

Yoga Publications Trust, Munger, Bihar, India

**Reclining Bound Angle Pose, page 136**

When was the last time you complained you felt stressed? For most of us that would be just hours, days or a few weeks. In our lives today we are faced with a cascade of potential stressors. A near miss crossing a busy road or just watching the latest tragedy on the news sends our adrenal glands into overdrive. Living in a high adrenaline haze is hard on our bodies, unpleasant to our psyche, and tough on our emotional selves. It's no fun, so we need to find ways to counter it. Yoga helps the unwinding process when we get upright and helps us de-stress practically.

**Equal Breath, page 316**

The asanas are a great channel to physically work out mental stress. Concentrating on body awareness during the practice of any asana gives a welcome mental break from habitually worrying about other things and is partly why people feel so refreshed after yoga. For physical and mental fatigue, the following restorative sequence of asanas, practiced in a slow, restful way, is helpful. These poses open the body while giving the nervous system a chance to to rest. They allow you to recharge energetically without using energy. Aside from counteracting stress, these postures help build energy reserves during chronic illness or menstruation, or whenever you need to refresh.

**Plough Pose, page 292**

One practice routine might be Centering with Equal Breath (page 316). Reclining Bound Angle Pose (page 136), supported Reclining Hero Pose (page 277), Child Pose (page 100) or Embrace Pose (page 103) or Restful Deep Forward Fold (page 313). Crocodile Pose (page 246), Cross Bolster Bend (page 356), Supported Plough Pose (page 292) or Easy Inversion (page 280), supported Revolved Abdomen Pose (page 190), Restorative Forward Bend (see page 357), and other supported forward bend variations (also listed on page 357). Follow with a long Corpse Pose (page 310) to counter mental and physical tension, and Alternative Nostalg Breathing (page 320) or Humming Bee Breath (page 318) to calm the nervous system. Practice meditation as an all-round rebalancer.

**Plough Pose, page 292**

In addition to the new poses shown in this section (page 356), there are other restorative asanas already covered that can be used to treat other illnesses or menstruation, or whenever you need to refresh. There are other restorative asanas already covered that can be used to treat other illnesses or menstruation, or whenever you need to refresh.

Surya Namaskara

The Sanskrit word *surya* means 'sun', and the word *namaskara* means 'salutation' or 'worship'. Therefore, this practice is known as 'salutation to the sun'. *Surya namaskara* is a dynamic exercise. It is neither an asana nor a part of traditional yoga. But because it is such a wonderful practice we have incorporated it into the yoga techniques that we teach.

We always recommend practitioners to include it as an essential and integral part of their yoga program. It revitalizes the whole body, removes all signs of sleep and is excellent for preparing the body and mind so that maximum benefits can be derived from the subsequent asanas, pranayama, meditation practices and so on. It loosens up all the joints, flexes all the muscles of the body, massages the internal organs, activates the respiratory and circulatory systems as well as helps to tone

all the other systems of the body. In short, it harmonizes the whole body-mind complex. It can be practised at almost any time of the day and in any place. No special preparations are necessary. If you feel tired during the day, a few rounds of surya namaskara will quickly restore the lost vitality, both physically and mentally. If you feel angry or depressed, surya namaskara is an excellent antidote; not a panacea, but a great help in removing emotional disturbances. It is a rhythmical, unsymmetrical exercise which is really a pleasure to perform. When it is perfected, the body almost appears to flow through the different movements without any effort or conscious will. Each part of the body seems to move automatically into the right position at the right time and in the right sequence without any effort. If you try it for yourself you will know what we mean.

