

INTRODUCTION III

SALUTING THE SUN, ASANAS AND CHAKRAS

Although you don't *have* to practise Yoga as part of the study of the Ecology of the Soul, each chapter includes a detailed exploration of one of the seven asanas or positions of Surya Namaskar, the 'Salute to the Sun'. Use it to explore one aspect of the practice of Hatha Yoga which is useful and relevant to the process of balancing your internal ecology. Sooner or later we see the link between spiritual and physical health – balance – and realize the need to treat mind, body and spirit as a single interlinked system – an eco-system. But you don't need to commit to hours a day to benefit from these notes, in fact it's not mandatory that you practise at all.

The reason why we are looking through Yoga eyes at this point is because it gives you direct experience of mind, body and spirit, or Soul, at work interacting and affecting each other. It will help you kickstart your awareness of the energy that is your silent, powerful Self. By merely physical action, you still your mind. If you do practise Yoga but only as physical exercise for health and flexibility, now's the time to make the connection to its mental and spiritual realm and use it as a way of uplifting your consciousness. That, after all, is what it is meant for. If you study T'ai chi ch'uan, meditation or any other discipline that focuses your inner awareness, demanding and creating inner stillness, then you will already know what you are trying to do. They all have the mental/spiritual element because most of them are based on the same understanding of energy flow in the body; the same understanding which underpins Chinese medicine, the Chakras and a host of other esoteric knowledge systems.

Practise one of them to know and love the difference between your physical and spiritual self, and to allow them to work in harmony with each other. Yoga happens to be the one I know, and the one from which I have learned the value of letting go. Just as you can't force your muscles to stretch, you can only

let them go, so you can't force your mind to relax, to be still. You can only let it go.

'Surya Namaskar', the 'Salute to the Sun' is the template for a basic yoga experience, a beginner's course if you like. Something you can do every day without completely rewriting your life. There are of course numerous versions. The one we work on here is my individual take, the result of many years of study and practice of the BKS Iyengar system of Hatha Yoga, including working with the Master himself. His *Light on Yoga* [Harper Collins 2001], originally published in the 60s, is still the pre-eminent text for serious students. This version has seven asanas, the practice of each one of which is explained in detail at the end of each one of the 'Power' chapters. But some of them repeat as you go through the sequence, so there are actually twelve 'position moments', periods (ideally of seven deep breaths) when you are holding each asana. And when it is holding you.

As with your Magic Minute, you need to make yourself a personal, private space in the day. Unlike your Magic Minute, it needs a minimum of about five minutes. Best to try and stitch them together, steal six or seven minutes for yourself and make the two contemplative practices feed each other.

Obviously, since it's Salute to the Sun, that five minutes ought to be first thing in the morning. You are greeting and celebrating the new day from the consciousness of your powerful, peaceful, inner Self, and it's a great way of setting yourself up for the day, especially if you have managed to get your Magic Minute in too – but that may not be possible. Even if you get up five, ten or 15 minutes earlier it might not work. Too much rush, too many things to think about, you can't give it the slow, contemplative attitude it needs. No matter. Find a time in the day that you can make for yourself, and do it then. Just before bed when everyone else is asleep can work very well, as long as you haven't been partying wildly; if that's the case, leave it out for tonight. If you do manage to fit it into your morning routine, don't launch straight into it as you literally put your feet on the floor; go to the bathroom, brush your teeth,

drink a glass of water, shake your arms and legs to warm up a bit, get yourself generally ready while keeping the quiet, inward focused state of mind.

