

Kundalini Yoga



Kundalini Yoga is a 5,000 year old authentic system of exercise and meditation that promotes health, happiness and spiritual awareness in those who are dedicated to the practice. It is a complete science that combines postures (asanas) movement, sound current (mantra) breath (pranayam) and meditation into powerful sets called Kriyas.

As a universal and non-denominational practice, Kundalini Yoga helps a person experience their personal beliefs in a deeper more meaningful manner. Kundalini is often referred to as the “yoga of awareness” because with devoted and consistent practice, it awakens the Kundalini, the unlimited potential that already exists in every human being. Kundalini is especially appealing to the householder: the person that lives in the present world, has a family and job, yet wants to gain balance between their inner and outer lives. Much of the practice focuses on an individual’s chakras, or energy points, that flow through the human body along the spinal cord. Each chakra is correlated with a different aspect of a person’s life and through Kundalini Yoga we attempt to create a balance within them.

People do Kundalini Yoga for many reasons, but some benefits of practice include:

- Building a healthy body and keeping it in shape
- Increased vitality
- Training your mind to be strong and flexible
- Making contact with your Higher Power and strengthening your intuition
- Balancing glandular systems and strengthening nervous system
- Enhancing creative potential
- Deepening your inner calm and self confidence

Sometimes called Laya Yoga, Kundalini Yoga is a system of exercises that is associated with Hatha, Raja, Tantra, and Kriya Yoga as well as the Sutras of Patanjali. The Kundalini itself, is a concentrated form of prana, (life force) which lies dormant in the chakras of the body. It is conceptualized as a coiled up serpent (Kundalini in Sanskrit means “that which is coiled.”) Lying undeveloped at the base of the spine, the Kundalini gradually raises upwards through the spine

as a yogi practices meditation techniques including postures, purification practices, ritual gestures and regulated breathing. Awakening the Kundalini is not a physical occurrence but rather a development of consciousness. Devotees of the practice say that awakening the Kundalini brings forth pure joy, pure knowledge, and pure love (6).

For thousands of years the sacred science and technology of Kundalini Yoga was only unveiled in secrecy, shared in oral tradition from master to chosen disciple. In 1969, Kundalini was first introduced to the people of the west when Yogi Bhajan challenged the age old tradition and began teaching Kundalini publically to anyone that was interested.

Kundalini Basics

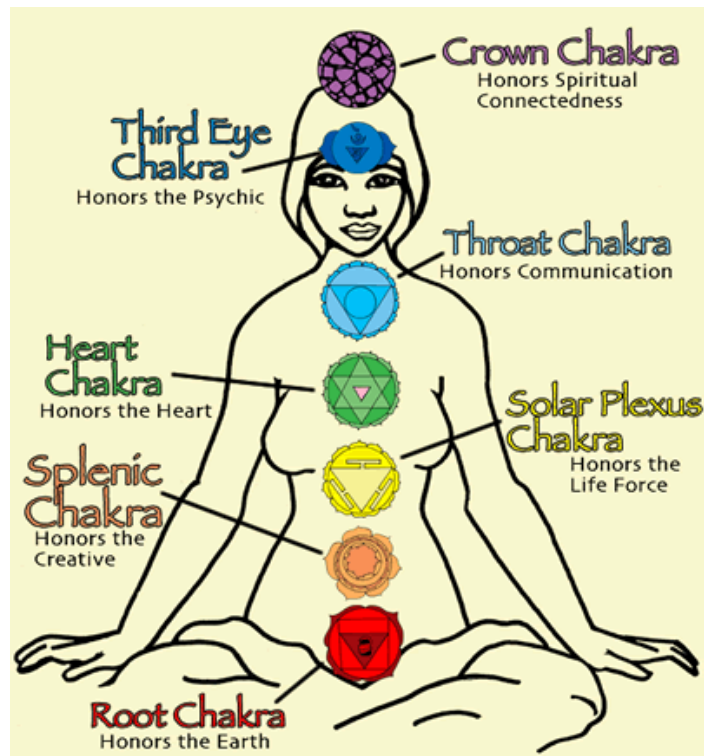
A typical Kundalini class would begin with centering through mantra, followed by 10-20 minutes of warm-up exercise. After warm-ups, you would begin the yoga sets (kriyas) which combine asana, pranayama and meditative focus. Afterwards there would be a long deep relaxation of some sort to help with regeneration and stress release. Class always ends with the closing song of blessing, which is “May the long time sun shine upon you, all love surround you, and the pure light within you guide your way home.” After this, tea is usually served. (8)

Chakras

It is necessary to understand the chakras and their purpose in order to efficiently practice Kundalini Yoga. Through our practice, we are trying to get the Kundalini energy moving up the spine and flowing freely through all the chakras creating a balance in our lives and bodies.

