



# **Asanas – Fundamentals**

**The psycho-physical exercises  
of Yoga**



# Outline

- ✦ Introduction to what yoga is for
- ✦ What are asanas (postures)
- ✦ Meditation position
- ✦ Mantra
- ✦ Cobra posture
- ✦ Long salutation posture
- ✦ Yoga posture
- ✦ Theory – lymph and glands
- ✦ Auto-massage
- ✦ Guided relaxation

A vertical decorative strip on the left side of the slide. It features a collage of images: at the top, several interlocking gears in shades of orange, red, and brown; in the middle, a stylized human figure in white and grey; and at the bottom, more gears and abstract shapes in warm tones. The background of the slide is dark blue with faint, overlapping gear patterns.

# Yoga – the *Instructions Manual* for a harmonious life

- ✦ Every machine is provided with an instruction manual so one knows what it is for and how to utilize it to produce the desired results.
- ✦ We have been provided with a human body and mind, we must know how to best use it and what it can be best used for.
- ✦ Yoga is a practice with instructions which enables us to utilize our body and mind in the best way.



# Yoga

– instructions for a fulfilling life

- ✦ When we came to this world we were provided with a human body and a human mind but we were not really given instructions on how to utilize this human structure.
- ✦ The word 'yoga' means 'union of unit mind with Cosmic Mind'.



# Human biological entity

- ✦ One may study from Kindergarten to a PhD degree without ever going deep into the question of how the human structure and life can be best utilized.
- ✦ Very little is talked about what this human biological entity is made for.



## Looking for – what?

- ★ If we observe human beings and also other beings, all are generally looking for some happiness, peace, comfort.
- ★ A cat will immediately lie on a recently parked car when the engine is hot, searching for a warm comfortable spot.
- ★ When one goes to an ice cream shop one will choose that flavour that stimulates most one's palate.



What is the goal?

What is a human being really searching for?

- ☀ Happiness
- ☀ Peace
- ☀ Well being
- ☀ But for how long? 5 minutes? Half an hour? A day? A month? A year?
- ☀ How long do we want to feel happiness for?
  - ☀ Every moment 😊 - yes?

The background of the slide is a dark blue gradient. On the left side, there is a vertical strip with a colorful, abstract pattern of gears and light. Overlaid on the blue background are several large, semi-transparent blue gear shapes of various sizes. At the top, there is a silhouette of a mountain range.

# Attaining harmony

- ★ To attain happiness one will have to live in a harmonious way caring for one's body and developing one's mind through daily exercises and practices.
- ★ Yoga was developed with that idea in mind.
- ★ You can practice and learn daily, at home - it is the regularity of your practice that will determine your benefits.





# How to develop the body and mind?

- ✦ Regular daily practice of yoga asanas.
- ✦ For physical and mental harmony one will need to practice daily.
- ✦ What to practice?
- ✦ We will start with the basic asanas or psycho-physical exercises of yoga.



# Asanas (yoga postures)

- ✦ Asana means 'a position in which one feels comfortable'.
- ✦ Asanas are a kind of physical practice (having both movement and stillness) which keeps the body healthy and balanced.

# Physical Exercises



- ★ Repeated muscular contractions
- ★ Develops strong muscles
- ★ Possible fatigue
- ★ Cramps, strain on the heart
- ★ No net gain of energy
- ★ Main effect on muscles
- ★ Effects are mostly physical

# Asanas



- Single, slow muscular contraction
- Relaxation and endurance
- No fatigue
- No cramps, nor heart strain
- Energy accumulated , not spent
- Main effect on internal organs
- Effects are physical and mental



# Benefits of asanas

- ✦ Balance hormone secretions from the glands, thereby helping us to control and balance our emotions better.
- ✦ Contributes to mental peace.
- ✦ Improve thinking and memory.
- ✦ Keeps the body flexible.
- ✦ Prevent onset of diseases.
- ✦ Importantly, make the body well-established for meditation.

# Rules for practicing asanas

- ✦ Before practicing asanas refresh your body by taking half-bath\* or full bath.
- ✦ Do not practice asanas outdoors.
- ✦ Do not allow smoke in the room.
- ✦ Wear tight-fitting underwear and light comfortable clothes for the session.
- ✦ Practice on a blanket or mat.
- ✦ Practice with empty stomach, 2 ½ hours to 3 hours after a meal.
- ✦ After asanas do not come in contact with water for at least ten minutes. Wait at least 20 minutes before eating.
- ✦ During menstruation, after 5<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy and within one month of delivery, women should not practice difficult asanas or any heavy exercise.