**Symbolic and spiritual significance** The sun has been adored since time immemorial. The ancient people worshipped the sun with awe, knowing that the sun generates

# YOGA AS RESISTANCE

## EQUITY AND INCLUSION ON AND OFF THE MAT

Dr Stacie C.C. Graham

same way as destruction of previous concepts. The sun was not only worshipped because of its material nature and power, though it might be less informed persons. The sun itself is a symbol. It symbolizes spiritual illumination and knowledge, the light in the darkness of ignorance. It represents the essence, the spirituality which exists in all material things. It is this essence which is worshipped by the more enlightened people of the ancient cults and religions. The material sun is the manifestation of the deeper, hidden background or substratum. This has been clearly explained by Paracelsus, the medieval alchemist, as follows: "There is an earthly, material sun, which is the cause of heat; and all who are capable of seeing it, even those who are blind, can feel his heat. And then there is an eternal sun, which is the source of wisdom; and those who are spiritually awokened will see this sun and be conscious of His existence."

The material or terrestrial sun is the manifestation of the invisible, spiritual and celestial sun. The spiritual sun represents the spiritual aspects of existence, and from it the material sun of material aspects of life is derived. Therefore, it is the spiritual sun that is regarded as the source of power and inner light but because the material sun can be seen by all, it is this aspect that is seemingly worshipped.

The yearly cycle of the sun was regarded by many ancient cults and religions as symbolic of the life of man, and in fact of all living things. The birth date of the sun took place three days after its winter solstice. This is because the sun was regarded as dying on its winter solstice (i.e. 22nd December). At this time its power, the intensity of its rays is the lowest (in the northern hemisphere). Three days later (25th December) the sun could be easily and distinctively seen to start to grow stronger and the days start to become longer. This symbolizes the rebirth of life, but more importantly, it symbolizes rebirth into spiritual consciousness. This date was important in many ancient cults, and still is in many religions today.

The sun is a symbol of immortality, for while it died every evening, it was reborn the following morning. The rising of the sun is a time for joy and wonder, for it raises all things from the dead. It restores life again. It is for this reason that surya namaskara was evolved in ancient

India. It is mentioned in the *Rig* and *Yajur Vedas*, ancient scriptures of India, where various prostrations are prescribed for worship of the sun. However, at that time it did not have the form it has now. It consisted of various static poses combined with mantras. It was not the dynamic exercise that we know today. It is only recently that the individual static poses were combined to form the coordinated exercise that we will describe in this topic.

Many people still worship the sun in one form or another. You can treat surya namaskara as an expression of your regard for the sun, whether it is the material aspect or that underlying spiritual aspect that the material sun symbolizes. Or, if you are not inclined to worship, then do surya namaskara for the sake of maintaining and inducing good health. This is the stepping stone to spiritual awareness and peace.

#### Basic features

Surya namaskara consists of five essential aspects. All of them must be done to gain the optimum results from the practice. These aspects are as follows:

1. *Physical postures*: there are twelve physical postures which correspond to the signs of the zodiac. During the sun's apparent journey through the heavens it passes through each of these celestial houses in turn. It remains in each zodiac for about thirty days and is said to triumph over each sign as it enters its domain. Each position in surya namaskara corresponds to one of these signs of the zodiac.

2. *Breathing*: the whole movement of surya namaskara from start to finish is synchronized with breathing. Each position is associated with either inhalation, exhalation or retention of breath. Nothing is forced or unnatural, for the breathing corresponds to the pattern one would normally do in relation to the physical movement. Correct automatic breathing should occur naturally without any prior instructions. However, details of the correct relationship between movement and breath are given to ensure it is done perfectly, for it is an important part of the practice. Without synchronization between the breath and the movement many of the benefits of surya namaskara are missed.

3. *Mantras*: associated with each of the twelve

mantra. A *mantra* is a combination of syllables, sounds or phrases, realized by ancient sages, which have been widely known in India for thousands of years. They are evocative sounds and through their power of vibration have subtle, yet powerful and penetrating effects on the mind and body. While doing surya namaskara, a particular mantra is repeated either silently or uttered aloud with each position. When surya namaskara is combined with correct breathing and these *bija mantras* (seed sounds), the entire mind and intellect are energized. These *bija* mantras create a vibration and it is this which creates the energy. Mantras may or may not have specific meanings, but the vibrations which they create should reach every fibre of one's being. The mantras of surya namaskara are energized sound. When repeated loudly, clearly and with devotion, these mantras give the greatest possible benefits to those who utter them, either in hastening the curing of an ailment, acquiring stability of mind and self-control, or dissolving tensions caused by modern living.

