moon shine

Get your inner glow on with gently flowing Moon Salutations.

BY ANDREA FERRETTI
SEQUENCE BY SHIVA REA
As inhabitants of a high-octane, competitive culture, American yogis often gravitate toward practices of fiery, strength-building intensity. In fact, the most ubiquitous sequence in the West is surely the ultimate heat builder, the Sun Salutation. The sequence’s Sanskrit name, Surya Namaskar, is literally translated as “bow to the sun.” And as you lift your arms and then bow down, as you lengthen forward and jump back, you begin to embody solar energy. You stretch, strengthen, and warm your whole being from the inside out.

But on days when you’re feeling depleted, overstimulated, or overheated, it’s good to know that Surya Namaskar has a soothing sister sequence known as Chandra Namaskar, or Moon Salutation. As the name suggests, Chandra Namaskar is a quieting sequence that invites you to bow to and cultivate the moon’s soothing lunar energy.

“This kind of practice is beneficial for men and women who are under any stress,” says Shiva Rea, the creator of Prana Flow Yoga, who offers the sequence on these pages. “It’s a great way to balance your energy before you get to the point of exhaustion.” Chandra Namaskar is a quieting practice, and the Bihar School of Yoga, where Rea first learned it, teaches the sequence with a meditation at both beginning and end (right) and offers the option of chanting a different mantra related to lunar energy for each pose.

**LUNAR POWER**

Perhaps Chandra Namaskar isn’t as well known as Surya Namaskar because it hasn’t been around as long. In all likelihood, it’s an invention of the late 20th century. The Bihar School, which is a yoga school in India founded in the 1960s, first published the sequence in Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha in 1969. (The Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health created a variation of Chandra Namaskar in the 1980s that differs from the sequence that we’re presenting here.)

But the idea of looking to the moon for rejuvenation is certainly not new. In fact, the Shiva Samhita, a 500-year-old Tantric text, regarded the moon as the source of immortality. In The Alchemical Body, David Gordon White, a professor of religious studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, describes how practitioners of Tantra (a form of yoga that preceded hatha yoga) believed that the “sun” was located in the solar plexus; the “moon,” in the crown of the head. The moon was thought to contain amrita, “the stuff of the macrocosmic moon, the divine nectar of immortality,” which “pours itself into the world in the form of vivifying rain.” While the fiery sun in the abdomen was important for triggering the yogic process, its heat would, over time, cause aging, decay, and death. To reverse this process, yogis did specific practices, such as inversions or mudras (locks, or seals), to both preserve and produce amrita. The act of turning upside down was believed to draw vital fluids from the lower chakras up to the crown, where they would be transformed into amrita (also referred to as soma).

If you apply this esoteric anatomy to modern hatha yoga practice, you could say that Surya Namaskar triggers the yogic process by heating our bodies and giving us the internal fire and passion to dive deeply into yogic study. And Chandra Namaskar gives us a method for cooling the body, which can help to replenish our vital energy. “The understanding is that we can create soma inside ourselves. It’s cultivated through meditation and through lunar sadhana [practice],” Rea says.
**ANJALI MUDRA**  
(Salutation Seal), variation  
Move into a lunar state: Step your feet hip-width apart, turn your palms up, and join your pinkies together in a mudra of letting go and inward listening.

**STANDING ANAHATASANA**  
(Heart-Opening Pose)  
Inhale, open the arms wide. Exhale, hands to sacrum. Inhale, draw your heart and belly up. Move between this pose and Lunar Uttanasana 3 times.

**LUNAR UTTANASANA**  
(Lunar Standing Forward Bend)  
Fold forward, keeping the knees soft and the neck relaxed. Bring chest to thighs with palms facing the sky. Allow tension to release through your spine.

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**TRANSITION TO SAHAJA ARDHA MALASANA**  
Exhale as you turn your whole body counterclockwise until you are standing with your feet wide and parallel to one another.

**SAHAJA ARDHA MALASANA**  
(Spontaneous Flowing Half Squat)  
Inhale, bend your left knee, extend your right leg. Spine stays long. Exhale, gather energy from your inner legs to your pelvic floor. Inhale, shift to the other side with the same awareness. Now flow back and forth twice more, sweeping your arms and torso in a spontaneous flow, like seaweed in the ocean.

**HIGH LUNGE**  
Turn toward your left leg to come into a High Lunge, and get ready for a lunar vinyasa.

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**SVANANADA**  
(Bliss-Filled Downward Dog)  
Exhale, flow into Down Dog with a lunar feeling. Pedal the heels, moving freely through the hips and spine. Release your jaw, let your neck move freely, feel the self-generated bliss of a liberated dog.

**THREE-LEGGED DOWNWARD DOG**  
Pause in neutral Down Dog. Inhale, extend your right leg to the sky, then exhale and lower it down next to the left foot. Inhale, extend the left leg to the sky. Exhale, bring it forward into a High Lunge.

**HIGH LUNGE**  
Inhale in the lunge. Exhale, walk your right foot forward to the top of the mat, swaying your hips slowly from side to side in a slow saunter with relaxed energy.
HIGH LUNGÉ

On an exhalation, step your left foot back into a High Lunge with your front knee over your front ankle and your back heel pressing away.