The background of the slide is a dark blue gradient. On the left side, there is a vertical strip with a colorful, abstract pattern of gears and mechanical parts in shades of orange, yellow, and brown. The main area of the slide features several large, semi-transparent blue gears of various sizes, some overlapping each other. In the upper right, there is a stylized mountain range silhouette in a lighter blue shade.

# Asanas

- ✦ Developed thousands of years ago in India and Tibet.
- ✦ Developed because of the human being's desire to know oneself.
- ✦ To achieve harmony between physical, mental and spiritual aspects of a human being.

# Asanas

- ✦ Yoga postures were first developed by observing various animals, how they moved, how they rested, how they instinctively cured themselves when sick.
- ✦ There are thousands of exercises and many of them carry the name of the animals which inspired them.
- ✦ At archeological excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro in Pakistan, civilizations more than 6000 years old, statues were found of Shiva and Parvati performing different asanas.

# Positions for meditation

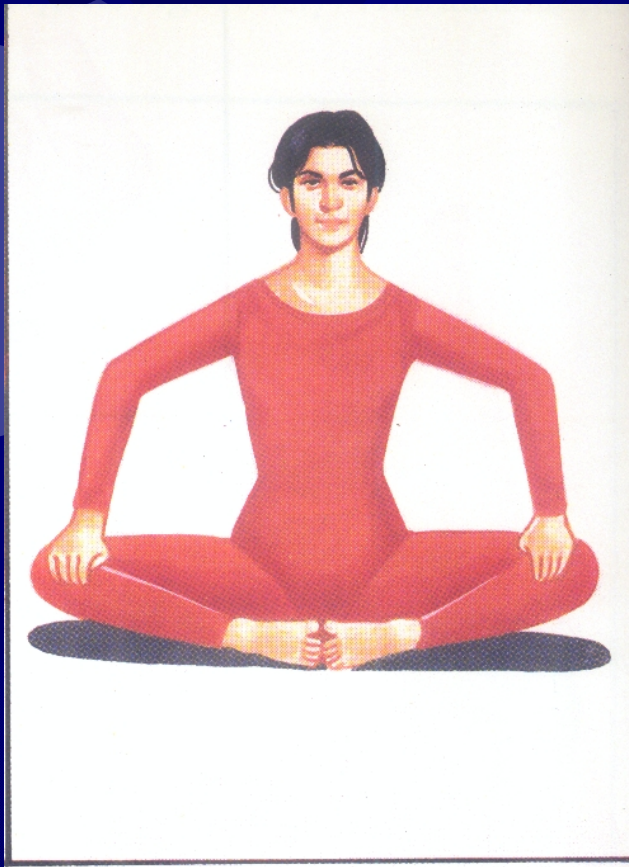
- ✦ Padmasana – the lotus pose