The bija or seed mantras are:

1. *Om hr̥am*
2. *Om hr̥im*
3. *Om hr̥um*
4. *Om hr̥ain*
5. *Om hr̥aum*
6. *Om hr̥ah*

The full mantras, one for each movement of the exercise are:

1. *Om Hr̥am Mitreya Namah*
2. *Om Hr̥im Rāvaye Namah*
3. *Om Hr̥um Suryaya Namah*
4. *Om Hr̥aum Bhūmīye Namah*
5. *Om Hr̥aum Khagaya Namah*
6. *Om Hr̥ah Puṣne Namah*
7. *Om Hr̥am Hirṇyagarbhyā Namah*
8. *Om Hr̥im Marīchaye Namah*
9. *Om Hr̥um Aditya Namah*
10. *Om Hr̥ain Saṅche Namah*
11. *Om Hr̥aum Arkaṇa Namah*
12. *Om Hr̥ah Bhaskarāya Namah*

The meanings of these names of the sun are as follows:

1. *Mitra* – friend
2. *Ravi* – shining
3. *Surya* – beautiful light
4. *Bhānu* – brilliant
5. *Khaga* – who moves in the sky
6. *Pashan* – giver of strength

7. *Hiranyaśartha* – golden centred

8. *Marichi* – lord of the dawn

9. *Aditya* – son of Aditi

10. *Savita* – benevolent

11. *Arka* – energy

12. *Bhaskara* – leading to enlightenment

However, before you attempt to integrate these mantras with each position we strongly advise that you first perfect the physical movements and synchronization of breath in surya namaskara to gain the maximum benefits.

4. *Awareness*: this is an essential element of surya namaskara. Without awareness the mantras will not work and the beneficial results are reduced.

5. *Relaxation*: this is not strictly a part of surya namaskara. However, it is a necessary supplementary practice that should be done without fail on completing your rounds. An relaxation technique can be adopted, but the best method is shavasana.

#### Sequence for learning surya namaskara

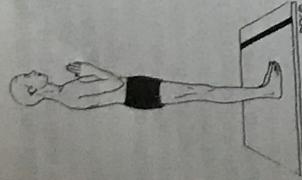
You should first familiarize yourself with the twelve postures. In the initial stage only be concerned with mastering the sequence of the physical movements, paying little or no heed to the breathing or mantra repetition. Eventually you will find that all the movements are performed automatically; little or no conscious thought or direction is required. At this stage the movements have been programmed into the mind. Awareness of the physical movement is very important.

After this has been mastered, ensure that the breath is correctly synchronized with the movement. Awareness should be on both the physical movement and the breathing. Later the mantras can be learnt and synchronized with each position. In the final stage the awareness should be directed as much as possible on the movement, breathing and mantra repetition. In its final form, surya namaskara consists of these different aspects welded together to give an integrated whole. Therefore, to make sure that the final practice is correct it is essential to master this technique in the progressive manner described.

#### Technique – postures and breathing

The following pages describe step by step the twelve different positions of surya namaskara together with the associated breathing sequence.

The palms should face forwards.  
The movement should be executed in one smooth motion with awareness.  
*Breathing:* Inhale while raising the arms.

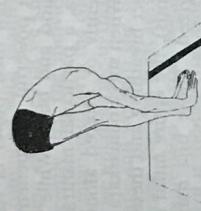


POSITION 1: PRANAMASANA  
(PRAYER POSE)

Stand erect with the feet together. Face the sun or the direction of the sun. Place the two palms together in front of the chest in an attitude of prayer, the namaskara mudra.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body. Be aware of the body for at least half a minute. This will prepare you for the forthcoming practice.

Try to consciously relax the muscles of the body. *Breathing:* Breathe normally with full awareness.



POSITION 3: PADAHASTASANA  
(HAND TO FOOT POSE)

Bend forward and place the palms of the hands on the floor, either in front of or on each side of the feet. The movement should be continuous and without any jerking.

