



# The Heart of Moon Yoga

Three Essential Tools to  
Deepen Your Yoga and  
Get You Started with  
the Moon Salutation

Laura Cornell

*Midwife for Healing Transformation*

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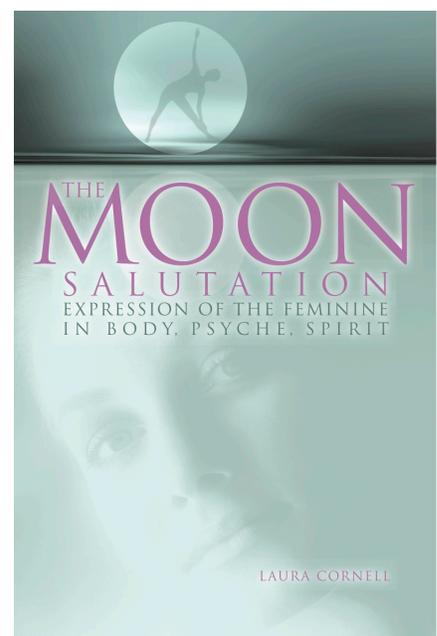
By Laura Cornell

Helping women heal so they can contribute to healing the planet.

[www.LauraCornell.com](http://www.LauraCornell.com)

Material in this ebook is excerpted from  
*The Moon Salutation: Expression of the Feminine in Body, Psyche, Spirit*, by Laura Cornell

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# About Dr. Laura Cornell

Laura Cornell, PhD, is a midwife for healing transformation, helping women who are inspired to make a difference birth their gifts into the world. Laura works as a scholar, author, teacher, non-profit leader, and coach, inspiring others to love themselves fully through the practice of Yoga, and to move from there towards healing the planet.

As Founder of the Green Yoga Association, Laura spurred a national movement towards Green Yoga studios, inspired thousands to move away from toxic Yoga mats, and produced two major conferences raising awareness about the connections between ecology and Yoga. She also lead a year-long research project with six yoga teachers on integrating Green Yoga into teaching and practice, and initiated the Green Yoga Teacher Leadership program. Laura's Green Yoga work was featured in Yoga Journal, Yogi Times, L.A. Yoga, and Common Ground Magazines.

In her Yoga teaching with women, Laura offers open-hearted practice, compassionate acceptance, and soul-nourishment. She encourages students of all levels to care for their own bodies as their first step in caring for the planet. She is author of The Moon Salutation: Expression of the Feminine in Body, Psyche, Spirit, slated for release in summer 2011.

Laura is adjunct faculty in the Asian and Comparative Studies Department at The California Institute of Integral Studies and facilitates the Institute's Certificate in Yoga Philosophy.

Laura holds her doctorate in Religion and Philosophy, and has additional degrees in East-West Psychology and physics.

She has led workshops at the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, the Yoga Philosophy Program of Loyola Marymount University, the Integral Yoga Teachers Conference and several ashrams and research centers in India.



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# Introduction

Welcome to your healing journey with the Moon Salutation! As someone who has practiced this flow for almost 20 years, I can tell you you're in for a treat!

The Moon Salutation has helped to heal and nourish my female body, but even more than that, it has invited me to love myself as a woman more deeply than I ever thought possible. It has connected me with other women in circles large and small, and helped me to remember the wisdom of my grandmothers and of this blessed planet.

Here are some of the benefits you can expect from this sequence:

- \* You will feel your heart open through the Crescent Moon Poses.
- \* You will feel empowered through the Goddess Squat.
- \* You will feel connected to the earth through Lunge and Side Lunge Pose.
- \* Your body will be strengthened and stretched through side-bending, lunging, forward bending, and squatting.
- \* And much more.

Here is what one of my well-known students had to say about learning the Moon Salutation, and about practicing it in conjunction with the meditative poem I share as a bonus in this ebook:

“Thank you again for sharing this blessed salutation and meditation with me.”