Chakras are the centers of consciousness and the focal points of energy which have direct, immediate and profound effects on our daily lives. Each chakra is a center point for different qualities and aspects of our lives and when a majority of our energy remains polarized in one area our basic behaviors and attitudes can be affected.

The *sushumna* is a person’s most important path of energy. It flows from the root chakra up through the crown chakra. Through the awakening this path, the kundalini arises and our human potential is revealed. Many yoga practices acknowledge only the first seven chakras but in Kundalini, we also acknowledge the eighth chakra, which is a person’s aura (1).



Below is a brief description of each chakra.

First Chakra/ Muladhara Chakra

The first chakra is represented by the earth element and is located in the rectum. Often referred to as the “Root Chakra,” it deals with issues that have to do with security and survival. When this energy center is properly balanced, a person will have strength and confidence. When unbalanced, a person may deal with many aspects of fear and insecurity.

Second Chakra/ Svadhisthana Chakra

The second chakra is represented by the water element and is located in the sex organs. When this energy center is properly balanced, a person is creative, imaginative, energized and lively. When unbalanced, a person may deal with an obsession of sex or unhealthy indulgences in fantasy.

Third Chakra/ Manipura Chakra

The third chakra is represented by the fire element and is located in the navel point. It controls the fire of digestion. This energy center deals with a person's identity, domain and judgment. The third chakra also gives us initiative and courage. When unbalanced, it can manifest in personal greed, a drive for personal power, and the feeling that nothing is ever enough.

The first three chakras generally deal with the individual's worldly life and physical needs. The fourth chakra acts as a balancing point between the lower chakras and the higher chakras, which focus on universal consciousness.

Fourth Chakra/ Anahata Chakra

The fourth chakra is represented by the air element and is located in the center of the chest. It is often called the "Heart Center" or "Heart Chakra." This energy point is responsible for a person's power to sacrifice, kindness, compassion and true maternal love.

Fifth Chakra/ Vishuddha Chakra

The fifth chakra is represented by the ether element and is located in the throat. This energy point is responsible for a person's power and impact of speech and the power of projection through words. When properly balanced, an individual's words will be of truth. When not functioning properly, a person may be highly opinionated.

Sixth Chakra/ Ajna Chakra

The sixth chakra is not represented by an element and is located at the center of the forehead. This chakra is also sometimes referred to as the "Third Eye." This energy point is a direct pipeline to the infinite source and helps an individual increase their faculty of intuition, universal knowledge and the wisdom in each of us. The sixth chakra is where a person sets goals and assesses the long range effects of their actions.

Seventh Chakra/ Sahasrara Chakra

The seventh chakra, also known as the “Crown Chakra,” is located at the top of the skull. When the kundalini energy has reached this point, a person will be in a state of absolute bliss. They will have a strong sense of spirituality, self realization, knowledge of God and enlightenment. This is the highest point of consciousness that one can attain.

Eighth Chakra

The eighth chakra is a person’s aura, or the magnetic field generated by their vibrations. It may project power or weakness depending on the person. It serves as a protective shield. While some people are able to physically see another person’s aura, many are not. We are however, able to sense a person’s aura and feel a sense of attraction or resistance towards them depending on the vibrations they are emitting.

Mantra

Mantra is a major factor in the Kundalini practice. Mantras are combinations of syllables consciously constructed to connect with a specific level of intelligence. Each Kundalini class begins by “tuning in” to the long line of Spiritual Masters who have preceded us on this path by using the mantra **ONG NAMO GURU DEV NAMO**. This mantra both invokes the blessing of your highest self and opens the protective link between you and the chain of Masters before you, sometimes known as the ‘golden chain.’