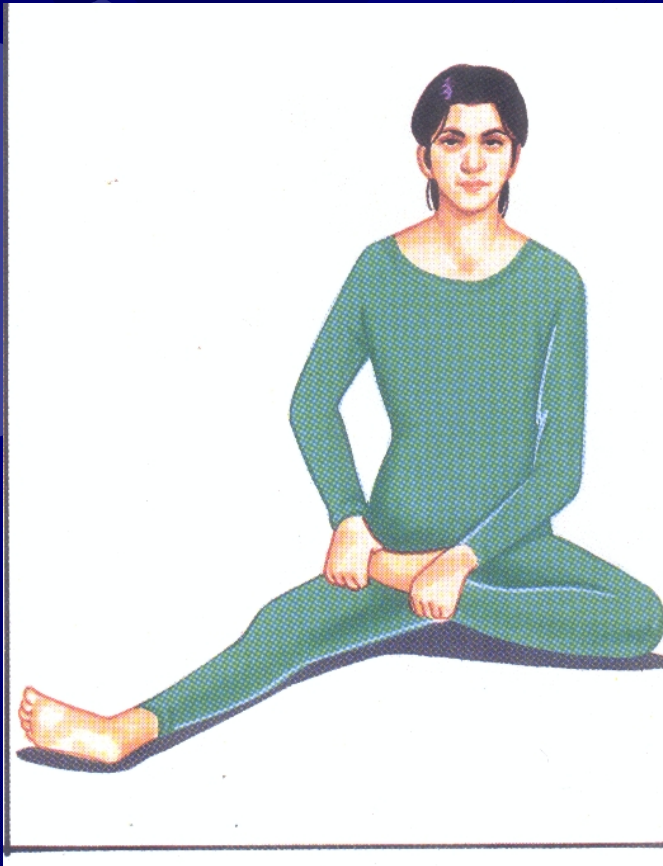


# Step by Step to the Lotus - 1

- ✦ Ankle-knee pose



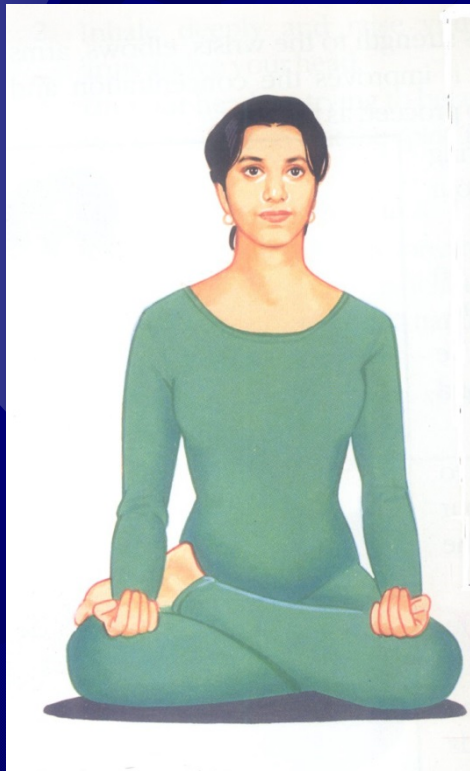
# Step by Step to the Lotus - 2



- ★ Mild stretching of legs upwards to below waist-line
- ★ - do both sides

# Step by Step to the Lotus - 3

## ☀ Half-lotus



# Step by Step to the Lotus - 4

✦ Full lotus





# Mantra meditation

- ✦ Before Asanas do some meditation. You can use a mantra.
- ✦ Mantras are sounds with feelings, and have:
  - ✦ a vibration
  - ✦ a rhythm
  - ✦ a meaning (ideation) ...
- ✦ ... which help to liberate the mind from the disturbances of the outer layers and ...
- ✦ ... merge in the depth of the inner layers.



# Mantra meditation

- ✦ The mantra establishes a connection between the microcosm and the Macrocosm.
- ✦ Constant repetition of a mantra introverts the mind and expands it to a higher level.
- ✦ In Ananda Marga we use two types of mantras:
  - ✦ Universal Mantra;
  - ✦ Personal Mantra.

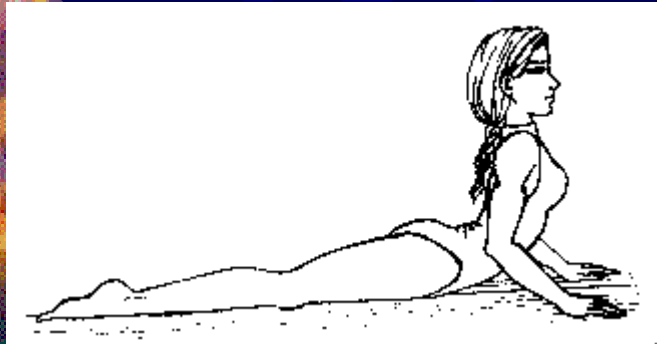


# One simple practice

☀ You can practice meditation simply with the universal mantra:

☀ Baba Nam Kevalam

- ☀ All is Cosmic Consciousness;
- ☀ Love is All There Is;
- ☀ Everything is an Expression of One Infinite Consciousness.



