

Lunar Power

Honor the nurturing energy of the divine feminine with this meditative moon salutation. **By Karina Ayn Mirsky**

Many traditional cultures revere the moon as a manifestation of the divine feminine force in nature. According to hatha yoga, this force also resides within us. Whereas solar energy is warm, active, and outwardly oriented, lunar energy is cool, receptive, and inwardly focused.

Society typically encourages our solar, more masculine impulses, making it easy to pursue worldly achievement rather than inner awareness. Although the aim of hatha yoga is to balance our lunar and solar energies, even our asana practice tends to reflect a bias for the solar, often emphasizing sun salutations and heating practices in the interest of physical fitness. If the divine lunar force could speak, she might lovingly remind us to “chill out before we burn out.” Like a mother, the moon can teach us to

slow down, listen to our own needs, and be receptive to change.

We can invoke and pay homage to the lunar energy in nature and within by practicing *chandra namaskara*, or moon salutation. The 15 steps in the sequence below represent 15 *tithis*, or lunar days; a 16th step honors the tantric goddess Shodashi, who presides over all the phases of the moon, as well as all that is perfect, complete, and beautiful. When practiced with devotion and gratitude for the divine feminine, this version of chandra namaskara can become a full body prayer.

An inward-moving and mildly calming practice, chandra namaskara is appropriate for any time of day, including late afternoon and evening. To bring an element of ritual into your practice, try it during the new and full moon phases, or outside anytime under the moon itself. The sequence is safe to explore for anyone who practices sun salutations, and many women find it soothing during menstruation or pregnancy.

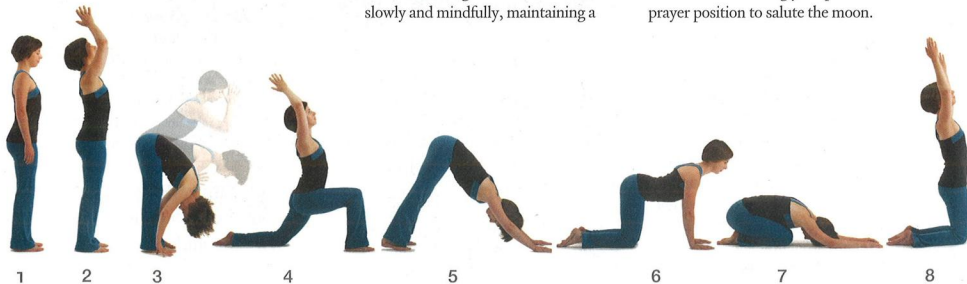
Move through chandra namaskara slowly and mindfully, maintaining a

smooth, deep, diaphragmatic breath. (Avoid using *ujjayi* breathing, which is heating). Tune into a sense of devotion as you honor all the phases of the moon and the cycles of your life.

Chandra Namaskara

1. Stand tall in *tadasana* (mountain pose) and take a few moments to establish *chandra bhavana*. (A *bhavana* is a subtle feeling created through the practice of visualization.) Close your eyes and relax your jaw. Imagine that the full moon is in your mouth like a large, soft “moon lozenge.” Picture it slowly rising through the roof of your mouth just past the center of the brain, then drifting to the back of your head, where it rests steadily at a point called the *bindu*. Hold your awareness of the full moon resting at the *bindu* throughout the practice; open your eyes two-thirds of the way and maintain a soft gaze.

2. Inhale slowly while raising your arms overhead. Bring your palms into prayer position to salute the moon.



3. As you begin to exhale, touch the thumbs to the brow center. Continue exhaling and start to fold forward, touching the thumbs to the heart center. As you complete the exhalation, fold completely into *uttanasana* (standing forward bend) with your palms open to the earth. Hold the breath out as you step your left foot back into *anjaneysana* (lunge) and drop the left knee to the floor.

4. Keep bending the right knee to anchor into the lunge as you inhale and raise your arms, bringing the palms into prayer position overhead.

5. Exhale slowly as you lower your arms in front of you, touching the brow center, heart center, and then the earth. Finish the exhalation as you step your right foot back into *albo mukha shvanasana* (downward-facing dog pose).

6. Inhale and drop both knees to the floor into table pose, then gently look up.

7. Exhale and fold slowly into *balasana* (child's pose).

8. With the next inhalation, rise onto your knees, lift your hips up off the heels, spread your arms wide, and look up, feeling flooded with receptivity and gratitude for the sacredness of life.

9. As you begin to exhale, bring your palms together in prayer position overhead, then bend your elbows to touch the thumbs to the back of your neck; bring your seat toward your heels, the chest toward your thighs, and the elbows to the floor. Finish the exhalation by settling into “praying child's pose.” Rest your awareness in *chandra bhavana* for a few rounds of breath. Then extend your arms and place your palms on the floor in front of you.

10. With an inhalation slide your chest forward between your hands and press up into a mild *urdhva mukha shvanasana* (upward-facing dog pose).

11. Exhale and press back into downward dog. Hold the breath out and step your left foot forward between the hands. Drop the right knee to the floor.

12. Keep bending the left knee to anchor into the lunge as you inhale and raise your arms; bring the palms into prayer position overhead.

13. Exhale slowly as you lower your arms in front of you, touching the brow center, the heart center, and then the earth; step the right foot forward and fold into *uttanasana*.

14. Inhale to stand up tall, raising your arms overhead with palms in prayer position to salute the moon.

15. As you begin to exhale, lower your palms to touch the brow center; complete the exhalation with palms in prayer position at your heart center.

16. Finish in *tadasana*. Close your eyes and imagine your mind as a still lake. A full moon rests at the point at the back of your head as in *chandra bhavana*, but now it shines a moonbeam onto the lake of your mind, which is then reflected out through the point between your eyebrows. Let this focused awareness shine from your calm, steady mind for a few rounds of breath.

You may feel complete after just one round of chandra namaskara, or you can choose to do four rounds, remembering all four seasons. If you have a large practice space, do one round facing in each of the four directions, beginning by facing east and moving clockwise. To complete the practice return to face east and allow yourself to linger in step 16. ■

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Photos: Crystal Kettnerhagen, Model: Kristen Koester, Wardrobe: Zobia