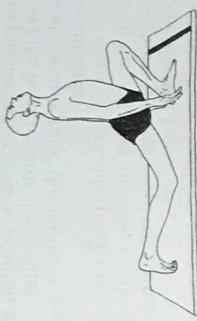
Keep the legs straight. If possible, try to touch your knees with your forehead or chin; be careful of your nose for you may cause injury when doing surya namaskara quickly.

Under no circumstances should undue force be used in order to attain the final position. *Breathing:* Exhale as deeply as possible while bending forwards and if possible accentuate the contraction of the abdomen, especially in the final position.

*Beginners:* Beginners and people with stiff backs will find the final pose difficult to attain. If you cannot touch the floor with your hands, or at most can only touch the floor with your fingertips, don't worry. It is only a matter of practice. As you become more supple through yoga practices, you will be surprised to find how easy it becomes to place the palms flat on the floor. Only time and practice are necessary. It is important that the legs remain straight in position three, so that the leg muscles (hamstring muscles) are stretched and the legs become more flexible. However, beginners who cannot touch the floor will have to adapt in the following manner: bend forwards as far as you can and try to touch the floor with the fingers or hands, keeping the legs straight. Try to stretch the legs a little more by reaching towards the floor with the fingers, then bend

the legs to place the palms on the floor in order to assume position four. However, if avoidable, the legs should not be bent.

*Breathing:* Inhale while raising the arms.



POSITION 4: ASHWA SANCHALANASANA  
(EQUESTRIAN POSE)

Stretch the right leg backwards as far as you can.

Simultaneously bend the left leg at the knee, but keeping the left foot in the same position. The palms should remain on the floor and the arms should remain straight.

*Beginners:* If this is too difficult for beginners the palms can be raised off the ground, with only the fingertips in contact with the floor. This helps to increase the arch of the back. In the final position the toes and knee of the extended right leg should be in contact with the ground.

Complete the movement by bending the head backwards and arching the spine as much as possible without straining. The movement should be executed smoothly and with awareness.

*Breathing:* inhale deeply as you move the body.

This position is so called because in the final pose eight points of the body are in contact with the ground. Lower the body to the ground, first bending the legs and placing the knees in contact with the floor.

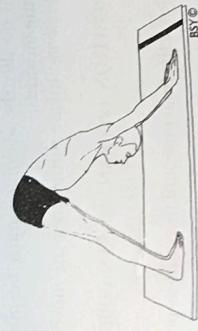
Bend the arms and lower the head and trunk towards the ground. Try to brush your forehead along the surface of the floor as you move the head and trunk forwards.

At the end of the forward movement of the head and trunk, let the chest brush along the surface of the floor and rest the chin on the ground. Finally raise the abdomen and hips slightly off the ground.

In the final position the eight points should be on the ground: the chin, the chest, two palms, two knees and the balls of both feet. The whole movement should be smoothly executed.

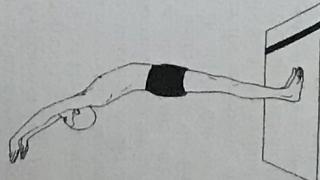
*Breathing:*

Hold the breath outside, i.e. don't breathe in.



POSITION 5: PARVATASANA  
(MOUNTAIN POSE)

Raise your right knee. Simultaneously lower your head towards the floor and bend the back so that the buttocks move upwards.



POSITION 2: HASTA UTTHANASANA  
(RAISED ARMS POSE)

Raise both arms above the head, keeping hands separated by a shoulder's width. At the end of the movement bend the head, arms and upper trunk backwards.

**POSITION 10: PADAHASTASANA  
(HAND TO FOOT POSE)**

This position is the same as position 3.

Lower the head towards the ground. Simultaneously raise the buttocks and right knee upwards.

Then, when you are able, place the right foot beside the left foot in between the hands. Straighten the legs and try to touch the forehead to the knees.

*Breathing:* Exhale deeply as you move the head towards the knees.