# Cobra Pose (Bhujangasana)

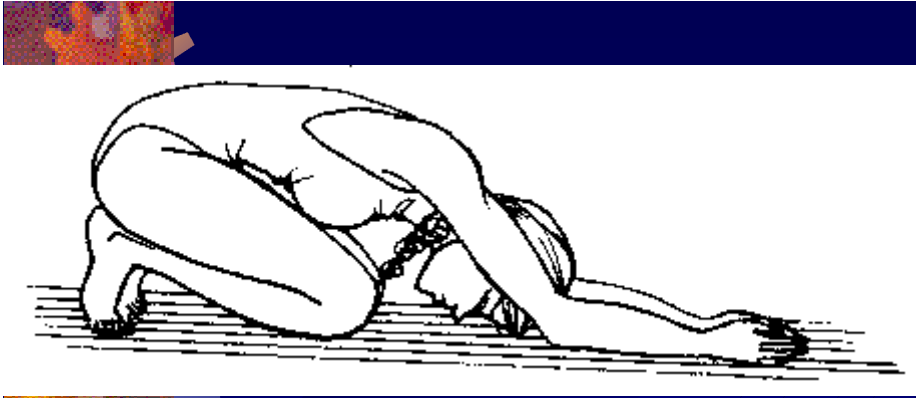
- ☀ Lie down on the chest. Supporting the weight on the palms, raise the chest, and bend back as much as possible without strain, stretching the head backward. Inhale while rising.
- ☀ Look at the ceiling. Hold the breath for 8 seconds. Try to keep the navel as near to the ground as possible.
- ☀ Then exhale and come down to original position.
- ☀ Practice 8 times.





# Benefits of the Cobra Pose

- ✦ It is an excellent exercise for the spine.
- ✦ Massages all the nerves of the spine.
- ✦ Keeps the spine supple and healthy.
- ✦ Strengthens the para-vertebral muscles of the back to relieve backache and correct incorrect posture.
- ✦ Massages all the abdominal organs including the liver and kidneys, relieving constipation and other digestive troubles such as gas, stomach ache and indigestion.
- ✦ By giving an internal massage, a pelvic massage, it tones the ovaries and uterus and thus prevents many female disorders.
- ✦ It is also good for the thyroid glands.
- ✦ Cures various problems of the upper chest, including strengthening weak lungs.

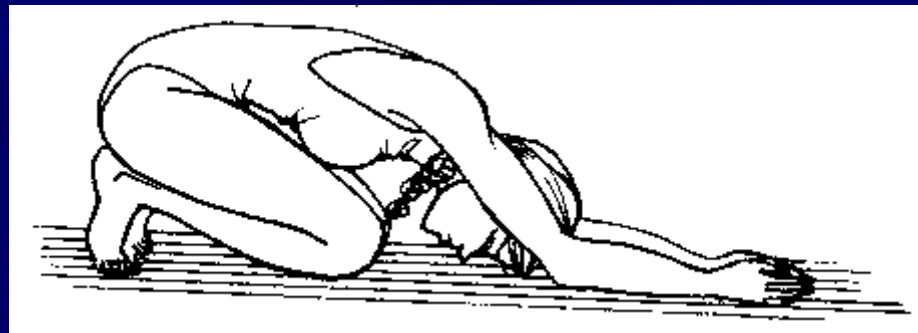


# Long Salutation (Diirgha Pranama)

- ✦ Kneel down and holding the palms together extend the arms upward, keeping them close to the ears. Do this while inhaling.
- ✦ Then bend forward in a posture of bowing down, touching the floor with the tip of the nose and the forehead. The buttocks must continue to touch the heels. While bending down, exhale and remain in a state of complete exhalation, motionless.
- ✦ Remain for 8 seconds.
- ✦ Then rise up, inhaling. Always keep the arms close to the ears.
- ✦ Practice 8 times.

# Benefits of the Long Salutation

- ★ Strengthens the back, tones up the abdominal organs.
- ★ Improves digestive system and removes abdominal fat.
- ★ Helps cure irregular menstruation because it regularly massages this area when the asana is performed on a daily basis.



