

FOUR

THE POWER OF LOVE

Practice 02: YOGA SEEDS – Salute to the Sun (Surya Namaskar)

Salute to the Sun #4: Plank (Chaturanga Dandasana)

The Salute to the Sun, like most things in Yoga, has many variations. The one we use here consists of seven ‘asanas’, to use the Sanskrit name for positions, done in a 12-step sequence. This posture is ‘Chaturanga Dandasana’ in Sanskrit (‘Chatur’ means four, ‘anga’ means limb or part thereof, ‘danda’ means ‘staff’ or stave – the four-limbed staff) and ‘Plank’ in English. No prizes for guessing which one we like here at the Ecology of the Soul.

Chaturanga Dandasana – Plank: The Asana



We focus on ‘high plank’ for this version of Surya Namaskar. It falls naturally into the sequence, whereas ‘low plank’ is such a trial of strength for the arms that I recommend you learn and practise it individually.

In the sequence, you are between ‘lunge’ with your right leg forward, and Adho Mukha Svanasana, ‘Dog’. Palms flat on the floor, jump your right leg

back from the lunge position so that both legs are extending back behind you, your weight resting on your toes, which have flexed to point forward. Your arms are straight up and down from your shoulders, elbows locked. You are turning them into strong structural components, supporting your upper body weight and giving it enough lift to feel light. Those arms have to feel like tree trunks or steel girders.

They need to be, because your aim here is to make a straight line with your body from the top of your spine where it enters your skull right down to the backs of your heels. We've talked about opening your channels for the energy to flow; that opening process happens when you make them as straight and unencumbered as you can, and this position concentrates on that straightness. Your head is a natural extension of your spine; you are looking down at the floor in between your hands. As your strong solid arms extend to your shoulders, open your shoulders and chest a little by twisting your arms in their sockets slightly and giving your heart more space. Your lower back must be energised and raised to counter its natural downward curve, but don't raise it by rounding your spine; the lift comes from within the spine itself, and also by tucking your coccyx in.

Remember that you are always feeling and hearing your breathing sound at the top back of your nasal passage, making a hollow echo in your head which in itself is creating your calm, inner focus. Remember also that every move you make is done on an exhalation. Run your attention up and down your body, focusing and feeling the energy in each chakra position, or node. Warmth from red Muladhara, at the base of your spine and flooding both upwards and downwards, connecting you to the earth and the natural world; a tingle from orange Svadisthana, in the pit of your stomach just above your genitals; steadiness and stability from yellow Manipura at the centre of your solar plexus; the opening, pivotal energy of Anahata, the heart chakra, which is green in colour, sometimes with pink petals; let go your throat muscles, relaxing your neck and tongue (this is tricky!) so the brain quietens at Vishudda, the blue throat chakra; you should have no difficulty feeling the energy at Ajna, the indigo 'third eye' chakra, because this is the physical

position of the Soul in the body; and finally, the upward and outward energy of the violet connecting / connected chakra, Sahasrara, carrying the flow out of your system, up and out towards the Divine. The more it flows out, the more there is of it to flow.

Hold the position if you can for seven full in-out breaths, each one focusing on each chakra. Tailbone tucked in, arms locked, chest spread. It's energising and strengthening; deceptively simple but with a great deal of subtlety. You will enjoy refining Chaturanga Dandasana for the rest of your days. Why not?