

worship the sun within...



As the days draw in, Lila Conway helps keep us warm with Surya Namaskar (sun salutation), an ancient yoga practice. Discover the deep benefits as you turn within.

With my feet firmly grounded, rooted to the earth, I stand tall with my hands in prayer. With gratitude and thanks, I offer humble respects to the source of all life, Surya (the sun). I am fully aware of my existence; I listen to the wisdom of my body, this pure vibrating mass of energy. I listen to the voice of my breath, the breath of life as it carries me from one position to another, evolving from the lower states of consciousness to the seat of the soul. My mind is a silent witness and fully present as I effortlessly move through the sequence, beginning where I shall end, without expectation just complete surrender to the flow and cycle of life... moving beyond the mind, through time and space... the journey begins.

I face the sun, feeling love and joy in my heart. I reach out and upwards, looking to the sky, I slowly arch back and let the sun fill me with warmth. Bending backwards, I open my heart to receive the dawn of a new day and the fruits it will bring.

I bow before the sun's radiance; tension in my body begins to melt away and I give myself permission to let go, let go. My leg lunges backwards, opening and freeing my hips allowing me to step forward freely in life. I face the sky feeling the light of life between my eyebrows. Holding my breath, the life-force intensifies like a blazing fire in the core of my being; I am straight as a stick, feeling strong, centred and present. Deeply exhaling, I softly place my forehead to the ground in humble respect, and duly remember that to achieve great heights, I must be as the dust of the earth.

The rhythm of the breath carries me; my body's wisdom intuitively knows its direction of travel. Tension becomes less; I greet the serene face of freedom and grace in each movement. Resistance and tension are now but a distant memory. As I stretch up towards the light, the clouds have now dispersed... there is only clarity, serenity and illumination. Now the cycle is complete, I am back where I started from, yet something has changed. Again, I stand tall as I remember: the true sun is within me.

sun worship

Surya Namaskar (Sun Salutation) is a traditional form of sun worship that can be traced back to the Vedas (a body of sacred texts originating in ancient India). Worship of the sun was one of man's first and most natural forms of adoration; many ancient traditions worshipped the sun as a symbol of health and immortality. Surya Namaskar is a graceful sequence of twelve positions performed as one continuous flow. Each position complements the other, flexing and stretching the spinal column and limbs, expanding and

contracting the chest, synchronising the breath with each flowing movement. Each of the twelve positions has its own mantra, celebrating aspects of the sun's divinity. By practising the sequence regularly, we can overcome the signs of ageing, increase flexibility, and lead a happy, contented and joyful life.

Preparation

Stand with the feet together, heels and big toes touching. Centre your body weight evenly and keep your chin parallel to the floor. Standing tall, arms relaxed at the sides of your body, feel that you are being pulled upwards through the top of your head. Maintain a comfortable upright position and become aware of the whole body as you mentally offer homage to the sun.

Position 1 (prayer pose)

Stand straight with your feet together. Inhaling, place both palms together in front of your chest. Exhale.

Mantra – Om Mitraya Namaha (salutations to the friend of all)

Position 2 (raised arms pose)

Inhaling, stretch both arms up, palms facing forward. Keep the arms shoulder-width apart. Push your hips forward as you arch back and stretch the whole body, keeping your legs straight and neck relaxed.

Mantra – Om Ravaye Namaha (salutations to the shining one)

Position 3 (hands to feet pose)

Exhaling, in one flowing movement extend your arms and bend forward from the hips without rounding your back. Bring your hands to the floor either side of your feet, keeping your fingers in line with your toes. Legs should remain straight, but bend knees if necessary.

Mantra – Om Suryaya Namaha (salutations to he who induces activity)

Position 4 (equestrian pose)