# Yoga Pose (Yoga Mudra)

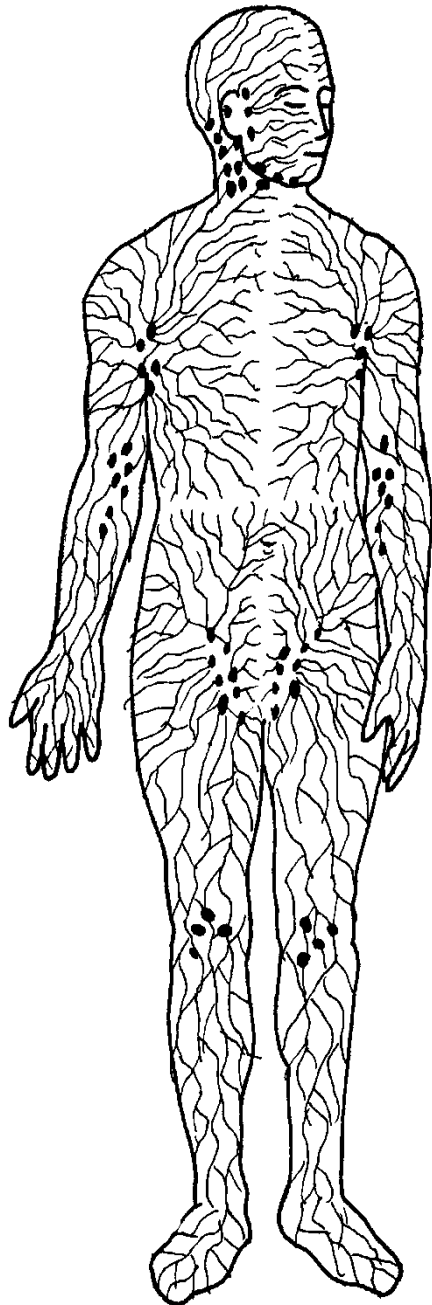


- ✦ Sit with legs crossed, right leg crossed under left, right hand holding left wrist behind the back.
- ✦ Bend down slowly while inhaling and touch your forehead to the ground; pause.
- ✦ Hold the breath for 8 seconds. In this motionless position try to relax the whole body as much as possible. Do not strain.
- ✦ Inhale and rise up to original position.
- ✦ Repeat 8 times.



# Benefits of the Yoga Pose

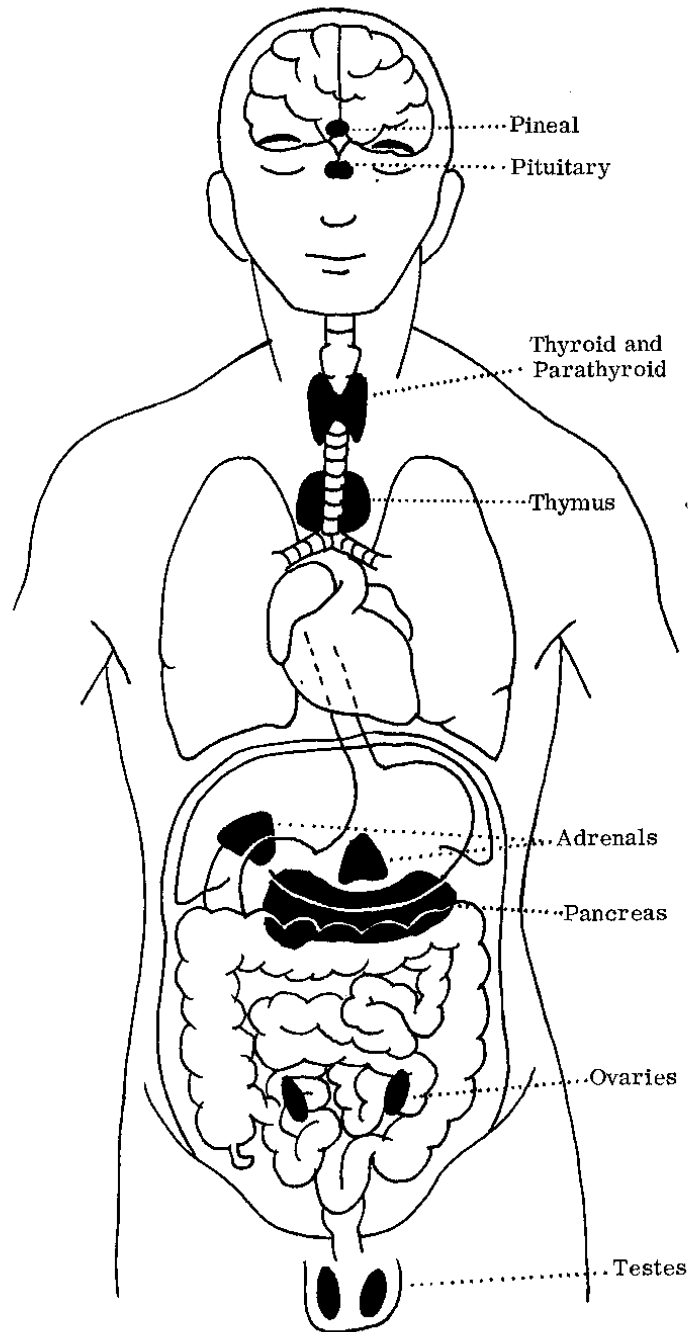
- ✦ Massages all the abdominal organs.
- ✦ Removes many ailments connected with this part of the body including constipation and indigestion.
- ✦ Promotes blood flow to the female organs, removing many menstrual problems.
- ✦ Excellent for the spine, especially the lumbar region or lower back, individual vertebrae are separated from each other and the nerve fibers passing through the vertebrae are gently stretched and toned. Since these nerves connect the entire body with the brain, this posture contributes to overall health.
- ✦ Activates and exercises the lungs and is thus good for asthma.
- ✦ Helps to remove abdominal fat and obesity.



