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## POSE OF THE MONTH

April 2005

The Sun Salute – Surya Namaskara

Surya means sun, and namaskara is a greeting, so we are greeting the sun :)

The sun is the soul of the world. Rig Veda 1.115.1

Worship of the sun was created because the sun is a powerful symbol of spiritual consciousness and health. Sun Salutes worship the outer and inner sun.

The Namaskara are of ancient origin and serve as the foundation stone upon which the science of yoga rests. Sun salutes help gather the strength of the mind in one direction and aid in mental focus. Without bringing the mind into a state in which it can control the body risk of injury is higher. Without its focusing of mental energies, yoga practice amounts to little more than gymnastics.

Surya Namaskar or the sun salutes are the foundation of our practice. Although they seem very physical sun salutes are devotional in nature. Their main focus is on meditation, inhales and exhales, bandhas, and drishti. This is where we establish our moving and breathing synchronization which is the heart of this practice—it connects our body, mind, and breath calming the mind while energizing our body, making space for good thoughts, and building a firm foundation which will support the rest of our practice.

Sun salutes and yoga postures stir up a lot of energy in our body. Left undirected this energy can stir up negative issues, if we make the conscious effort to direct this energy we can use it more productively, so it is helpful to start your practice with an intention. In Sanskrit this is known as Bhavana, which means “to be” or “to become”. So in essence you can “dream it”, use your intention to help direct your energy in your practice, dream the positive effects you want from the practice and focus your mind on that. This helps give our practice inner significance—an inner meaning with a practical method that improves health, clarity of mind, and is spiritually uplifting.

In yoga philosophy the Sun represents health and vitality—mentally and physically. By practicing sun salutes they bring health to our body and peace of mind to our head. Health is our greatest wealth, both in the body and mind. When practiced with a meditation in mind the sun salutes gather the strength of the mind developing inner happiness and aiding in mental focus.

There is a mantra that goes with the sun salutes to help us develop the meditative side of our practice. This is actually more a meditation than a mantra that you just recite. The Rig Veda outlines a meditation that goes with each position of Surya Namaskar A, however in my practice I have found it useful to repeat this meditation to myself while holding down dog. This is taken from the verses in the Rig Veda but I have tweaked it to suit me, you also can do the same, make it fit you—with the sun in my mind I meditate on the following:

Please bestow upon me the good fortune of having only good thoughts

Of hearing and speaking only Satya words and seeing good things— not evil (Satya is the Sanskrit word for truth, but it means truth that does not hurt—so you want to speak the truth no matter what, but you don't want to hurt with it no matter what . . . very difficult!)

Of having a sound, strong, and light physical body

that I may live a long life and attain yoga (and personally I add—spread the yoga joy ;).

The mantra then goes on to ask for longevity, a disease free body, stillness of mind, powers of concentration, ability to think profound thoughts, be unwavering, and to maintain a perfect equilibrium in body and mind.



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There is also a mantra for Sun Salute B. Surya Namaskar B is said to benefit the heart--when a beginner first starts practicing sun salute b they find themselves quickly winded, but if you keep with it you will get a stronger and a more cardiovascular-ly fit heart from practicing them giving you a strong heart.

The Rig Veda states that whoever is suffering from heart trouble will find their trouble eliminated if they practice Surya Namaskar B. This is because the surya namaskar b mantra destroys the inner enemies (which if left to manifest will become our outer enemies). The Vedas describe 6 poisons that surround the spiritual heart, recitation of this mantra helps to rid these poisons from our body. They are:

Desire (kama)  
Anger (krodha)  
Greed (Lobha)  
Delusion (moha)  
Pride (mada)  
Jealousy (matsarya)

So the Rig Veda states that by removing these poisons from our body heart disease will disappear.

The mantra for surya namaskar b is long and complicated, instead focus your attention on breathing around your heart while holding down dog. I focus on having my breath totally encompass my heart, front to back, side to side, top to bottom, keeping the heart area open and allowing prana to circulate around the heart. Remember this is more dhyana (meditation) than an actual recitation.

So as you begin your practice with sun salutes focus your attention on these meditations, and on your breath--it is important to keep your inhales and exhales the same length as this promotes body and mind equilibrium. This also sets your intension for your practice and helps develop the awareness in our practice that reduces the risk of injury while connecting our body, mind. and breath at the start, which helps us maintain that connection throughout our entire practice.