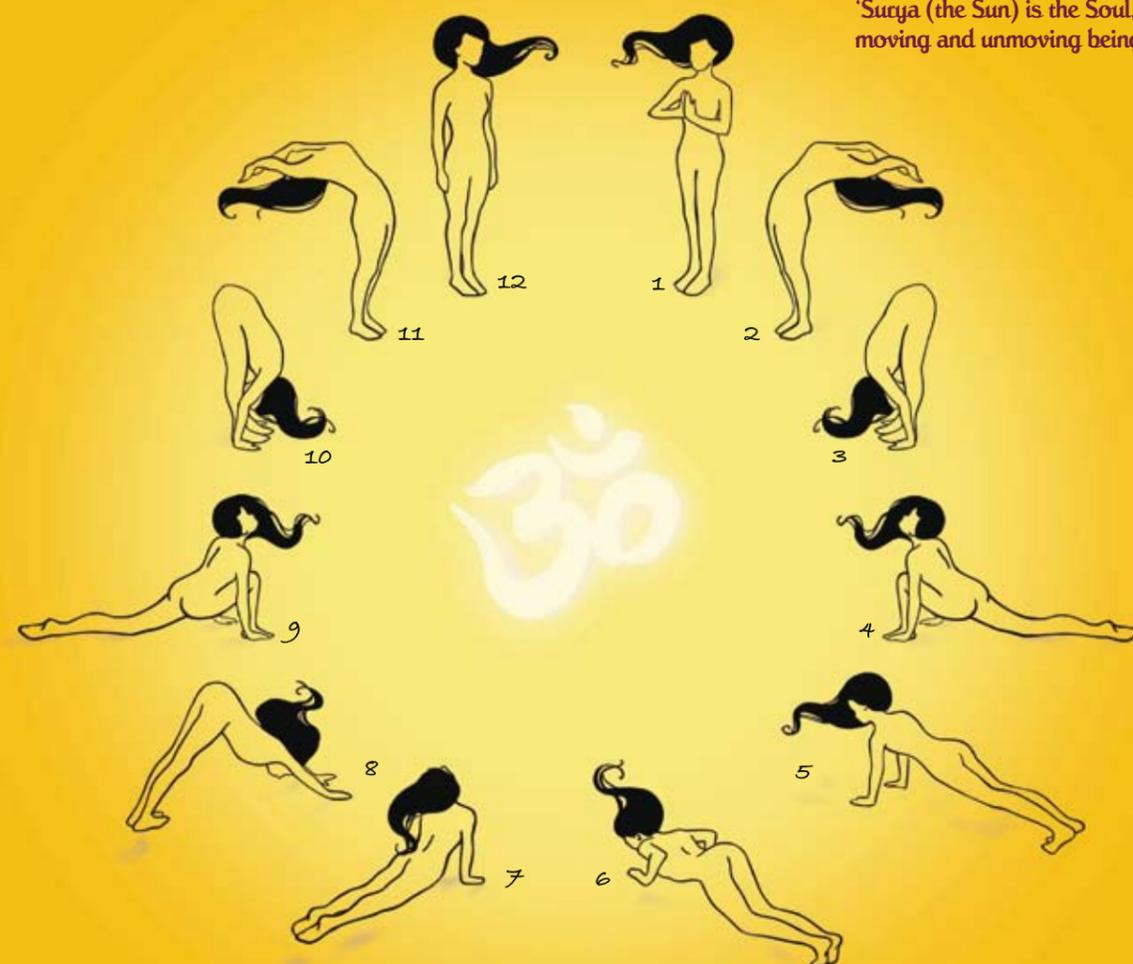
Inhaling, keep both hands on the floor. Extend your right leg back as far as possible and drop your knee to the floor, point the toes and keep your left leg bent. Lift the chest and look up.

Mantra – Om Bhanave Namaha (salutations to he who illumines)

Position 5 (staff pose)

Retain your breath as you tuck your toes under and straighten your right leg. Bring your left leg back and keep your feet together. Support your body weight on your hands and toes. Align your hips, back and neck in a straight line. Look at the floor between the hands.

Mantra – Om Khagaya Namaha (salutations to he who is all-pervading)



'Surya (the Sun) is the Soul, both of the moving and unmoving beings'

Rig Veda

Illustration by Camilla Carlow

Position 6 (ashtanga – eight limbs pose)

Exhaling, bring your knees to the floor; bend your arms as you lower your chest, then your forehead. Keep your hips up and toes curled under. The forehead, hands, chest, knees and toes touch the floor and the spine is arched.

Mantra – Om Pushne Namaha (salutations to he who nourishes)

Position 7 (cobra pose)

Inhaling, extend your chin, push your chest forward as you lower the hips, point your toes and arch back. Keep the legs together, arms slightly bent in towards the body, and shoulders down and back. Look up.

Mantra – Om Hiranya Garbhaya Namaha (salutations to the golden cosmic Self)

Position 8 (downward dog pose)

Exhaling, curl your toes under, raise your hips and lower your head between the arms to form a triangle. Keep your palms firmly down, shoulders back, arms and legs straight as you lift your buttocks and extend your heels towards the floor.

Mantra – Om Marichaye Namaha (salutations to the Lord of the Dawn)

Position 9 (equestrian pose)

Inhaling, step your right foot forward between the hands. Rest your other knee on the floor and look up, as in position 4.

Mantra – Om Adityaya Namaha (salutations to the son of Aditi, the cosmic Mother)

Position 10 (hands to feet pose)

Exhaling, bring the other leg forward and bend down from the

waist, bring your chest towards your thighs, tuck the head in. Keep your palms flat as in position 3.

Mantra – Om Savitre Namaha (salutations to the stimulating power of the sun)

Position 11 (raised arms pose)

Inhaling, stretch both arms forward and up, keeping the arms shoulder width apart. Push your hips forward as you arch back and stretch the whole body, keeping your legs straight and neck relaxed as in position 2.

Mantra – Om Arkaya Namaha (salutations to he who is the essence of vitality)

Position 12 (mountain pose)

Exhaling, gently lower your arms by your sides and come back to an upright standing position.

Mantra – Om Bhaskaraya Namaha (salutations to he who brings inner strength and awakening)

Practise one round first leading with the right foot (as in positions 4 and 9) and the next leading with the left. Always complete both right and left sides. Start with four rounds and gradually increase up to twelve. Respect your body's capabilities and do not strain. Not suitable during pregnancy (unless with modifications). Practise daily with devotion, humility and prayerful contemplation of the divine power the sun represents. Reflect on the sun as a symbol of the light of love, knowledge, wisdom and understanding that resides within our heart and soul. ॐ

For more details on Lila's yoga classes and retreats, go to www.yogaprema.org