The Lymphatic System

# Lymphatic system

- ★ Lymph is a vital fluid which purifies the body, picking up waste matter and dead cells; the wastes are first taken to be filtered at the lymph nodes and finally excreted by the kidneys.
- ★ This purifying lymph which bathes all the cells of the body, is not pumped by the heart but is moved by the action of our muscles.



# Endocrine glands

- ☀️ Secrete chemical substances called hormones into the bloodstream, which affect both body and mind.
- ☀️ These glands are:
  - the pineal gland in the center of the brain,
  - the pituitary gland below and in front of the pineal,
  - the thyroid and parathyroid in the neck,
  - the thymus in the chest,
  - the adrenals above the kidneys,
  - the pancreas, and
  - the ovaries in women and testicles in men.



# Endocrine glands

- ✦ The hormonal secretion from these glands have a powerful effect on our minds.
- ✦ Over or under secretion of these glands may cause not only sickness but various mental and emotional disturbances as well - negative emotions such as anxiety, hatred, anger and fear, which destroy our health and mental peace.
- ✦ The asanas exert a subtle pressure on the different glands, restoring a balanced secretion of hormones, and bring about emotional equilibrium and mental peace.





# Endocrine glands - thyroid

- ✦ The thyroid gland in the neck controls the metabolic rate of the body and its energy level, and also regulates growth.
- ✦ Even a small increase of the secretion of the thyroid hormone thyroxin may cause profound physical and mental changes.
- ✦ Excess secretion of thyroxin may cause irritability and worry, nervousness, heart palpitation, insomnia, loss of weight, and make the eyes bulge like a frog.
- ✦ Under-secretion may bring sluggish metabolism, mental dullness, obesity and extreme sleepiness. The person may eat only a little but easily get fat.



# Massage

- ✦ Massage also relaxes the muscles and improves blood circulation, especially the circulation of lymph.
- ✦ Massage stimulates this lymph flow and thus the purification of the body.
- ✦ So, we take special care to massage the areas of the important lymph nodes in the face, neck, armpits, groin and knees.
- ✦ You may have noticed that these lymph nodes may become swollen when you have an infection or flu.



# Shavasana (corpse posture) with warm Sun visualization

- ✦ Continue to breath slowly and deeply. With each breath feel the muscles in your body becoming heavier and heavier. Imagine the tension melting away as you continue breathing rhythmically and naturally.
- ✦ Picture yourself lying on a warm tropical beach basking in the glow of the sun. Visualize the vivid, beautiful colors of the sky, the earth, the flowers, and the plants around you. As you lie on the beach, the warmth of the golden sand penetrates every pore of your body and makes you feel warmer and warmer. The golden sand feels soft and soothing; its warmth enters your hands and feet and begins to flow throughout your entire body.
- ✦ ...



# Shavasana (corpse posture) with warm Sun visualization (cont)

- ✦ Imagine yourself lying serene and restful as your muscles become loose and limp. Feel your body sinking into the sand and drifting deeper and deeper into a state of peace and total relaxation. With each breath, watch your body become more and more relaxed, more and more at peace.
- ✦ Now feel the warmth of the sunlight all over your body, warming you deeply and gently. Visualize the inside of your body bathed in the golden light, absorbing every ray and glowing as radiantly as the sun. A warm, gentle breeze swirls around your body and relaxes you even more... Let your mind and body be totally at peace.
- ✦ Now feel yourself returning to this room ... move your hands and feet a little, stretch and slowly turn to the right side and sit up. It is easier, and less strain on the back to sit up by turning on the right side.