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Mar 24, 2020 by [Aparna M Sridhar](#)

Namaste and more, India shows the way during COVID-19 ^[1]

COVID-19 has brought attention around the world to many Indian traditions that promote and sustain good practices for mental, physical and spiritual health. Foremost among them is the *Namaste*, a greeting that has been universally espoused by leaders worldwide.

Namaste

State heads are urging citizens to use the Indian greeting *Namaste*, to prevent contact and yet remain convivial. The *Namaste* is an archetype of Indian philosophy, which when used for greeting a single person means ‘I bow to you,’ and *Namaskar*, which when used to address many, is the act of bowing or reverence.

Since early March, many global leaders have talked about their decision to shed the handshake and go for the *Namaste*. From Prince Charles in Britain, French President Macron,

to Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, American President Donald Trump, everyone is greeting with a *Namaste*.

“The Indian way of greeting—*Namaste*—which is getting popular across the world has deeper spiritual and scientific meaning. Spiritually, 'Namaha' removes all egos and one bows down to the God, creator within others,” says international relations expert Dr. Bharti Chhibber. “Scientifically, in 'Namaskar' which is Anjali Mudra, various pressure points in palms and fingers are pressed which act as healing power in various health problems.”

In fact, several countries would have to change their mode of greeting in the wake of Corona. Argentina with its right cheek to right cheek touch; the *Mano* of the Philippines, where the knuckles are pressed against the forehead of the other person; sticking one's tongue out as a mark of respect in Tibet; the triple-cheek kiss of Ukraine —left, right, left; the elaborate handshake of Botswana; the Hongi practice of touching noses of New Zealand. Anything that requires contact between individuals will be avoided now on.

India has many forms of greetings, foremost among which is the salutation with joined palms (the *Namaste* or *Namaskara*). Vedic scholar S K Ramachandra Rao talks about others including the holding and shaking of hands (*hasta-laghava*), the embrace (*parishvanga*, *alinga*), more elaborate prostrations (*pranama*) and the touching of feet (*pada-sparsa*).

However, it is *Namaste* that has always been symbolic of India. The word *nama* occurs in the Rigveda as well as in later Vedic texts. Today, travelers to India are always greeted on flights with a *Namaste*, the first point of welcome to the land.

Rao says the expression '*nama*' in *namaskara* is derived from the root '*nam*' which means to bend, to bow, to sink, to incline, in terms of submitting oneself humbly. “It is cognate with the Greek '*nemo*,' '*nemos*' and '*nomos*,' the Latin '*nemus*, the old Saxon '*niman*,' the German '*neman*' and '*nehmen*.”

In his book *Bharatiya Pranama Paddhati (Respectful Salutations in India)*, Rao says *Namaskara* is supposed to be threefold: “physical or bodily (*kayika*), verbal (*vachika* or *vagbhava*) and of the mind (*manasika*).

Focus on Breath

COVID-19 has brought the focus right back to the breath, where modern science believes all things begin and end. Medical practitioners all over the world are finding ways to tackle the virus, which enters, stays and multiplies first in the upper respiratory system, and when fortified, attacks the lower respiratory system.

The anxiety and stress is mounting. Dr. John Sharp is a board-certified psychiatrist on the faculty at Harvard Medical School and the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. He has been voted by his peers for inclusion in Best Doctors in America for the past 10 years. On March 12, he posted suggestions on how to beat stress during COVID-19 on the [Harvard Medical School website](#).