“The Moon Salutation feels like the perfect amount of movement to wake up and soften my body. I haven't done much Yoga before, and I like the permission given to modify as needed. I love the sequence of the poses: softening, opening, reaching, bending, and squatting. The squat makes me feel especially strong and female and connected to something very ancient. I love the meditation you offer and find my body flowing more and more easily into the poses as I practice.

In the face of several recent losses, daily Moon Salutations have become a way of centering myself in body and spirit, while affirming my beauty, power, love, and connection to all life in the universe. I salute your work wholeheartedly.”

Carol Christ, author of *Rebirth of the Goddess: Finding Meaning in Feminist Spirituality*; *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess*; and *She Who Changes: Re-imagining the Divine in the World*.

If you are a beginner to Yoga, go easy as you start. You may want to show this ebook to your Yoga teacher, and ask him or her to guide you through the poses one by one over a period of weeks before you attempt putting them together in a flow. I'm also including as a bonus a gentle version that you can practice out of the box from day 1, even as a beginner, and even if you have special needs or are in a chair.

Some of you may be experienced Yoga teachers or practitioners yearning to find a feminine voice and a feminine perspective on Yoga. To you I say, welcome, you're in the right place! There is much to learn about the vital history of women in Yoga, and the Moon Salutation is an excellent starting place.

For all of you starting out on this path, welcome. The Moon Salutation will enhance your practice both physically and spiritually. I wish you many blessings on your journey.

*Laura*

# Essential Tool 1

## Understanding the Moon Salutation

The Moon Salutation was created by a group of senior female teachers at the Kripalu Center in the late 1980s. Their goal was to honor women's bodies and women's rhythms while also complementing the Sun Salutation. For some women during menstruation and menopause, the more familiar Sun Salutation is too stimulating for the nervous system, and should be practiced gently or not at all. During pregnancy, several of its postures are contraindicated, as they could injure either fetus or mother. In contrast, the Moon Salutation cools and calms the nervous system, and includes several of the most beneficial postures for menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause.

Men also love practicing the Moon Salutation because it is such a powerful psychological and spiritual counterbalance to the Sun Salutation. While the Sun Salutation enacts the hero's journey--stepping forward to face life's challenges--the Moon Salutation enacts the journey of descent--sinking into the depths to discover one's creativity, the process of literal or metaphoric birth.

Just as the moon goes through dark phases and returns to its full brilliance, so the Moon Salutation drops into the depths of lunging and squatting, returning to triangle, star, and half moon poses with radiant joy and openness. Further, because it is oriented to the side it is perfectly suited to practicing in a circle or facing a partner, opening us to relationship and community in our Yoga practice. Its earthy squats help us to feel grounded and open to emotions.

If you are a beginner, it is often helpful to learn the Moon Salutation under the guidance of a teacher so that you can learn to adapt it to any special needs your body might have, such as tight hips or a vulnerable knee. More experienced practitioners may be comfortable moving into the full Moon Salutation without variations. Alternately, Laura's book on the Moon Salutation provides directions for practice and variations that are appropriate for a variety of skill levels, ranging from seniors practicing chair Yoga to advanced students looking for challenging variations.

Once you are familiar with the movements of the Moon Salutation, you can experiment with practicing it at different times of the day, such as during a morning stretch break (instead of a coffee break!), before bedtime as a way to quiet and center yourself, or even as a way of celebrating the full moon. You can teach the Moon Salutation to a friend or family member, and practice it while mirroring each other, enjoying its balance and completeness. The Moon Salutation has both ancient and modern roots. The recovery of the Moon Salutation is part of the recovery of the divine feminine at this time in history.

