Chandra Namaskar: Celebrating the Power of the Moon

Throughout history, different cultures and peoples have celebrated the moon through dances, songs, special foods, prayers, and offerings. Before calendars were created, the moon's cycles were used to keep track of time. For many, the full moon has been a time for rituals associated with healing, mysticism, growth, inspiration and insight. Every full moon brings with it the potential to celebrate fulfillment, fertility, and the bearing of fruit from our projects. Traditional full Moon rituals have ranged from very structured to very spontaneous.

Each phase of the moon brings with it a special energy for that lunar cycle. Everyone knows the moon affects the tides of the oceans. We, as human beings are also made of water, and the same phases that affect the tides also have a deep impact on our bodies and minds. When we view our lives through this interactive lunar lens, we are empowered to explore ourselves in a very natural and powerful way. Techniques for exploration can include ritual, movement, meditation and mindfulness in daily life

Moon Salutations

This year, in honor of the late harvest moon (rising October 4th, 2009), I invite you to celebrate moon energy through practicing the Moon Salutation series. This modern practice can help you rediscover the ancient roots of honoring the moon with ritual movement, and uncover your personal connection to the mysterious and divine feminine energies that surround all of us.

Practicing the Moon Salutation takes us on a symbolic journey of inward descent. It can be used as an introspective tool to help us discover the depths of fertile creative energy. It can also be a space to explore the process of literal or metaphoric birth. Just as the moon goes through dark phases and returns to its full brilliance, the Moon Salutation drops into the depths of lunging and squatting and returns to expansive standing poses that radiate beauty and magnetic power. The energy of the flow reenacts the cycle of the moon's journey through the night sky.

Physically, the moon salutation is a cooling flow of postures that calm and soothe the nervous system. The poses are good for women in all of the different phases of their cyclical reproductive lives – from menstruation to childbirth to menopause, most women can benefit from the way this particular set of poses strengthens and tones the abdominal and reproductive organs. Men can also benefit from the moon salutation in the times that they are in need of a cooling practice or whenever they feel a desire to connect with the more feminine aspects of their personality.

Practicing the Moon Salutation

Try to learn each pose individually at first. When you are comfortable with each pose, then start to link them together in a slow melodic flow. In this phase of learning, allow yourself several breaths in each shape so that you can relax and feel the essence of the pose. Once you become familiar with the flow of the poses, you can move breath by breath to your own unique rhythm. Feel free to modify the individual poses as you see fit.

Poses of the Moon Salutation

Prayer Pose: Stand with feet hip distance apart. Root the feet and engage thigh muscles. At the same time, extend through the crown of the head, imagining length coming into the spine. Bring palms together at heart center. Breathe deeply and connect to moon energy. Embrace the divine feminine and let it flow through you.

Crescent Moon: Extend the arms overhead and interlace fingers while sending the index fingers skyward into a temple position. Root left foot and left hip, extending torso and bend to the right. Root right foot and right hip and, extending the torso, come back through center - bending to the left. Return to center.

Goddess: Step out with the right foot into a wide stance. Point toes towards 11 and 1 o'clock. Bend knees and send them towards the big toes and lower into a standing squat. Keep the torso long and the crown of the head extending skyward. Bend into cactus arms.

5-Pointed Star: Keep your wide stance, straighten legs and turn the toes in the direction that you are facing, keeping feet wide apart. Extend your arms to shoulder height and relax. Imagine energy radiating from crown to tailbone and from fingertips to fingertips.

Triangle: Keep your left foot at 90 degrees and turn right toes to point towards the end of your mat. Ground into the left foot and hinge from your left hip to extend your torso to the right. Find the strength of your side body and lower your right hand until it lands on the right leg (above or below the knee joint). Extend your left arm skyward and stack your shoulders. Broaden your chest as you reach into your left hand. Take the gaze toward the left hand if it feels OK for your neck.

Pyramid: From triangle, unwind the left arm towards the right leg. As you fold forward over the right leg with your torso, rest your hands somewhere on the leg or the floor. Relax your head and neck.

Lunge: Bend the right knee, frame the foot with your hands, and lower the left knee to the floor. Check to see that your right knee is directly over your ankle. Shine your heart energy forward and take your gaze slightly up.

Yogic Squat: Bring the right leg toward center. Root your feet, lowering your tailbone. If flexibility allows, bring palms together at your heart. If your heels are lifted, try tucking a blanket underneath of them or keep your hands on the floor for added balance. If this pose doesn't work for you, you can either repeat Goddess pose here or skip the squat entirely and move from the lunge on the right into the lunge on the left.

To Finish: Take the sequence to the left side of the body in reverse order: Lunge, Pyramid, Triangle, 5-Pointed Star, Goddess, Crescent Moon. Finish in mountain pose with prayer hands and pause for a couple of breaths to feel the resonance of moon energy in the body.