SOMACHANDRASANA I
(Nectar of the Moon Flowing Vinyasa I)

Inhale, draw your right arm overhead as you turn both feet clockwise. Your front foot is at a right angle; your back foot is in Side Plank.

SOMACHANDRASANA II

Exhale, draw your right hand by your side. Reach toward your back foot with your chest open, shoulders level, and legs activated. Move between Somachandrasana I and II 2 more times.

PLANK POSE

Inhale, step back into Plank with your hands under your shoulders, your core activated, and a long line of energy from crown to tailbone to heels.

ANAHATASANA

Exhale, knees to the floor, lower belly engaged. Walk your hands out in front of you, shoulder-width apart, releasing your heart to the earth. Rest for several breaths, then lower all the way down.

SAHAJA BHUJANGASANA
(Spontaneous Flowing Cobra Pose)

Bring your hands under your shoulders and lift your chest, alternately rolling through the shoulders and freeing the neck. Let the spine move fluidly and without constriction or hesitation.

LUNAR UTTANASANA

Bow over your legs in a lunar forward bend with your feet together or hip-width apart and your arms hanging heavily toward the earth, palms facing up toward the sky.

STANDING ANAHATASANA

Rise up, hands to sacrum. Root down through your feet; draw up through your legs, heart, and crown. Relax your jaw. Soften your palate as if you were receiving a drop of lunar nectar.

ANJALI MUDRA, variation

Reflect inwardly before switching sides. Return here after the second side to offer a final mudra, a dedication, a moment of gratitude, and a prayer for peace and rejuvenation for all beings.

Repeat the whole sequence on the second side, this time stepping back with the right leg into a High Lunge.
Yogic texts have long acknowledged that the body has both heating and cooling energies and that yoga and pranayama (breathwork) can help bring them into a balanced harmony. Doing so is part of preparing the body for self-realization. Rea says that, after many years of an intense “solar” practice, a regular practice of Chandra Namaskar has changed her. “On a personal level, Chandra Namaskar has really helped me become a more full-spectrum yogini,” she says. “We all feel this ebb and flow in our energy, and now I totally value both sides. Instead of feeling like having low energy is a bummer, I now see it as having more meditative energy.”

**GET IN THE GROOVE**

In Rea’s version of Chandra Namaskar, the poses aren’t all that different from those of Surya Namaskar. But the intention, the pace, and the quality of movement are completely different. To support your intention of cultivating lunar energy, Rea suggests taking time to consciously set the mood for your practice. If you can, position yourself so that you can see the moon or—when the weather allows—practice outdoors in the evening. If you are indoors, keep the lights low, light a few candles, and create a womb-like atmosphere for yourself. Soothing music can help set the right tone, too. Experiment to find what works for you.

Begin your practice with a short meditation, like the one on page 78, to cultivate your connection with the moon. Draw your attention inward, inviting a sense of receptivity into your practice. To enhance your inward focus, you can repeat a traditional lunar chant, *Om somaya namaha*, as you move from pose to pose.

Pay special attention to the quality of each movement. Instead of moving quickly, jumping into and out of poses as you would in Sun Salutations, move slowly, as though you were moving through water. You can also add some spontaneous movement within the forms of the poses. For example, instead of pressing immediately into Cobra Pose, which is a heat-building backbend, try circling your shoulders back and swaying side to side.
until you arrive at your own natural version of Cobra. Rea calls this *sahaja*, which she describes as “the spontaneous movement that comes when we’re receptive to our innate inner wisdom.”

**ENERGY SAVER**

When you can, practice Chandra Namaskar in the evening. Surya Namaskar is traditionally practiced at sunrise as a way to pay homage to the sun and to warm up the body for the coming day. It makes sense, then, to practice Chandra Namaskar in the evening when the moon is out. Not only is it a great way to prepare yourself for sleep, as yoga teacher and *Yoga Journal* contributing editor Richard Rosen points out, sunrise and sunset have always been considered powerful times for practicing hatha yoga. “During these times, there’s a balance between light and dark. It’s not day. It’s not night. You’re at a junction between the two,” he says. “This reflects internally in your body: Your hot and cold energies are also in balance. It’s a natural time to do the practice.”

In addition to the time of day, you might also consider the time of the month that you practice. Rea suggests choosing a few days during the new moon, the full moon, and the waning moon (the 14 days after a full moon), since our energy is lower during those times. For women with a menstrual cycle, Chandra Namaskar can be a balm for low-energy days.

Most important, move slowly. This means that you don’t have to sync each movement to an inhalation or an exhalation the way you do with Sun Salutations. Savor the practice, just as you would a carefully prepared meal, and allow it to bring you into a more present state. “You’re not participating in the whole ‘quick fix’ when you do this practice,” Rea says. “Moving slowly and flowing through asanas without a postural goal has an unbelievable ripple effect in terms of one’s own rejuvenation and one’s ability to really be, even if you have only 20 minutes. It’s not about how much you do; it’s about the quality of being.”

*Andrea Ferretti is a senior editor at Yoga Journal who loves practicing under the moon.*