Christianity also, sacred fire is maintained in candles at synagogues and churches. Ten Commandments were revealed to Moses by god in the form of a “pillar of fire” atop Mount Sinai. Menorah with 7 lamps¹ is an important component of Judaism. In Judaism, *Korban Olah* or whole offering² consisted of completely burning animals in the *mizbe’ah* or altar. Altars for fire offerings were constructed by Noah³, Abraham⁴, Isaac⁵, Jacob⁶ and Moses⁷.

New Testament refers to baptism with fire. John the Baptist says, “*I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I – He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*” (MATTHEW 3:11). Purification with fire is superior to purification with water. Note that fire is clubbed with Holy Spirit here. Also in other places in New Testament, Holy Spirit is mentioned to manifest as “tongues of flame”.

¹ It seems to correspond to 7 tongues of fire mentioned in Hinduism.

² It seems to correspond to “poornaahuti” (whole offering) of Hindu fire ritual of homam.

³ And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and **offered burnt offerings on the altar.** [GENESIS 8:20]

⁴ And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. [GENESIS 22:9]

⁵ And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well. [GENESIS 26:25]

⁶ And he erected there an altar, and called it EleloheIsrael. [GENESIS 33:20]

⁷ And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Adonai-nissi. [EXODUS 17:15]

Fire Yoga

Fire connects the physical world to the spiritual world. Fire is a representative of god on earth. It is an energy form that one can see with eyes and feel.

One can use an external fire to enkindle the internal fire, by resonance. When the internal fire burns brightly, it burns bad qualities and weaknesses inside one⁸ and purifies one. It prepares individual consciousness for a communion with the cosmic consciousness (yoga) and a long-lasting divine bliss. *That* is Fire Yoga.

One can visualize divine presence in fire and offer materials and thoughts into fire. By resonance, external fire will enkindle internal fire. That will enhance one's concentration, mental focus and peace. It is a fast track for connecting with the divine, burning impurities in one's individual consciousness, accelerating internal transformation and merging the individual consciousness with cosmic consciousness someday.

Fire reduces everything it comes in contact with to a common substance, *i.e.* ash. Similarly the internal fire of wisdom that burns inside us reduces all objects perceived by one's mind to a common substance, *i.e.* the underlying divinity in all of us. When that happens, one's mind is filled with peace and bliss. Though the internal fire of wisdom does not burn well in most people, it can be made to burn stronger through fire yoga. Internal fire resonates to the external fire and gets strengthened over time due to fire yoga.

Even 20 minutes spent every day – or an hour or two every week – in front of fire with a sense of sacredness and reverence can make a lot of difference to one's state of mind and make it more focused, calm and peaceful over time. The proof of the pudding is in eating it. One can try it and see for oneself what it can do.

Religion and Fire Yoga

Fire yoga is religion agnostic. The sacredness of fire and the ability of fire to purify one's consciousness is universal. As shown above, seers of several religions used fire to purify themselves and reach god.

If one is open to trying fire yoga, one need not worry about whether one's god can be reached through fire or not. People have the notion that there are different gods who created different people. But the fact is that one god created this whole universe and god is beyond forms, beyond knowing, beyond understanding and beyond describing. People who have experienced different aspects of this one god have given different names and descriptions and different paths to reach god.

Despite the existence of many religions and many notions of god today, one thing we can declare confidently is that god is one and all religions are different attempts to reach that one god or cosmic consciousness. *Infinite* god cannot be captured *completely* by anything *finite*, including religion. God can be realized only through internal experience and not through reading books or intellectual discussions or hearing about someone else's description of god.

Fire yoga is an accelerated method to bring internal transformation and uncover the divine within. It is not without reason that fire is considered sacred in many religions and cultures and used as a medium to connect with the divine. However, one need not jettison one's own Faith and concept of god in order to take advantage of fire yoga and approach god via the medium of fire.

