

Yoga Training Notes: Salutations to the Moon (2005)

SALUTATIONS TO THE MOON

The word Chandra means Moon. Just as the Moon, having no light of its own, reflects the light of the sun, so the practice of Chandra Namaskara reflects that of Surya Namaskara. The sequence of Asanas is the same as Surya Namaskara except that Half Moon pose is performed after Equestrian pose. This posture develops balance and concentration which adds another dimension to the practice. Whereas the different positions of Surya Namaskara relate to the twelve zodiac or solar phases of the year, the fourteen positions of Chandra Namaskara relate to the fourteen lunar phases. In the lunar calendar the fourteen days before the full moon are known as Shukla Paksha, the bright fortnight, and the fourteen days after the full moon are known as Krishna Paksha, the dark fortnight. The name of each day introduces each asana and is used as a basis for learning the days of the lunar cycle. The lunar energy flows within and it has cool, relaxing and creative qualities. Similarly, the lunar mantras ascribed to this practice are those which glorify Devi, the female or lunar aspect of divinity.

It is advisable to learn Surya Namaskara before attempting Chandra Namaskara as the postures are the same for both, except for one extra pose. Chandra Namaskara is best practiced at night, especially when the moon is visible, or at dawn at the time of the full moon. Be aware of the different experience given by the changing aspects of the moon. When practicing at night ensure the stomach is empty. Before beginning Chandra Namaskara, a few moments should be allowed to prepare the body and mind.

Stand in the upright position with the feet together, the eyes closed and the arms at the sides. The weight of the body should be evenly distributed on both feet. Adjust the position if necessary. Try to observe any spontaneous movement of the body as it relaxes. Gradually become more aware of the natural flow of the breath with each inhalation and exhalation. Then include awareness of the movement in the body with the rhythm of the breath. Retain this awareness for a few moments. Slowly withdraw the awareness from the breath and become aware of the space between the eyebrows. Within this space, visualize the full moon in a clear night sky, shine brightly upon the waves of the ocean. The full reflection of the moon penetrates the deep waters and the cool shade of moonlight catches the tops of the waves as they dance. See the image clearly and develop awareness of any feelings or sensations that are created in the mind and body.

The physical practice of the asana sequence is similar to Surya Namaskara. However, there is one extra Asana Half Moon Pose, which emphasizes the link with the lunar energies set up by the preparatory visualizations. Also, in Chandra Namaskara the force of each Asana is changed subtly by the repetition of mantras related to the lunar energies.

You need to maintain the balance, raise your both the hands and bring your both of the palms together in front of your chest, forming Namaskara Mudra. Stretch both arms over the head, keeping the palms together. Arch the back and look up, raising the chin as high as possible.

There should be a gentle curve from the tips of the fingers to the tips of the toes, resembling a crescent moon. Hold the pose for a short time. Lower the hands to the chest in Namaskara Mudra, then, separating them, place the hands on each side of the left foot as in shown in Equestrian pose.

Inhale deeply while raising the arms, arching the back and bending the head back. Retain the breath inside while lowering the arms or start exhalation while lowering the arms. This practice develops a sense of balance and gives a good stretch through the front of the body.