*Beginners:* Ideally, the hands should remain on the floor throughout the movement. However, beginners will find that because of inflexibility in the back they will be unable to straighten the legs if they try to keep their hands on the floor. They should, therefore, allow the hands to leave the floor as they straighten the legs. However, in position three they should stretch the fingers further towards the floor for a few seconds when their legs are straight. This will encourage the back to become more supple so that you can eventually keep the palms on the floor with the legs straight.



**POSITION 7: BHUJANGASANA  
(COBRA POSE)**

Lower the hips to the ground. Simultaneously straighten the arms so that the head and back arch upwards.

In the final position the head and back should be bent backwards as far as is comfortable, but try to keep the abdomen as close as possible to the floor without straining. The position of the hands and feet should not change throughout the movement.

*Breathing:* Inhale deeply during the movement.

**POSITION EIGHT: PARVATASANA  
(MOUNTAIN POSE)**

This position is a repeat of position 5. From the arched position of bhujangasana bend the back in the opposite direction so that the buttocks move upwards.

Keep the arms and legs straight and don't move the position of the hands and feet. In the final pose the buttocks should be as high as possible, the head should be between the arms and the heels should be gently pressed towards the floor.

*Breathing:* Exhale while performing the movement.

**POSITION 9: ASHWA  
SANCHALANASANA (EQUESTRIAN  
POSE)**

This position is a repeat of position 4. Bend the left leg and place the left foot between the two hands. Simultaneously raise the head upwards, arch the back downwards and lower the right knee to the floor. The position of the two hands and the right foot must not change. The arms should remain straight throughout. In the final pose, accentuate the arching of the back and bend the head backwards as far as possible.

*Breathing:* Inhale deeply while assuming the final pose.

**One complete round**

We have described twelve positions. This constitutes a half round of surya namaskara.

One full round consists of twenty-four positions. To complete the second half of surya namaskara the same twelve positions are repeated but with two minor modifications. These are as follows:

1. In position 16 the left leg is extended backwards followed by the right leg in position 17. This is instead of stretching the right leg backwards as in position 4, followed by the left leg in position 5.
2. In position 21 the right leg is brought forward followed by the left leg in position 22. This is instead of bringing the left leg forwards in position 9 followed by the right leg in position 10. The breathing sequence and the mantras remain unchanged. This alteration of the twelve basic positions to form twenty-four is necessary to ensure that both halves of the body are exercised equally – surya namaskara is a perfectly symmetrical exercise.

**Breathing**

Make sure that you breathe through the nose and not the mouth. If necessary, do jal neti before commencing surya namaskara or your daily practice program.

The breathing sequence in surya namaskara is perfectly natural and should occur spontaneously. The breathing that we have already related to each position is that which the body will automatically do, and any attempt to breathe differently will prove uncomfortable and awkward. There is an easy principle to remember when you are learning surya namaskara. When you bend backwards, inhale, eyes closed. Witness the various movements of the chest expands, inducing air into the lungs. And when you bend forwards, then you must exhale, because the abdomen is being compressed, which in turn reduces the volume of the lungs, via the diaphragm, and air is forced out of the lungs. Only while assuming position six, is the breath retained, and if you experiment for yourself you will find that this is also perfectly natural, for it is difficult to lower the body and breathe at the same time.

In summary, there is little or no effort required

on your part to ensure correct breathing; your body will tell you. But what you must do is accentuate the inhalation and exhalation more

than the body will do naturally. Some effort will be required in this direction.

**Awareness**

Awareness is an essential part of surya namaskara. It is performed without any awareness or any attempt to be aware most of the benefits are lost.

If you have time it is preferable to stand for a few minutes in position one preparing yourself physically and mentally for the coming practice. The eyes should be closed. If you don't have very much time, then thirty seconds is sufficient.

Be aware of your whole body and the breathing pattern. Try to feel that you are detached from your body and breathing.