Some Helpful Guidelines

⁸ Christianity refers to Fire being sent from heaven to earth for Armageddon. It is a metaphor for burning the bad qualities through effort, surrender to Lord and wisdom. Though some people take all things externally and literally, most scriptures use external metaphors to describe internal happenings in a spiritual seeker.

If one sticks to vegetarian food as much as possible, it will enhance the efficacy of fire yoga to bring internal transformation and clarity. At least not eating meat 12 hours before fire yoga is a good idea. Though this is not an absolute rule, it is a very helpful guideline.

Fire Yoga can be performed anytime. But one hour before or after sunrise or sunset, is particularly conducive to a pleasant fire yoga.

If one does not consume any food 1-2 hours before the fire yoga, it maximizes one's focus. Evacuate the bowels before homam and take bath. Stomach should be empty during a homam for the best experience.

Materials Needed

Must have

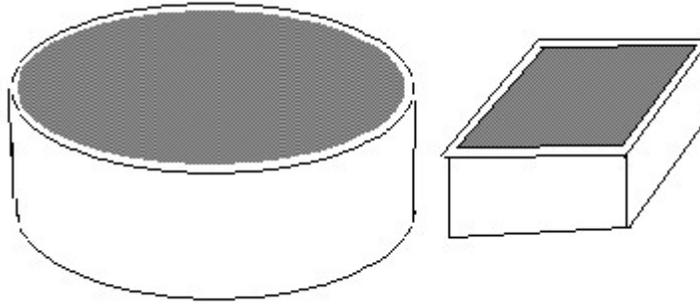
- A fire pit or a metallic container placed in fireplace or outdoors (see the section “Preparations Before Fire yoga” below for more).
- Firewood or wood pellets. Alternately, to reduce the smoke, one can use copra (dry coconut) halves that are available in Indian stores.
- Clarified butter or oil (see the section “Preparations Before Fire yoga” below for more)
- A wooden or copper spoon/ladle to offer clarified butter (or oil) into the fire.
- Camphor pieces
- Some uncooked rice grains or some other grains (e.g. wheat or barley).
- A small lamp, consisting of a wick that can be lit in sesame oil or some other oil. A candle can also be used as an alternative.
- A match box to light fire
- One tumbler/cup/glass to store water and one spoon to take water from it. They should preferably be made of silver or copper. If unavailable, you may use steel or paper or plastic.
- Some water

Optional

- Some turmeric powder and kumkum (vermilion) powder
- Some flowers or flower petals
- Sesame seeds (black or brown or white), puffed rice, puffed grains, raw grains (rice, wheat, barley *etc*), dry fruits (raisins, dates *etc*), nuts/seeds (cashews, almonds, pistachios, sunflower seeds, pumpkin seeds *etc*). Small/big fruits are also fine, if one has big enough fire to burn them. All these are optional.
- An incense stick if available to burn next to fire pit

Preparations Before Fire Yoga

Fire pit: One can do fire yoga in a fire pit. One can use any metallic container of circular or square base (see pictures below) as fire pit. One can place it in a fireplace or outdoors and do fire yoga in it. For the metallic container to be used as a fire pit, copper, silver, brass and bronze are better than steel and iron. Placing a couple of bricks on the floor with a small gap between them and placing the container on them is a good idea, so that the floor does not overheat. One can also dig an outdoor fire pit in ground and do fire yoga in it. A square with the side being 1 or 2 feet and the depth being half of the side is recommended.



Fuel for burning: Firewood or wood pellets can be burnt in fire pit. Dry coconut pieces (known as copra and available in India stores) can also be used for less smoke. Several other materials like sesame seeds, grains, dry fruits and nuts can also be offered (they are optional). Clarified butter or oil can be used to burn the materials well. The right balance of oil and dry materials ensures that things burn well and with least smoke.

Clarified butter is available in Indian stores as “ghee”. One can make it at home by melting butter in low heat and filtering out the black stuff that separates from the melted liquid. In the absence of clarified butter, one can use sesame oil or olive oil or vegetable oil also.