# Essential Tool 2

## Visual Image of the Moon Salutation

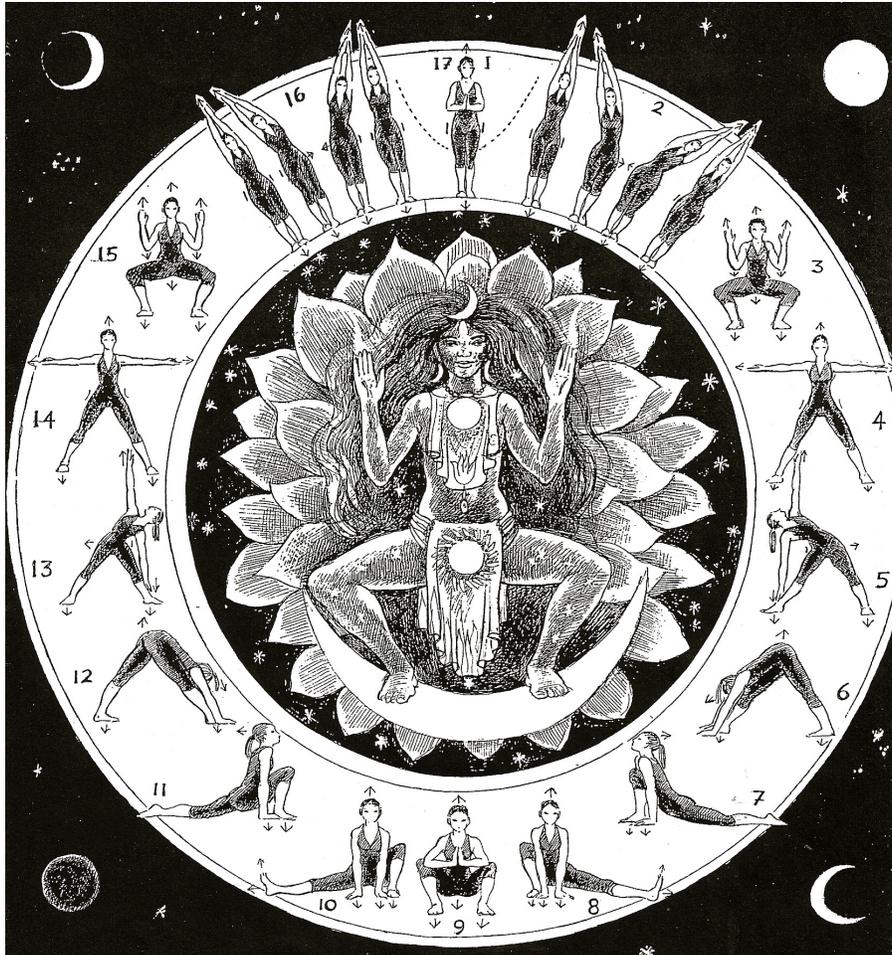


Image drawn by Gail Rutherford.  
Contributed by Deva Parnell, 2010.

# Essential Tool #3:

## Step by Step Instructions for Practicing the Moon Salutation

Note: Numbers given here correspond with the numbers on the previous page.

Begin in mountain with hands by sides.

1. Inhale, sweep arms out to sides and overhead to temple (interlace fingers, extend first fingers and thumbs).
2. Exhale, half moon left.  
Inhale, temple.  
Exhale, half moon right.  
Inhale, temple.
3. Exhale, Goddess.
4. Inhale, star.  
Exhale, triangle preparation left (left foot turns out, right foot slightly in, torso reaches left with head in line with spine, arms reach left staying parallel to floor).
5. Inhale, triangle left (arms rotate with left arm pointing to floor, right arm to ceiling, turn head to look up).
6. Exhale, head-to-knee pose (sweep right arm by ear and to floor, rotate hips to face left).
7. Inhale, lunge.
8. Exhale, extended leg squat (walk hands front, rotate hips to face center bringing weight over left toes, see modifications below if needed).
9. Inhale, full squat (see modifications below if needed). Take three complete breaths.
10. Exhale, extended leg squat (extend left leg to side).
11. Inhale, rotate to lunge.
12. Exhale, head-to-knee pose.  
Inhale, triangle preparation right (eyes stay down for balance, prepare feet with right foot out, left in slightly, bring both arms in front of right knee, open left arm up, open shoulders and hips into triangle).
13. Exhale, triangle left (rotate head to look up).
14. Inhale, star.
15. Exhale, Goddess.  
Inhale, temple.
16. Exhale, half moon right.  
Inhale, temple.  
Exhale, half moon left.  
Inhale, temple.
17. Sweep arms to sides slowly through the shape of the full moon, taking several breaths if desired.