The asanas in the 12 steps are:

1 Standing prayer (Tadasana 1): The Power of Connection



2 Extended Mountain (Tadasana 2): also The Power of Connection



3 Forward bend (Uttanasana): The Power of Focus



4 Lunge (right leg forward. I can't find the Sanskrit name for this one. It may not be a traditional yoga position at all): The Power of Communication



5 Plank (Chaturanga dandasana): The Power of Love



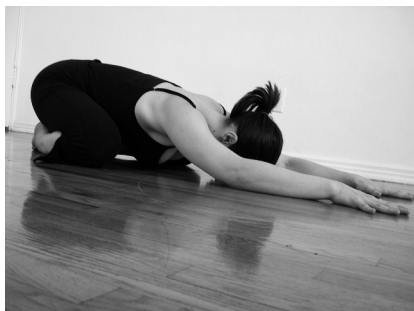
6 Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana): The Power of Endurance



7 Cobra (Bhujangasana): The Power of Creativity



8 Child (Balasana): The Power of Nature



9 Lunge (left leg forward): as above



10 Forward bend (Uttanasana): as above



11 Extended Mountain (Tadasana 2): as above



12 Standing prayer (Tadasana 1): as above



A Note on the Chakras

My Yoga practice has been given a notional shot in the arm by concentrating on the Chakra centres of energy while holding each asana, an additional source of inner focus and a definite help in keeping the attention on the channels of Pran or Ch'i in the body – which feed back directly to the mind and spirit. They also fit uncannily neatly into the Ecology of the Soul's Seven Spiritual Powers. I spent about two years thinking about the Powers, how many there are and what they are. It came down to seven – you know, days of the week – maybe I should structure the book as a 'mental/spiritual breakfast', a food-for-thought manual to dip into every day. Seven is also a beautiful number, lucky for many, and with many resonances. Of course I was familiar with the Chakras, but I swear, honest to God, I didn't research them again until long after I had settled on the Seven Powers. When I did look at them, I was astonished and uplifted to find that the Seven Powers of this spiritual ecology are more or less directly equivalent to each of the seven Chakras.

You probably know the Chakras, or at least know about them. Essentially they are understood as 'hubs', energy nodes in the body that have an affect on, and are affected by, specific areas of your physical, mental, emotional and spiritual being. Having at least a passing acquaintance with them really helps you make the leap from physical to non-physical experience, because you start right there at a specific part of your physical body, focus on it and very soon become aware of its link to spiritual energy. The image of the meditator with all seven of his or her chakras lit up and glowing is a powerful and profoundly compelling one. Kundalini yoga is a kind of meditation which focuses on the power of the Chakras, awakening the 'energy snake' inside you. But we don't have to go there – not yet, anyway.



This is how the Chakras and the Seven Spiritual Powers work together:

1. The Power of Connection

Sahasrara, the Crown Chakra, 'honors spiritual connectedness'. It deals with the release of karma, meditation, universal consciousness and unity, 'beingness'. 'Connection' in this case means linking your consciousness to a higher one, which many call God. Right now all you need to do is link your consciousness to your own higher consciousness – to see, understand and experience yourself as a Soul. Connection and connectedness also refer to community and communality, our sense of interdependence, of belonging to one organic whole.

2. The Power of Focus

Ajna, the Brow Chakra, or 'third eye', 'honors the psychic'. It governs the balance of the higher and lower selves, trusting inner guidance, intuition, visual consciousness and clarity.

3. The Power of Communication

Vishuddha, the Throat Chakra, governs communication, independence, fluent thought, and a spiritual sense of security.

4. The Power of Love

Anahata, the Heart Chakra, governs circulation, unconditional love for the self and others, passion and devotion.

5. The Power of Endurance, Sustenance

Manipura, the solar plexus Chakra, 'honours the life force', the Ch'i. It governs digestion, personal power, expansiveness, and spiritual growth.

6 The Power of Creativity

Svadhithana is either the sacral or the spleen Chakra, depending on where you look. It governs sexual desire, reproduction, creativity, joy, harmony and spiritual enthusiasm.

7 The Power of Nature

Muladhara, the base or root Chakra, governs sexuality, stability, sensuality, and courage, stamina and spiritual security.

An understanding of the Chakras, like the practice of Yoga, isn't necessary. But it helps. How you can re-awaken your own personal powers is the subject of this book, and, I hope, the inspiration for a new way of life based on mental and spiritual harmony, inner peace and profound fulfilment. The payoff is very practical. It's about Doing. But we can't fix the Doing until we fix the Being (no do-be-do-be-do jokes, please). So that's where we start. Enjoy.