Other Preparations:

- (1) Fill water in the tumbler/glass/cup and place the spoon in it.
- (2) Make a seat for yourself in front of the homa kundam. Ideally you should be facing east and fire pit should be in front of you, *i.e.* fire pit should be on the east from you.
- (3) If you cannot sit on the ground, you can sit on a chair. If doing that, place the fire pit on a table higher than the chair. Ideally, the base of the fire pit should be placed higher than you.
- (4) If you are using dry coconuts, cut them into small pieces. Pieces of 1 inch x 1 inch size are useful.

Fire Yoga Procedure

Beginning

Think in your mind of Mother Earth for bearing us and providing us everything we have. Think of Lord Ganapati, a personification of an aspect within our consciousness that helps us avoid and overcome obstacles in our lives. Think of god in the way you normally think (*i.e.* as a male or female human-like form, as light, as sound or as energy). Think of your parents, ancestors, teachers, sages and seers of past, for all that they have given you.

Take a tumbler/cup/glass of water. Take three spoonfuls of water and drink it while saying: “This is for Keshava (keśava)”, “This is for Narayana (nārāyaṇa)” and “This is for Madhava (mādhava)”. While saying the three names, contemplate the aspects of god that sustain the physical, mental and spiritual realms of the creation respectively.

Take raw rice grains (or other grains) in hand. If you have turmeric or vermilion, smear the grains with it and use those colored grains. Pray to Ganapati (see explanation above): “O Ganapati (gaṇapati)! Please remove obstacles from my fire yoga”. Breathe in and breathe out slowly and calmly, with a relaxed mind. Make sure that breathing is calm and regular (agitated breathing is a sign of an agitated mind and calm breathing shows a calm mind. Mind can be controlled through control of breathing).

Now take a vow: “I shall now perform a fire yoga to the best of my ability, as a humble service to god.”

Leave the grains in your hand in the fire pit.

Early Offerings

Light the wick in the lamp (or candle). Take the water with the spoon and sprinkle a little bit on yourself and on the fire pit. Imagine that you, the fire pit and the surroundings are cleansed of negative influences and thoughts.

Take a small camphor piece, light it with the lamp and place the burning camphor piece in the middle of the fire pit while saying the following:

om bhūrbhuvassuvarom!

(O controllers of the physical, mental and spiritual realms! Amen.)

Place dry coconut pieces or wood around/above the burning camphor and make sure that they catch fire.

Now we make offerings to various *aspects* of god that are responsible for binding our awareness to a small part of the physical realm and for freeing our awareness to experience various physical, mental and spiritual realms, through the three channels through which awareness ascends – (1) solar channel of reasoning, (2) lunar channel of feeling, and (3) middle and hidden channel of direct perception. Offer five drops of clarified butter (or oil) while saying the following five:

om prajāpataye svāhā! (This is for Prajapati, Amen. NOTE: Prajapati is the aspect of god that binds our awareness to a small portion of this physical world when we are born.)

om indrāya svāhā! (This is for Indra, Amen. NOTE: Indra is the aspect of god that frees our awareness to experience various physical, mental and spiritual realms by ascending via the middle channel of *direct perception*.)

om agnaye svāhā! (This is for Agni, Amen. NOTE: Agni is the aspect of god that frees our awareness to experience various physical, mental and spiritual realms by ascending via the *solar* channel of *reasoning*.)

om somāya svāhā! (This is for Soma, Amen. NOTE: Soma is the aspect of god that frees our awareness to experience various physical, mental and spiritual realms by ascending via the *lunar* channel of *feeling*.)

om bhūrbhuvassuvaḥ svāhā! (For the controllers of the physical, mental and spiritual realms, Amen.)

