

# An Introduction to Kundalini Yoga

## What is Kundalini Yoga?

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Kundalini Yoga is one of the most comprehensive, effective, safe, and healthiest forms of yoga. