

## **Yoga Training Notes: Surya Namaskar (2005)**

### **SURYA NAMASKAR**

The Sanskrit name Surya (Sun) here refers to the Sun and Namaskara means 'Salutations'. Surya Namaskara has been handed down from the enlightened sages of the Vedic Age. The sun symbolizes spiritual consciousness and, in ancient times, was worshipped on a daily basis. In Yoga the sun is represented by a channel of energy, the channel which carries the vital life-giving force. This dynamic group of Asanas is not regarded as being a traditional part of Hatha Yoga practices as it was added to the original Asana group at a later time. However, it is an effective way of loosening up, stretching, massaging and toning all the joints, muscles and internal organs of the body. It's versatility and application make it one of the most useful methods of inducing a healthy, vigorous and active life while, at the same time, preparing for spiritual awakening and the resulting expansion of awareness.

Surya Namaskara is a complete Sadhana, spiritual practice, in itself for it includes Asana, Pranayama, Mantra and Meditation techniques. It is an excellent group of Asanas with which to start morning practice. Surya Namaskara has a direct vitalizing effect on the solar energy of the body which flows through important part of your body. Surya Namaskara is composed of three elements which are Form, Energy and Rhythm. The twelve Asanas are the physical matrix around which the form of the practice. These Asanas generate Prana, the subtle energy which activates the psychic body. Their performance, in a steady, rhythmic sequence, reflects the rhythms of the universe; the twenty-four hours of the day, the twelve zodiac phases of the year and the biorhythms of the body. The application of this form and rhythm to the body/mind complex generates the transforming force which produces a fuller and more dynamic life

The ideal time to practice Surya Namaskara is at sunrise, the most peaceful time of day. Whenever possible, practice in the open air, facing the rising sun. Sunset is also a good time to practice as it stimulates the digestive fire. Surya Namaskara, however, may be practiced at any time provided the stomach is empty .

Before commencing the practice, stand with the feet together or slightly apart, and the arms hanging loosely by the side of the body. Close the eyes gently and become aware of the whole physical body as one homogeneous unit. In this position the body may sway from side to side or backward and forward. Try to minimize this oscillation and balance the body weight equally on both feet. Bring the awareness inside the body and mentally begin to relax it. Starting from the top of the head, take the awareness systematically through all the parts, releasing any tension. Intensify , once more, the awareness of the whole physical body and feel in harmony with it. Take the awareness to the soles of the feet in contact with the floor. Feel that the whole body is being pulled downwards by gravity and that any tensions are being pulled down, through the body and into the ground. At the same time, experience the vital force surging up from the earth and flooding the whole being.

The practice of Surya Namaskara as a whole gives a great number of benefits. It stimulates and balances all the systems of the body, including the endocrine, circulatory, respiratory and digestive systems. Its influence on the pineal gland and the hypothalamus helps to prevent pineal degeneration and calcification. This balances the transition period between childhood and adolescence in growing children. Synchronizing the breath with the physical movements of Surya Namaskara ensures that the practitioner, at least for a few minutes daily, breathes as deeply and rhythmically as possible. This removes carbon dioxide from the lungs and replaces it with fresh oxygen, increasing mental clarity by bringing fresh, oxygenated blood to the brain. Surya Namaskara is the ideal practice to increase awareness and bestow good health and well being.

***Dharmanidhi's comments:***

Surya Namaskar open us up to greater cosmology. It is a scientifically produced, efficient way of harmonizing on a cosmic energy level (ashtanga surya namaskar loses cosmic intent) It is a body prayer, most ancient form of yoga, the asana makes a mudra of the sun through this cycle, we can experience death and rebirth every time we perform it We are enacting a cosmological cycle in space and can actively run off karma when we perform Surya Namaskar (when we say we burn karma that signifies we are still attached to it) 12 constellations go with 12 zodiac signs, right and left represents full cycle (light and dark) We must focus on the 2nd and 3rd chakra when we perform this. Signifies water coming under fire, symbolizes alchemy, which is how we can transform ourselves We are all energy manifestations

DO NOT CONSTRICT AIRFLOW IN THE THROAT! You destroy the fruition of the poses when you perform ujay, it changes the flow of the energy channels

MOVEMENT FROM EACH POSTURE ORIGINATES FROM THE HIP/PELVIS

**Position One: Pranamasana (prayer pose with elements of Open Gate)**

- Remain standing upright with the feet together
- Slowly bend the elbows and place the palms together in front of the chest in namaskara mudra, mentally offering homage to the sun, the source of all life.
- Relax the whole body

Gaze: Eyes should be open without dualistic engagement (not taking in stimuli). If you are feeling heavy or dull look up. If you feel too active look down. When you are balanced look straight ahead.

Breathing: breathe normally

Awareness: Physical – on chest area, Spiritual – on anahata chakra

Mantra: Om Mitraya Namaha – Salutations to the friend of all

Beeja: Hram

Benefits: This pose establishes a state of concentration and calmness in preparation for the practice to be performed.

**Position 2: Hasta Uttahanasana**

- Raise and stretch both arms above the head
- Keep the arms separated, shoulder width apart
- Bend the head, arms and upper trunk backward
- Tuck the tailbone in

Gaze: Follow your thumbs up invoking shambavi mudra

Breathing: Inhale while raising the arms.

Awareness: Physical – on the stretch of the abdomen and expansion of the lungs,

Spiritual – on vishuddhi chakra

Mantra: Om Ravaye Namaha = salutations to the shining one

Beeja: Hraim

Benefits: This pose stretches all the abdominal organs and improves digestion. It exercises the arm and shoulder muscles, tones the spinal nerves, opens the lungs and removes excess weight.

### **Position 3: Padahasthasana (hand to foot pose)**

- Bend forward until the fingers or palms of the hands touch the floor on either side of the feet

- Try to touch the knees with the forehead

- Do not strain

- Keep the knees straight

Gaze: Groin/Navel

Breathing: Exhale while bending forward. Try to contract the abdomen in the final position to expel the maximum amount of air from the lungs.

Awareness: Physical – on pelvic region, Spiritual – on swadhistana chakra

Mantra: Om Suryaya Namaha = salutations to he who induces activity

Beeja: Hrum

Contra-indications: People with back conditions should not bend forward fully. Bend from the hips, keeping the spine straight, until the bend forms a ninety degree angle with the legs, or bend only as far as comfortable

Benefits: This pose is useful in eliminating or preventing stomach or abdominal ailments. It reduces excess weight in the abdominal region, improves digestion and helps to remove constipation. It improves blood circulation, makes the spine supple and tones the spinal nerves.

### **Position 4: Ashwa Sanchalanasana (equestrian pose)**

- Place the palms of the hands flat on the floor beside the feet.

- Stretch the right leg back as far as possible, rest the knee on the ground

- At the same time, bend the left knee, keeping the left foot on the floor in the same position. Keep the arms straight. In the final position, the weight of the body should be supported on both hands, the left foot, right knee and toes of the right foot. The head should be tilted backward, the back arched and the inner gaze directed upward to the eyebrow center.

- Movement should be fluid

Gaze: Shambavi, look at the tips of your nose

Breathing: Inhale while stretching the right leg back.

Awareness: Physical – on the stretch from the thigh to the chest or on the eyebrow center.

Spiritual – on the ajna chakra

Mantra: Om Bhanave Namaha = salutations to he who illumines

Beeja: Hraim

Benefits: This pose massages the abdominal organs and improves their functioning, strengthening the leg muscles and induces balance in the nervous system.

Practice note: In the final pose the palms of the hands should be flat on the floor initially. Later on, more advanced practitioners can come up on their fingertips.

### **Position 5: Parvatasana (mountain pose)**

- Take the left foot back beside the right foot
- Simultaneously, raise the buttocks and lower the head between the arms, so that the back and legs form two sides of a triangle
- The legs and arms should be straight in the final position
- Try to keep the heels on the floor in the final pose and bring the head towards the knees.
- Do not strain.

Gaze: Navel

Breathing: Exhale while taking the left leg back

Awareness: Physical – on relaxing the hips or on the throat region, Spiritual – on vishuddhi chakra

Mantra: Om Khagaya Namaha = salutations to he who moves quickly in the sky

Beeja: Hraum

Benefits: This pose strengthens the nerves and muscles in the arms and legs. The spinal nerves are toned and circulation is stimulated especially in the upper spine, between the shoulder blades.

### **Position 6: Ashtanga Namaskara (salute with eight parts or points)**

- Turn elbows inwards as you come down
- Lower knees, chest and chin to the floor
- In the final position only the toes, knees, hand and chin touch the floor simultaneously. If this is not possible, first lower the knees, then the chest, and finally the chin.
- The buttocks, hips and abdomen should be raised.
- (At the more advanced level you want to float into this pose)

Gaze: Shambavi or tips of your nose

Breathing: The breath is held outside in this pose. There is no respiration.

Awareness: Physical – on abdominal region. Spiritual – on manipura chakra

Mantra: Om Pushne Namaha = salutations to the giver of strength.

Beeja: Hraha

Benefits: This pose strengthens the leg and arm muscles, develops the chest and exercises the region of the spine between the shoulder blades.

### **Position 7: Bhujangasana**

Float up from position 7 to 8, you want to tuck your stomach up and keep your groin on the floor

- You need to lower the buttocks and hips to the floor, Straightening the elbows, arch your back and push your chest forward into the cobra pose.
- Bend the head back and direct the gaze upward to the eyebrow center.
- The thighs and hips remain on the floor and the arm support the trunk.
- Unless the spine is very flexible the arms will remain slightly bent.
- Inhale while raising the torso and arching the back.

Gaze: Shambavi or up

Breathing: Inhale

Mantra: Om Hiranya Garbhaya Namaha

Beeja: Hram

Benefits: This pose keeps the spine supple, improving circulation in the back region and toning the spinal nerves. It tones the reproductive organs, stimulates digestion and relieves constipation. It also tones the liver and massages the kidneys and adrenal glands.

**Position 8: Parvatasana (mountain pose)**

Breathing: Exhale

Mantra: Om Marichaye Namaha

Beeja: Hrim

**Position 9: Ashwa Sanchalanasana (equestrian pose)**

Breathing: Inhale

Mantra: Om Adityaya Namaha

Beeja: Hrum

**Position 10: Padahasthasana (hand to foot pose)**

Breathing: Exhale

Mantra: Om Savitre Namaha

Beeja: Hraim

**Position 11: Hasta Utthanasana (raised arms pose)**

Breathing: Inhale

Mantra: Om Arkaya Namaha

Beeja: Hraum

**Position 12: Pranamasana (prayer pose)**

Breathing: Exhale

Mantra: Om Bhaskaraya Namaha

Beeja: Hraha