Make one offering to Ganapati:

om gaṃ gaṇapataye namaḥ! svāhā! (This is for Ganapati, Amen. NOTE: Ganapati or Ganesha is a personification of an aspect within our consciousness that helps us avoid and overcome obstacles in our lives)

Main Part

Now imagine that god is in fire and will accept your offerings and prayers via fire. Think of god with the name you normally think (*e.g.* God, Almighty, Holy Ghost, Allah, Ahura Mazda, Brahman, Atman, Supreme Self, Cosmic Being, Lord Krishna, Lord Shiva, Lord Narayana, Mother Durga, Mother Mahalakshmi, Mother Parashakti, Savita *etc*) and in the way you normally think (*i.e.* as a male or female human-like form, as light, as sound or as energy). Though god is beyond forms, one may normally imagine god in a specific form based on one's taste and conditioning, to make it easier to connect.

Whatever your notion of god is, imagine that *that* god is in fire and ready to receive your offerings and prayers.

Say a sacred chant or prayer of your choice to god. Chant it as many times as you can, based on the time you can spend on this. After chanting it each time, say “svāhā” (I offer via fire) and make an offering in fire. You can offer clarified butter (or oil) and various other materials.

This sacred chant or prayer can be in any language (*e.g.* Sanskrit, Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, Greek, English, Hindi, Urdu *etc.*). If a combination of syllables was used by many people in the past in their spiritual practice, that combination becomes more powerful over time. Though you can also make up your own prayer, it is better to say a prayer that has been repeated by many spiritual seekers historically. One can find many such prayers and sacred chants in one’s own Faith and use it. For example, someone with Faith in Quran can pick a Quranic surah and use it.

When doing it, imagine that god is indeed in fire and listening to your chant and receiving your offerings and prayers. Fill the mind with reverence, humility and surrender and be thankful to fire.

If one has no preference of which sacred chant/prayer to use and is looking for suggestions, the mantra for Ganapati above (given at the end of “Early Offerings”) can be used. Imagine an elephant headed deity who is a personification of an aspect within our consciousness that helps us avoid and overcome obstacles in our lives and lends stability to our personality, character and life.

Final Offerings

Now we thank the deities (various aspects of god) controlling the experiences of our awareness. The physical, mental and spiritual realms are controlled by Fire, Wind and Sun gods. Fire, the transformer, creates the physical reality by processing the elements through the physical senses and transforming them into physical experiences. Wind, the mover, creates the mental reality to by moving the notions and concepts in the mind. Sun, the shiner, shows the spiritual reality by throwing light on the divinity in everything. Every being of this universe, every object, every experience and every notion is created, sustainer and destroyed by the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer aspects of god. We thank them too.

Say the following lines and offer a drop of clarified butter (or oil) in the fire after each line:

om bhūḥ agnaye svāhā (This is for Fire, the controller of the physical realm, Amen.)

om bhuvāḥ vāyave svāhā (This is for Wind, the controller of the mental realm, Amen.)

om suvāḥ sūryāya svāhā (This is for Sun, the controller of the spiritual realm, Amen.)

om bhūrbhuvassuvaḥ svāhā (This is for the Creator of the physical, mental and spiritual realms, Amen.)

om viṣṇave svāhā (This is for Vishnu, Amen. NOTE: Vishnu is the Sustainer, who sustains everything that is created, including people, beings, objects and experiences, at the physical, mental and spiritual levels.)

om rudrāya svāhā (This is for Rudra, Amen. NOTE: Rudra is the Destroyer, who destroys everything that is created, including people, beings, objects and experiences, at the physical, mental and spiritual levels.)

At the end, sprinkle a little water on your right hand.

Final Offering – Complete Surrender

While saying “Om” (Amen), pour a stream of clarified butter (or oil) from the spoon/ladle into the fire. Try to cover different parts of the fire pit, so that there is big fire everywhere. When the fire becomes big, you can

make the final offering that is supposed to symbolize complete and unconditional surrender to god. The final offering can be slightly bigger in size compared to previous offerings and something that can burn for a while by itself, while you stop tending to the fire and meditate with eyes closed. A full or half dry coconut or a dry fruit soaked in clarified butter/oil is a good candidate. Offer it in fire after saying the sacred chant (or prayer) used in the “main part” above, for one last time.