To correctly begin chanting (and promote concentration):

- Sit with your spine straight, preferably cross legged on the floor (this position is called Sukh Asan or “Easy Pose.”)
- Place the palms of your hands together at the center of your chest, fingers pointing upward and sides of your thumbs at the center of the sternum. This mudra (hand position) is called “Prayer Pose.”
- Eyes should be closed keeping focused on the center of the forehead.

Start by taking deep breaths inhaling deeply through the nose and then exhaling deeply through the nose. After taking several deep breaths, begin to vibrate the sacred chant. **ONG NAMO GURU DEV NAMO** is chanted (vibrated) to assure the purest inner guidance for your practice of Kundalini Yoga. By chanting these words, we are literally saying “I Bow to the Creator, to the Divine Teacher Within.” This must be chanted at least three times (or until you feel connected) before beginning each session of Kundalini Yoga. When you are consistently practicing the same mantra, there *will* be an effect on you. Though you may not immediately feel anything, the subtle power of the mantra is continuously stored and available to you when you need it. (3)

SAT NAM is another commonly used mantra and greeting. By saying this, we are acknowledging that we are “one in spirit” with those around us. Linking the breath with SAT NAM is one of the easiest ways to maintain self awareness.

All Kundalini mantras come from the Gurbani language, which is based on the science of NAAD, the basic sound for all languages through all times. It is the universal code behind language and human communication. (1)

Pranayam

“If there is anything Divine in you, it’s your breath.” Yogi Bhjan

A basic principle in Kundalini Yoga is **Value Your Breath**. Many of us take the breath for granted and go through our lives on auto-pilot, never really understanding or appreciating our ability to breath. Each breath brings life and provides an opportunity to connect consciously with the moment. Without breath we are nothing- it is the most basic and essential need to all human beings. Our breath is constantly with us and needs to be nurtured and acknowledged. In Kundalini Yoga, we focus on slowing the breathing rate, which strengthens the nervous system, metabolism and digestion, calms the mind and cools down emotional energy. By slowing down and actually focusing on the breath, we are balancing our mental and emotional states . Yogis have practiced Pranayam or yogic breathing exercises for thousands of years.

Prana is the basic building block of the universe, given to us with each inhalation. When you breathe less than eight times each minute, a secretion is stimulated in the pituitary gland, which is the gateway to intuition. The more your pituitary secretes, the more active and accessible your intuition becomes. You become more aware of actions you need to take and find an inner guidance becoming more frequent, stronger and clearer. (7)

Breath of Fire

The Breath of Fire is a wonderful exercise to promote energy, focus and vitality. It is a rapid, rhythmic, continuous breath that sounds like powerful sniffing. The breath is forcefully exhaled by rapidly contracting the diaphragm and pulling the navel point towards the spine. The inhale occurs naturally as the diaphragm relaxes. Inhale and exhale are equal length and typically occur 2-3 times per second. This practice can be done throughout the day for periods of 30 seconds to three minutes to increase energy. (4)

Exercises

“There are 84 postures in yoga, but all people, whether Westerner or Easterner have done them in the womb of the mother. So you are yogis anyway.” – Yogi Bhajan

Teachers of Kundalini Yoga may focus on many different types of exercises. Some may be more relaxed and consist of holding asanas while chanting or meditating, others may consist of more rapid fast-paced movement and interaction with classmates. In the Kundalini practice, all postures are done in kriyas (sets) and the effect of a particular exercise is determined by its placement within the set. (4) Classes and routines will vary, but some popular Kundalini asanas include:

- Cat-Cow (Marjariasana)
- Cat Stretch
- Cobra Pose (Bhujanasana)
- Guru Praham (Supta Parvatasana)
- Ego Eradicator
- Frog Pose
- Front Bends (Uttanasana)

- Kundalini Lotus (Urdhvamukha Prasarita Padottanasana)
- Leg Lifts (30, 60, 90 degrees)
- Life Nerve Stretch (Front Stretch) (Paschimottanasana)
- Neck Rolls
- Sat Kriya
- Spinal Flex (Camel Ride)
- Spinal Twist
- Yoga Mudra (Yogasana)



Ego Eradicator

Sadhana

Sadhana is the daily spiritual practice, usually done with mantra and meditation. It is a cleansing process and a great way to clear the mind, connect with your own soul and develop spiritually. Yogi Bhjan believed that the morning sadhana was the greatest tool one could use to work on themselves and achieve the purpose of life.