## Bonus #1

# Meditation on the Moon Salutation

I stand tall, body full and present in all of its beauty.

I open my arms wide to bring all of life into my being.  
My arms form a temple above me, protecting and sheltering me.  
I know that I am on holy ground.

Yielding now, softening, my body takes the shape of the crescent moon.  
As I move and bend, my heart stays open to the world.

I step wide into a squat.  
Mother Earth's ferocious powers rise up through my legs, hips, belly, and back.  
I give birth to all that is.

Straightening arms and legs I am a star.  
I am the universe.  
Planets and galaxies whirl within me.  
I radiate light in all directions.

Supple and yielding again, I reach to the side.  
I turn to look up.  
I reach, yearning and striving, and yet rest, accepting fully.

Turning to pyramid pose I become quiet.  
I submit to the inner workings of my own being.  
I am ready to descend.

Lunging, I stretch long and feel again the glorious length of my body.  
I ask for blessings and protection.

Turning, I place my hands on the blessed earth.  
Home of deer and bear, hillsides and ponds,  
I touch you lovingly.

Coming into a squat I am connected with all animal and plant life.  
I am the dark moon.  
For three days and nights I will stay here.  
I am giving birth,  
Standing on the threshold of life and death.  
I am Ereshkigal, Hecate, the crone.  
I am Queen of the Underworld.

Dear Earth, You have been with me when I needed comfort,  
Given me wisdom when I was in pain.  
I pray I may do the same for you.

I receive the blessings of the moon as I look up,  
I am here, divine spirit in all life, to do your bidding.

I am restored and nourished.  
I feel my breath, my bones, my flesh.

I am Venus, the morning and evening Star.  
I am Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth.

I am infinite, beyond space and time.  
I am the bindi, the one point at the center of the world.

I am Lilith, I will not deny my sexuality.  
I am Kali-Durga, I fight for justice courageously and effortlessly.

I am Mary, the Virgin, Quan Yin, compassionate mother of all.  
I am Aphrodite, flower of the fields.

I am the full moon.  
I am whole.  
I am complete.  
I know the world with all its sorrow and pain and I am not afraid.  
I know myself with all of my sorrow and pain and I am not afraid.  
I am light and dark.  
I am the inside and the outside.  
I am one with all.

Om Shanti

- Yogeshwari Laura Cornell

## Bonus #2

# The Flow of Masculine and Feminine in the Psyche

## A Model for Archetypal Masculine and Feminine

The model of the archetypal masculine and feminine that I will use here is that of Gareth Hill, who draws from the groundbreaking and powerful work of Carl Jung on the juxtaposition of opposites in the psyche. Unlike Jung, however, Hill does not ascribe certain psychological tendencies more to one gender or the other. Rather, he views both masculine and feminine as essential and integral in the psyches of both men and women. The flexibility and gender-egalitarian nature of Hill's model is a refreshing and necessary revisioning of Jung's theories, which slipped into overly stereotyped and gender-rigidified notions. Hill's model of masculine and feminine provides a framework within which to understand these aspects of the sun and moon salutations. The moon salutation is one expression of the larger project of bringing feminine values and principles back into the collective sphere.