See or feel a mental picture of the different parts of the body and try to relax them, but at the same time try to remember that you are merely witnessing. The different parts of the body and the breathing are something external; feel as though you are apart from them. Be aware of sensations, but again with a feeling of detachment, with the attitude of being the witness. Experience the peace that comes through merely being, without the confusion and tension of life or having to do something extroverted, or if we are introverted it is usually extroverted, of a morbid, self-deprecating form, just for a short time be introverted with awareness of your feelings. Do not plan for the future or regret the past. Live in the present, even if only for a short time. This can bring wonderful peace of mind.

When you are ready, begin the practice. Maintain awareness throughout. Your eyes may be opened or closed, although after mastering the practice it is better to keep the eyes closed. Witness the various movements of the body and the corresponding breathing. Don't lose yourself in the practice, watch and be continually aware of every movement you perform. In this way surya namaskara becomes a very powerful practice. It not only harmonizes the whole body, and mind, but also develops the ability of awareness and concentration. These wonderful and practical benefits will carry over into your daily life.

**Relaxation**

An essential sequel to surya namaskara is relaxation. It is necessary to rest the body and

**POSITION 11: HASTA UTTHANASANA  
(RAISED ARMS POSE)**

**POSITION 2.**

This position is the same as position 2. Smoothly straighten the whole body. Keep the arms straight and separated by about a shoulder's width. Raise the arms over the head and lean the head, arms and back slightly backwards. To do this the abdomen must be pushed a little forwards.

*Breathing:* Inhale throughout the movement.

**POSITION 12: PRANAMASANA (PRAYER  
POSE)**

This is the final pose and the same as position 1.

Bring the palms together and hold them in front of the chest.

*Relax the whole body.*

*Breathing:* Exhale while assuming the final pose.

*Breathing:* Breathe normally while remaining in the final position prior to continuing the practice.

allow the heartbeat and respiration to return to normal. It is also essential to intensify the feeling of mental peace and awareness. Any method of relaxation can be used, but we highly recommend shavasana because it is a scientific method which induces optimum relaxation of mind and body, at the same time intensifying the awareness<sup>1</sup>.

The time spent on relaxation depends mainly on the time taken to perform surya namaskara. At least three or four minutes should be spent relaxing for every ten minutes of surya namaskara. At least five minutes should be spent relaxing if it takes twenty minutes to practise surya namaskara. It is important to relax the body until the heartbeat and respiration return to normal. The practitioner must use his own discretion in this respect.

#### Tempo

You can do surya namaskara as rapidly or as slowly as you wish; the choice is yours. At first, it should be done slowly to ensure correct development of the movement and breathing. With regular practice your body will begin to gradually flow through the different positions. Under these circumstances you will automatically be able to perform each round in less time. However, be careful not to do the practice so quickly that the inhalation and exhalation becomes shallow and the mantras are not pronounced correctly. Eventually, you will find that the tempo of surya namaskara will be automatically fixed by the time necessary to perform the movement, breath and mantra.

#### Number of rounds

The number of rounds depends on the health of the individual as well as on the time available. Surya namaskara should not be done to the point of exhaustion. Beginners should start with no more than two or three rounds and add one more round on each successive two days. In this way the body will gradually become accustomed to the increased exercise. It is really impossible to lay down a fixed number of rounds to be done every morning, for this depends entirely on the individual. Do as many as you can in the time available. However, at the slightest sign of exhaustion stop the practice and relax the body. In fact, the body should be your guide as to the

number of rounds that you can manage – listen to it carefully and take heed of it. As a rough suggestion, however, a person of reasonably good health should eventually aim to do about twelve rounds every morning. Of course, those who are able can do more, and many people do. If you are not sure on this point seek the guidance of a competent yoga teacher who can prescribe a suitable number of rounds to suit you individually depending on your state of health.

#### Sequence

Surya namaskara is ideally practised before doing other asanas, as it helps to remove any sleepiness and to loosen up the body, in preparation for your asana practice.