According to the sages--the first duty is to take care of the body which is the means to the pursuit of spiritual life. Sedentary lifestyle leads to pain. The practice of Surya Namaskara cures this affliction; sun salutes lead to greater health, creativity, and productivity.

Benefits:

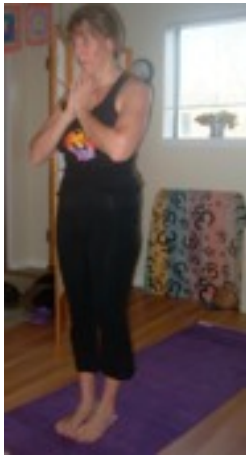
The practice of Sun Salutes requires form, energy, and rhythm.

Deb

- ॐ They alternate forward and backward bending give a profound stretch to the spinal column, keeping it healthy.
- ॐ They build heat in the body, helping to prepare our body for the practice; and the heat helps with the removal of toxins from our organs and bloodstream.
- ॐ Connecting the moving and breathing synchronicity is the most important lesson in the sun salute. Pay attention to match your movement to your breath, at first this may seem challenging (especially in sun salute b) but over time with practice will become easier. When we synchronize our moving and breathing it is very calming to the mind while energizing to the body, removing stress.
- ॐ The postures generate prana (energy in our body).

**The practice of Surya Namaskara brings happiness, health, and sunlight to the spirit.**

### Starting Position: Samasthitih (Equal Standing)

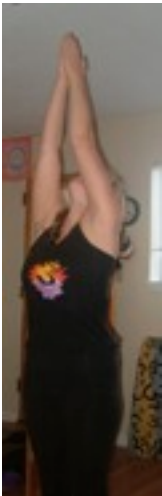


- ☯ Stand with your feet together, toes touching, heels slightly parted
- ☯ Gently contract your thighs lifting your kneecaps
- ☯ Keep pelvis level, create inner lift through your bandhas
- ☯ Relax shoulders down
- ☯ Keep chin parallel to floor and lengthen top of head towards ceiling

#### Benefits:

- ☯ Induces a state of introversion
- ☯ Focus of the mudra (anjali mudra, the pressing of your palms together) to make an offering of intention for your practice
- ☯ Activates the anahata Chakra (heart chakra)
- ☯ It is the beginning and end of the sun salute and as such it represents the peace, tranquility, and beauty of the sunrise and sunset

### First Position: Hasta Uttanasana – Inhale Hands Up



- ☯ With an Inhale, reach your arms overhead keeping your palms together
- ☯ Keep your tailbone slightly tucked
- ☯ Gaze up to your thumbs

#### Benefits:

- ☯ The upward stretch gives traction to the spine helping to maintain health of the discs
- ☯ When performed with an inhale it massages the abdominal organs and aids in digestion
- ☯ Removes roundness of the back
- ☯ Prana is moved upward
- ☯ This pose affects the Vishuddhi Chakra and the thyroid gland speeding up metabolism.
- ☯ This pose is indicative of drawing in the energy of the newly risen sun, not only via the breath but every pore in your body. This is the energy we will use to dive into our busy days.

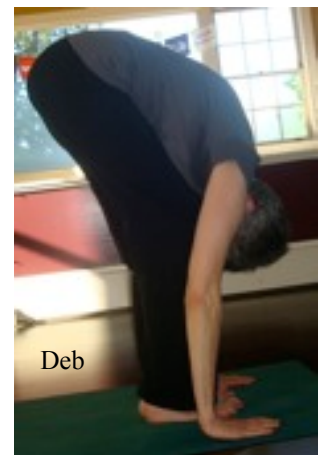
### Second Position: Exhale – Uttanasana



- ☯ On Exhale bend forward at your hips (keeping your waist long—ribs away from hips)
- ☯ Ground your palms on either side of your feet—even if you need to bend your knees to do this—See picture of Deb
- ☯ Tuck your head in toward your knees
- ☯ Gaze past the tip of your nose

#### Benefits:

- ☯ Combines the effects of a forward bend with an inversion massaging the abdominal contents.
- ☯ The whole abdomen is toned eliminating constipation
- ☯ Good blood flow is encouraged to the spinal nerves
- ☯ Emphasis is on the Swadhisthana chakra (2<sup>nd</sup> )
- ☯ Prana is channeled to the lower regions of the body, motivated by exhalation