In his book Masculine and Feminine: The Natural Flow of Opposites in the Psyche (1992), Hill describes the interplay of dynamic and static aspects of the psyche. He divides psychic energy into four quadrants or principles: the static feminine, the dynamic feminine, the dynamic masculine, and the static masculine. This model thereby ascribes to both masculine and feminine attributes relating to steadiness or constancy as well as attributes relating to change or newness. These elements of the psyche are in constant interplay and balance in the healthy adult. They also describe developmental stages, which are experienced beginning in infancy.

The static feminine is the principle of containing, grounding, and nurturing—the experience of being held and cared for. It is represented by the cycles of nature with their repetitive predictability: the seasons of the year, the cycles of the moon, or a woman's cycle. Most elementally, the static feminine is expressed by the containing womb. Its shape is a circle. In its negative aspect it may be seen as smothering and entrapping, but in its positive aspect it represents unconditional love and acceptance.

Developmentally, the static feminine is the first stage experienced as an infant. In the protective embrace of the parenting matrix, we learn to trust our environment and to access our instincts. As the individual matures, the ground of bodily security is integrated, providing the foundation from which he or she will later move independently into the world. Adults who are well established in the static feminine are able to trust themselves and thus relate authentically to others. They feel at ease with the world and experience themselves as whole.

The dynamic masculine is the counterbalance to the static feminine. It is the principle of actively and consciously engaging with the world. It is the ability to think and act independently and thus create an autonomous identity. It is the zest for new knowledge, the acquisition of new skills, the impetus for new projects. Most elementally, the dynamic masculine is the sperm penetrating the egg. Its shape is the arrow. Unchecked and out of balance, the active masculine can lead to excessive activity that is destructive to individual, communal, and ecological well-being. When it is in balance, however, the dynamic masculine is the healthy manifestation of enterprise and vigor.

The dynamic masculine is the second stage of psychological development. Here the child begins to break away from the symbiosis of the parenting matrix to explore what she or he may become apart from the family. Adults who are well established in the dynamic male show initiative and enthusiasm, and are able to move purposefully toward their goals.

In Hill's model, the energy of the psyche flows naturally from static feminine to dynamic masculine, and from there to static masculine. The static masculine is the principle of rational order. It is logos, the word, conscious thought. It is the development of those aspects of community that allow for harmonious living: fair-minded rules and ethics, family structure and support, and the disciplined completion of projects. In its negative aspect, the static masculine becomes overly rigidified rules and the mindset that clings to them, even when those rules are devoid of meaning and thus lifeless. In its positive aspect, the static masculine is a mindful way of organizing one's approach to life, a sense of principled living.

Developmentally, the static masculine is the third stage of life, wherein the energy of the adolescent is tempered by constructive and necessary constraints. The demands of career, family, and balanced personal

growth require a harnessing of the drive for independence into productive channels and a regularized life. An individual who is well established in the static masculine will be able to accept these limitations, to plan and think reasonably and thereby contribute to the common good.

The static masculine is counterbalanced by the dynamic feminine. The dynamic feminine is the muse, the connection to imagination and to the unconscious. It is eros, feelings and emotions, an openness to connection with others. The experience of the dynamic feminine is often fresh and surprising: the unexpected shooting of Cupid's bow in the igniting of erotic love, or a startling insight gained from a dream. In its negative aspect, the emotionality of the dynamic feminine may become overwhelming or self-indulgent, resulting in chaotic stagnation or depression. In its positive aspect, the dynamic feminine is a fountain of life-giving joy and creativity, intuition, and improvisation.

Developmentally, the dynamic feminine may be considered the fourth stage of life. After becoming established in family and career, the individual begins to examine the meaning of her or his life. Is it authentic? Is it connected to her deepest desires? Does it contribute to relatedness to self and others? Jung was especially attentive to this stage of life in his work with his clients. Here we explore the choices we have made in the light (or darkness) of the unconscious; we consult the soul and ask it to come to the fore, giving meaning and joy to the structures which have been created, or rendering them asunder if needed. An adult who is well established in the dynamic feminine will be spontaneous and playful, open to new possibilities and flexible enough to change directions when needed.