#### When and where

The best time to practise surya namaskara is in the morning at sunrise. Face the rising sun to absorb the health giving ultraviolet rays. If this is impractical in view of the time of sunrise, climatic conditions and coordination with other yogic practices, it can be done first thing in the morning, preferably after going to the toilet, and again, preferably, after going to the toilet, times during the day. However, it is important to wait at least three hours after meals, before attempting the practice. Later in the morning before lunch and in the afternoon before dinner are both good times. It is not advisable to do surya namaskara before sleep because it activates the entire body and this is the opposite effect to what is desired before going to bed.

If possible, practise in the open air, perhaps on a lawn, or any clean flat surface. A thin matress, mat or blanket can be placed on the ground but it must be firmly fixed. Otherwise, while learning surya namaskara in particular, the mat tends to slide backwards.

#### Limitations

There are absolutely no sex or age limitations with regard to the practice of surya namaskara; both young and old, male and female can do it and gain its many benefits. However, ladies should not do it after their fourth month of pregnancy, but it can be continued after childbirth. Furthermore, ladies are advised not to do it during menstruation as a precautionary measure.

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People with certain ailments, such as sciatica, slipped disc, high blood pressure, coronary ailments and so on should not do surya namaskara. If you are not sure on this point seek expert guidance.

#### Precautions

Surya namaskara is a powerful method of eliminating toxins from the body. However, these toxins should not be eliminated too quickly, for they may manifest in a number of uncomfortable ways, such as huge painful boils. If any such symptoms or sign of fever begins to show, reduce the number of rounds of surya namaskara or even stop altogether for a few days. The toxins must be eliminated from the body, but it should be done gradually over a period of weeks or months, using surya namaskara, asanas and pranayama.

As we have already stated, don't strain yourself by doing more rounds than your physical condition will comfortably allow. Additionally, don't attempt surya namaskara if you are ill, because at this time all the energy of the body needs to be internalized to heal and remove the ailment.

#### Instructions

At first some mental effort is required to memorize the different positions, breathing and the mantras. An excellent method of quickly mastering the exercise is for a friend to read you the instructions while you accordingly carry them out. In this way all the important aspects of the exercise will be clearly imprinted in your memory.

#### Benefits

The obvious characteristic of surya namaskara is the fact that it exercises the entire body. The back is bent forwards and backwards, the arms and legs are bent and straightened, the abdomen is compressed, stretched and so on. It is an integral exercise that influences the health of the whole body. It is not confined to developing one part of the body, such as the arm muscles, like so many other forms of exercises and gymnastics.

The body consists of various systems and

organs which interrelate and coordinate with each other to give the best possible health and efficiency. It is very easy for these systems to become disrupted. The result is disease and

lack of vitality etc. Surya namaskara brings these systems – the circulatory, respiratory, endocrinal etc. – into balance with one another, thereby helping to prevent and remove disease. Let us briefly discuss some of the main systems in the body and how they benefit from surya namaskara.

**Digestive system:** The abdominal organs and stomach are alternately stretched and compressed. This imparts a healthy massage to the internal organs and ensures that they function correctly, or if they don't currently work efficiently, encourages them to do so. Many diseases of the digestive system can be prevented and removed by the regular practice of surya namaskara.

**Eliminative system:** Rapid elimination of waste materials from the body is essential. Often undigested waste products remain in the intestines and bowels due to constipation, which can result in various other disorders. Surya namaskara stimulates the peristalsis of the intestines helping to remove any tendency towards constipation. The kidneys are also important eliminative organs. They filter impurities from the blood and eliminate them from the body in the form of urine.

Therefore, any disorder or inefficiency in the workings of the kidneys will result in impure blood. Surya namaskara gently massages these two organs, increases their supply of blood, as well as speeds up the circulation throughout the body. The result is that the kidneys are encouraged to function properly while at the same time the blood is given an additional flush and filter through the kidneys. For best results one should supplement the daily practice of surya namaskara by drinking plenty of clean, fresh water.