Offer one more drop of clarified butter (or oil) to thank Fire for carrying the offerings to god:

om agnaye saptavate svāhā (This is to give thanks to the seven aspects of Fire god, Amen.)

Now, keep your back straight and eyes closed. Meditate for 5-10 minutes as the final offering (symbolizing complete surrender) burns. Please scroll down for some tips on meditation.

At the end of the meditation, thank the fire god mentally for his co-operation in the ritual. Then say:

om śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ (Let there be peace peace peace, Amen.)

Tips on Meditation

It is the nature of mind to wander and think of thousands of things. A truly focused mind can be very powerful and meditation is a practice to calm down the mind and focus it on one thing. In meditation, we try to focus the mind on a sacred chant or prayer or an image visualized in the mind or a mental idea. However, hard one tries, mind will invariably wander here and there. Getting frustrated does not help and makes things worse. Whenever you become aware that you are thinking of something, just acknowledge it in your mind and calmly bring back your mind to the focus point that you are using (sacred chant or idea or image *etc*). If mind wanders away again, bring it back calmly. Keep doing it patiently. With practice, time will come when mind is fully focused on one thing and forgets everything else. When that happens, it will feel awesome.

Practical Tips and Hints

Here are some hints related to practical aspects of fire yoga:

(1) In the beginning, there may be problems with maintaining the fire. New dry coconut pieces (or wood pieces) have to be put in the fire while old pieces are still burning, in order to keep the fire going. One’s ability to estimate how long each item burns will improve with time.

(2) If the fire completely goes away, sprinkling some camphor powder on the hot pieces can bring the fire back. That fire can be sustained by placing new pieces (wood, dry coconut pieces *etc*). If fire completely goes away, you may need to light it again. After practice, you will know how to keep fire going.

(3) If merely a drop of clarified butter or oil is offered each time, less smoke is generated. Make sure that you do not put too much clarified butter or oil, in which case it will accumulate at the bottom of the fire pit as a puddle.

(4) If one puts a lot of oil in a pan and heats it, it generates smoke. If one puts too little oil in a pan and tries to fry vegetables, they burn and generate smoke. If one puts the right balance of oil and vegetables, they get fried properly and there is no smoke. Similarly, if one puts the right balance of oil and solid materials (wood, grains *etc*), they burn with minimum smoke.

(5) With dry coconut pieces as the main fuel, the smoke will be minimized. But there will be some smoke at the end, when the fire goes off.

(6) It is a very good idea to keep the body as still as possible, with minimal movement of only those body parts that *must* move (*e.g.* arm and mouth). It will maximize the benefit from fire yoga.

(7) When the fire yoga is over, do not put out the fire by pouring water or sand on it. Let it go away naturally, by itself. With practice, you will know the right amount of materials to burn, so that the fire goes away at the end of the fire yoga. If you put too little material, fire goes away when you are meditating. If you put too much material, it burns for a while even after you finish and get up. Start off with fewer materials and slowly increase the materials. Thus, you can find out how much material your fire yoga needs.

Bottomline

Worshipping god in fire is an accelerated method to bring internal transformation and approach the divine within. It is not without reason that fire is considered sacred in many religions and cultures and used as a medium to connect with the divine. One can stick to one's own Faith and concept of god and yet take advantage of fire yoga and approach god via the medium of fire.

Fire yoga first brings calmness and balance to mind, it then control various mental weaknesses and burns impurities in consciousness. Eventually, when one is ready, individual consciousness is merged with cosmic consciousness.

The proof of the pudding is in eating it. One can try fire yoga for a few weeks and see for oneself what it does to one's mental state.