### Third Position: Inhale – Head Up



- ☯ Keeping your hands grounded look up lifting your head and heart, if your hamstrings do not allow you to straighten your knees, bend your knees to keep your palms grounded as in picture of Deb.
- ☯ Pay attention to lift your heart area and not just throw the head up
- ☯ Lean your body weight forward into your hands

Deb



#### Benefits:

- ☯ Prepares us to jump back
- ☯ Counter-stretch on the spine
- ☯ Improves posture and strengthens the back

### Fourth Position: Exhale – Jump Back to Chaturanga Dandasana



- ☯ On exhale step or jump back to push up position
- ☯ Your forearms should be by your waist
- ☯ Wrists under your elbows
- ☯ Engage abdominals and do not let back sag! If you are too weak to not let your back sag, or have shoulder issues, you may need to bend your knees to do the pose safely until you gain strength--see picture of Deb.



- ☯ Gaze past the tip of your nose
- ☯ Fully exhale before moving into next pose

#### Benefits:

- ☯ Strengthens chest, arms, shoulders, and abdominals
- ☯ Stimulates Manipura Chakra (3<sup>rd</sup>)

### Fifth Position: Inhale – Urdhva Mukha Svanasana



- ☯ On Inhale Roll forward uncurling toes and pushing through to the tops of your feet. Lift your torso up and back, push down with hands and lift chest in opposition
- ☯ Pull your hips to wrists as you extend upward and backward
- ☯ Contract gluteals and thighs, point legs back. Slide shoulders down and back, if possible contract thighs and lift them off floor so only your hands and feet touch the floor. Again if strength or shoulder/back pain do not allow you to keep your thighs off the floor, allowing your knees to rest on the floor may be helpful--just be careful to work toward building your strength and posture over time to be able to do the pose with your knees off the floor.
- ☯ Head is back and Gaze is down.



**Benefits:**

- ☯ Relieves tension in the back muscles and spinal nerves as it stretches each vertebrae from top to bottom. Corrects posture.
- ☯ Relieves many ailments such as asthma, constipation, indigestion, kidney and liver problems
- ☯ Prana tends to move upward but we want to place our attention at the Swadhisthana chakra in attempt to stimulate prana at the source of the upward flow.
- ☯ Represents the awakening after the low point of the previous pose, the arising of knowledge from ignorance

**Sixth Position: Exhale – Adho Mukha Svanasana–5 breaths**



- ☯ On exhale lift hips by first engaging abdominals, push back with arms as you press chest back toward thighs, bend your knees if necessary.
- ☯ Allow your head to relax between your arms, gaze toward navel.
- ☯ Hold this position for 5 breaths.

If you are a member of the “tight hamstring club”, you have a couple options of ways to do your down dog:  
 ☯ Bend your knees as in the photo of Patrick, this will allow you to keep your spine straighter. or  
 ☯ to deepen the hamstring stretch, keep your legs straight and work to move your hips back. This may cause your back to round, if you have any back issues this way is not recommended--



however if you have a strong back this position will stretch your hamstrings better.

**Benefits:**

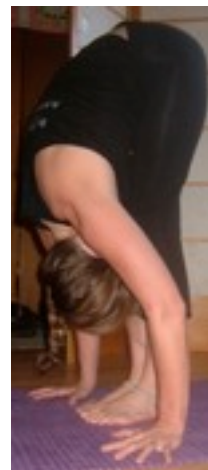
- ☯ Strengthens abdominals, arms, and wrist
- ☯ Stretches calves, hamstrings, and Achilles tendon, chest and shoulders
- ☯ Relieves varicose veins
- ☯ Relieves spinal compression, like traction for the spine
- ☯ Because the drishti (gaze) is toward the navel, the head position stimulates Vishuddi Chakra (5th )
- ☯ Prana moves downward with the exhalation



Finish Sun Salute as you began:

**Seventh Position: Inhale – Jump Up, Head Up**

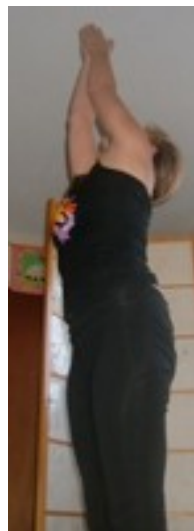
**Eighth Position: Exhale – Forward Bend**



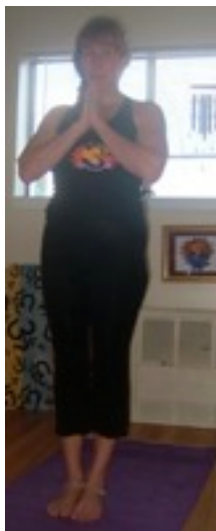


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**Ninth Position: Inhale – Hands Up**