Ideally, Sadhana is suggested to be done in the ambrosial hours, before the sun rises. It is typically comprised of chanting, meditation, prayer and asanas. Some people chose to follow CDs, DVDs or other guides while others prefer to follow their own routines. People who do this on a regular basis quickly feel the benefits and make it a habitual start to their day. It is said that for every hour of morning sadhana, you experience ten hours of guidance and clarity (which is why many people's sadhana lasts two and a half hours each day.)

If you are absolutely unable to do a morning sadhana, you can do it at any other time of the day that works better for you- any sadhana is better than none at all!

Yogi Bhajan

Yogi Bhajan is the revered man that shared the divine secrets of Kundalini with the entire world. He is acknowledged and credited in most of the modern teachings and customs we practice today, and no Kundalini overview would be complete without a brief synopsis on his life.

“If you can’t see God in all, you can’t see God at all.” – Yogi Bhajan



Harbhajan Singh Khalsa Yogiji (Yogi Bhajan) was born August 26, 1929 in Punjab, India. Raised in a well-to-do Sikh family, he was taught at an early age the essence of the Sikh teachings and a respect for all religions. As a teen, Yogi Bhajan spent several years under the strict instruction of Sant Hazara Singh who declared his student a Master of Kundalini Yoga at the young age of 16.

As a young man, Yogi Bhajan received his Masters Degree in Economics from Camp College, New Delhi. Upon graduation, he worked in Indian Civil Services in various jobs in the Revenue

Department and as a customs inspector while continuing his practice and pursuit of yogic knowledge. During this time, he also married Inderjit Kaur Uppal (Bibiji) and had three children.(6)

In 1968, Yogi Bhajan migrated to North America, first living in Toronto and then moving to California. When arriving in Los Angeles, Yogi Bhajan saw first hand the turbulent drug culture and its effects on young people. He believed that many of them were using drugs seeking an “altered state of consciousness” due to their deeper desire to experience a holistic sense of awareness. He also believed that they were looking for a way to better connect with themselves and one another. Knowing that Kundalini Yoga could bring a greater high and consciousness than any drug or chemical, Yogi Bhajan broke the centuries old tradition of secrecy and began teaching Kundalini publicly as an effective alternative to drug use. He called it the 3HO (happy, healthy, holy) way of life and gave many people the purpose they had been seeking. Kundalini Yoga quickly became a popular practice and Yogi Bhajan practically became a household name. He drew much attention to himself and his practice in part because yoga had always been considered a part of the Hindu culture and he was a Sikh man (in turban) distinguishing himself as a yogi.

As the Master of Kundalini Yoga and head of the Sikh faith for the Western Hemisphere, Yogi Bhajan also made numerous other contributions to society. In 1969, he founded 3HO, a worldwide non-profit foundation that offers classes in Kundalini Yoga, meditation, vegetarianism, nutrition and lifestyle choices to people all around the world. The “3HO Super Health” drug treatment center in Tucson, Arizona was opened in 1973 and continues to rehabilitate people with drug problems today.

Shocked and offended by the exploitation of women in America, he taught women that they were the “Grace of God” and spent a great deal of time re-educating and affirming women, who he believed to be the foundation of any society.

Yogi Bhajan spent his later years engaged in and chairing numerous inter-religious councils and forums. He was a trusted advisor to a number of profitable enterprises including Yogi Tea Co. which packages and markets his tea formulas.

In 1998, Yogi Bhajan founded Miri Piri Academy Boarding School outside of Amritsar, India, offering studies in general curriculum, yoga, mediation, service and Sikh studies. Currently students of 17 nationalities are enrolled. (2)

Yogi Bhajan died October 6, 2004 due to heart failure at his home in Espanola, New Mexico due to heart failure. He was 75 years old.

This is only a brief overview of Kundalini Yoga, and while it is important to have some kind of understanding of the basic facts, one must keep in mind that the true purpose of any type of yoga is to create a stronger connection between your own mind, body and soul and elevate your spirits closer to the Divine. Only so much can be learned through texts and research, the real knowledge must be gained by the yoga practice itself.

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