While the four principles described here may be understood on a macro level as distinct stages of psychological development, they may also be understood on a micro level as interacting forces in shorter events. For example, in creating the Moon Salutation, the women moved from their own organic, felt sense that at times their bodies needed a different way of doing yoga (static feminine) to the desire to explore and create a new form (dynamic masculine). The form became standardized (static masculine) and as they and others practiced it, it led them each time to new discoveries and insight, to a deeper and more real connection to the soul (dynamic feminine). These discoveries became integrated and led to an enriched and broader sense of

wholeness (static feminine). If any one of these aspects had been missing—the organic body sense, the initiative to create a new form, the ability to organize, to standardize, and to teach others, or the connection to life-giving meaning—the Moon Salutation might never have been birthed, transmitted to others, or been so enthusiastically received. Similarly, all four aspects of experience are present in any successful endeavor or significant learning.

## Masculine and Feminine in Hatha Yoga Practice

Different aspects of asana practice itself reflect different aspects of masculine and feminine. The spontaneous posture flow emphasized by Amrit Desai and experienced by many of his students is by nature dynamic feminine. In posture flow, one allows movement to emerge spontaneously from the body's prana, or life force; the results often reflect the surprising nature of the unconscious. The counterbalance to posture flow is provided by the anatomical alignment principles of muscles and bones (static masculine). They are the ordered, conscious mind's way of quantifying yoga practice. Both alignment principles and spontaneous posture flow are necessary to create balance.

It is interesting to note that as hatha yoga became popularized in the twentieth century, the emphasis on technical alignment (static masculine) became much greater than it had been previously. The modern, scientific study of anatomy combined with emerging posture-based forms to create this new, alignment-oriented yoga. Kripalu is unique among American schools of yoga in including the dynamic feminine, through its inclusion of posture flow, taught as a later stage of practice.

Even within the walls of Kripalu, there has been an oscillation and tension between emphasis on alignment or flow, as discussed in Chapter 4. This interplay at Kripalu has taken place within the context of a wider culture that values the static masculine more highly than the dynamic feminine.

A static feminine element of hatha yoga is found in the final pose of the practice: deep relaxation (also known as Corpse Pose). Corpse Pose (Savasana) is considered by some to be the most important asana. It is a complete letting go, a release into the hands of the Mother. As we "die" in this pose, we practice the organic