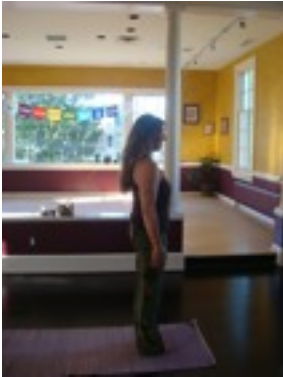
**Exhale – Samasthitih**



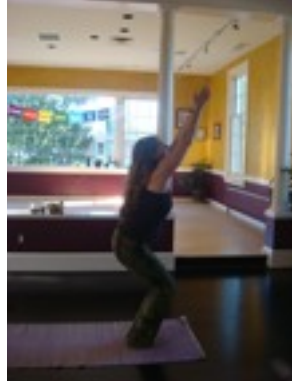
## Surya Namaskar B

The Second Sun Salute is a little longer than the first, it too requires energy and rhythm. Since it is a bit longer you will feel it affect your breathing; over time practicing sun salutes will improve your fitness! I will only give detailed info on the new poses, see Surya Namaskar A for details on other poses.

### Samasthitih

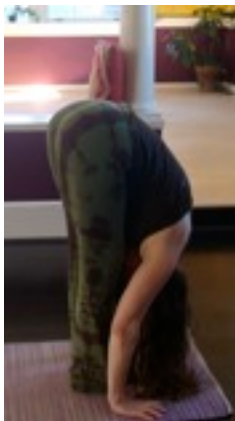


### First Position: Inhale – Utkatasana



- ☯ On Inhale squat down to a demi-squat position, shifting your body weight toward your heels but keeping weight on all four corners of your feet
- ☯ keep your arms just in front of your cheeks (reaching the arms back to far strains the shoulders)
- ☯ bring your palms together
- ☯ look to your thumbs

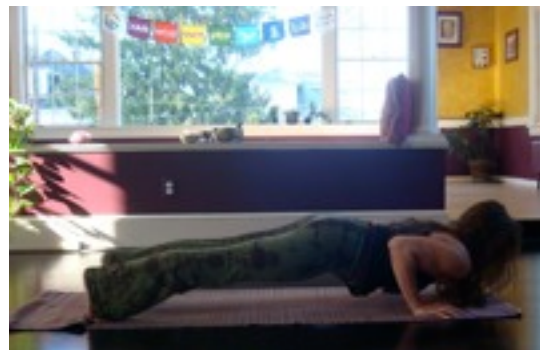
### Second Position: Exhale – Uttanasana



### Third Position: Inhale – Head up



### Fourth Position: Exhale – Chaturanga



**Fifth Position:**  
 Inhale – Upward Facing Dog



**Sixth Position:**  
 Exhale – Downward facing Dog



**7th Position: Inhale – Virabhadrasana**



☸ turn your left foot grounding your heel, step your right foot forward up toward or between your hands, straighten your back leg, bend your front knee

☸ Inhaling reaching your arms up, palms together, looking to your thumbs

☸ Stepping forward from the downward dog position will be challenging if you have tightness in your hips--in this case you may feel the need to take an extra breath here for awhile, that is ok . . .

be careful not to hold your breath while trying to keep rhythm. Also you may take a shorter stance or even use your hand to help get your foot forward.



**8th Position:**  
 Exhale – Chaturanga



**9th position:**  
 Inhale – Upward Dog



**10th Position:**  
 Exhale – Downward Dog







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**11th Position:**  
Inhale - Virabhadrasana Left Leg



**12th Position**  
Exhale - Chaturanga



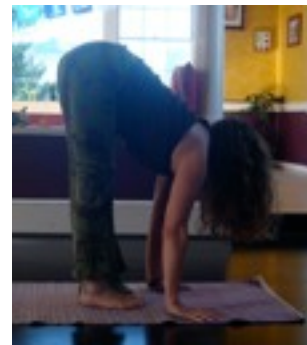
**13th position:**  
Inhale - Upward Dog



**14th Position:**  
Exhale - Downward Dog



**15th Position**  
Inhale Jump/Step Forward  
Head Up



**16th Position**  
Exhale - Uttanasana



**17th Position**  
Inhale - Utkatasana



Exhale - Samasthitih