A high proportion of the body's waste products are eliminated through the skin. This process works particularly well when a person sweats profusely. Often toxins accumulate in the skin, manifesting as boils and pimples. If a good sweat was developed regularly there would be less tendency for this to happen as the toxins would reach the outer surface of the skin and be washed off. Surya namaskara results in increased perspiration and thereby encourages the elimination of toxins from the body, helping to prevent skin ailments. This is an excellent method of acquiring a fresh

complexion, especially if one takes a bath after surya namaskara or the yoga practice program.

**Girenlatory system:** Surya namaskara increases the heartbeat and the workings of the whole circulatory system, helping to eliminate waste materials from the body. Areas of sluggish blood are also removed and replaced by purified and oxygenated blood. All the cells of the body receive extra nutrition enabling them to function more efficiently. This leads to better health and increased vitality.

The lymphatic system is also speeded up.

**Surya namaskara** harmonizes this system helping to remove any irregularities by directly massaging the relevant glands and improving their blood flow. Imbalance of the endocrinal system is often caused by mental tension, so surya namaskara can help to remove or reduce this deeper cause of hormonal malfunction, especially if it is supplemented by other yoga practices.

**Nervous system:** The multitudes of nerve connections throughout the body are gently stretched, massaged and stimulated while

The lymphatic system is also speeded up. This system is most important in protecting the body against infection. It is the body's auto-therapeutic system and without it the body would quickly succumb to disease. Surya namaskara, by increasing the circulation and the lymphatic system to work more efficiently in its fight against illness.

**Respiratory system:** Most people tend to breathe superficially in short and shallow gasps. This starves the body of the oxygen it requires

for perfect health. Carbon dioxide also tends to accumulate in the system. Further under-utilization of the lung capacity allows a build-up of germs which can lead to various illnesses. Surya namaskara, when done correctly, accentuates the exchange of air and from the lungs, opens and expands the intricate alveoli, or air sacs, of the lung tissue and exercises the muscles of the surrounding chest region. The lungs are emptied of impurities and stale air and the body and brain are revitalized by the extra supply of oxygen they receive. On

**Muscles and skeleton:** Surya namaskara exercises all the main muscles and joints in the body. The muscles are contracted and

The muscles are contracted and tensed and any impure, stagnant blood redirected back to the lungs and kidneys for purification. It is an excellent method of loosening up the body for asana practice.

**Subtle influences:** Surya namaskara can give many additional and perhaps more important benefits beyond the physical. It depends on your attitude. If you are aware and totally involved with the intonation of the mantras, the breathing and the movements, it will induce peace of mind. It is therefore a very useful exercise in reducing emotional conflict, neurosis and stress, especially when supplemented by other yoga practices. If one is devotionally inclined then satsanga can be

worshipping the sun. This will purify the heart and mind. Surya namaskara also helps to bring the flow of pranic or bioplasmic energy into balance and remove blockages in the nadis through which it flows. Surya namaskara is an excellent practice with which to start the day. It helps to prepare you in every way to face the oncoming day with physical and mental strength and confidence.

### **Summary**

retired, massaged and stimulated while doing surya namaskara. It is these nerves that connect the different parts and organs of the body with the brain. The nerves are the intermediaries. Even if an organ is in perfect condition it can only function as well as the nerves will allow. If the nerves are unhealthy then the functioning of the associated organs must suffer. If the pipe connecting the water tank to the tap is blocked, then the tap cannot work properly, even though it might be perfectly new. It is the same with the body's nervous system. The nerve fibres determine how well the organs and muscles of the body function.

Most modern, sedentary people don't exercise their bodies sufficiently. As a consequence the nerve connections tend to become lazy and atrophy develops. Surya namaskara tones up these nerves and simultaneously awakens the associated brain centres. One feels more alive after a few rounds of this exercise.

You practise surya namaskara. In fact, we regard surya namaskara so highly that we will recommend that you practise it in your daily practice program from now onwards throughout the book.

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<sup>1</sup> Notes  
Shavasana: Part 1 – Book I, Lesson 1, Topic 5;  
Part 2 – Book I, Lesson 2, Topic 8

<sup>2</sup> For further details on the subject see

for further details on the subject of awareness – Book I, Lesson 3, Topic 5