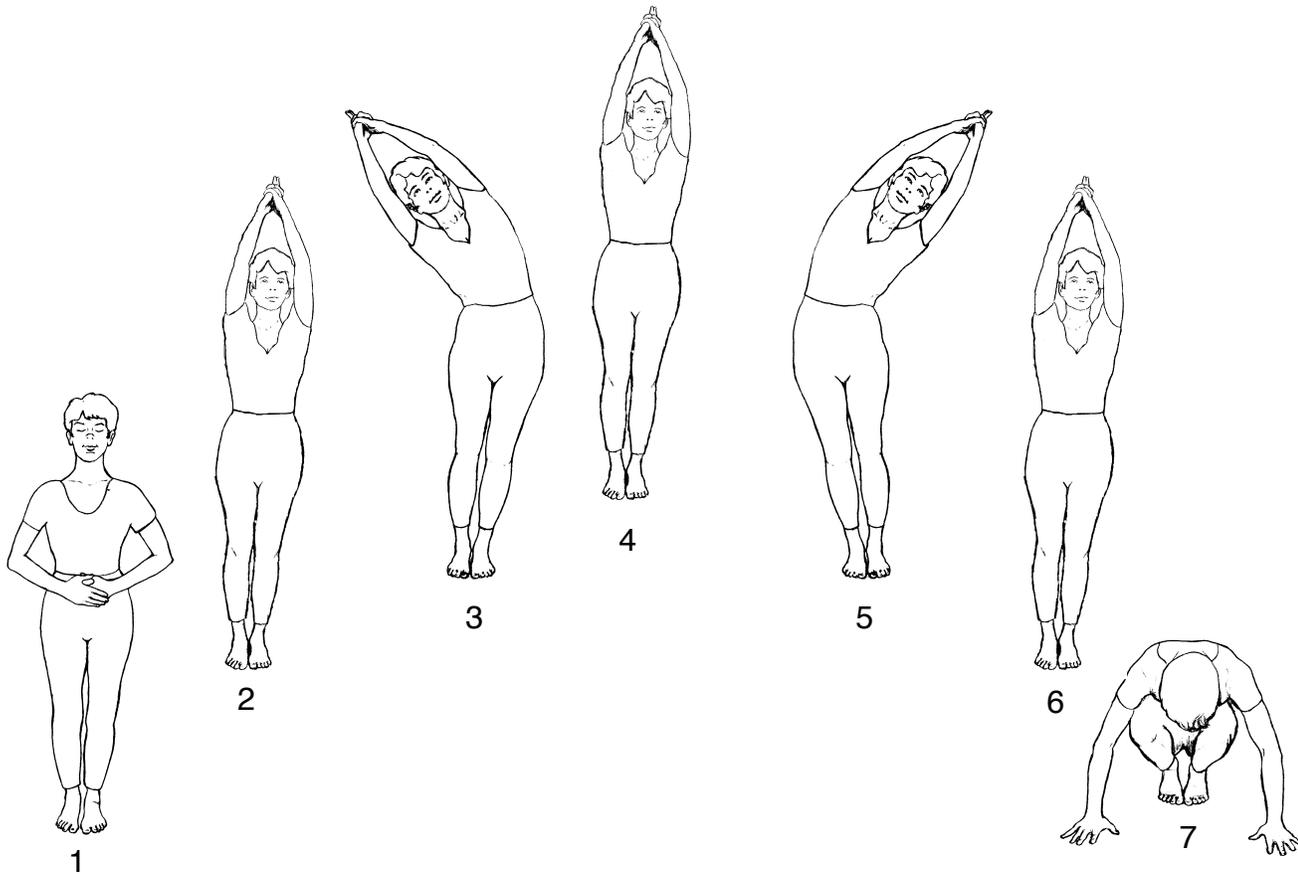
decomposition of nature, we integrate all insights and knowledge, we come into peaceful unity with ourselves and are reborn.

Another static feminine aspect of hatha yoga is the development of the compassionate witness in the mind and body of the practitioner. This is the mental stance that watchfully observes the body and mind, without judging them. For many, this internal stance is difficult to achieve at first and is held by another—the teacher or the support of the group, in contexts where that is made available—until the practitioner can integrate and maintain it for her or himself.

The impetus to begin a yoga practice and the curiosity to learn new poses stem from the dynamic masculine aspect of the psyche. The will to improve and the intention to strengthen and better oneself are also dynamic masculine. Without this impulse, it would be difficult to move forward. Taken as a whole in its purpose as a spiritual path, hatha yoga contains complete possibilities for balance.

## Bonus #3

### Three Phases of the Moon Gentle Flow



1. Mountain pose, hands by sides.
2. Inhale, trace the shape of the full moon with the hands, bringing arms overhead to temple (interlace fingers, extend thumbs and first fingers).
3. Exhale, half moon left.
4. Inhale, temple.
5. Exhale, half moon right.
6. Inhale, temple.
7. Exhale, dark moon (knees bend fully, body rounds down over knees, head is down, hands touch the ground, or for more challenge, hands wrap around shins).
8. Pause for one or more full breaths in dark moon.
9. Repeat from Step 2 above.
10. When ready to complete, inhale, temple, and then exhale, arms to sides to mountain.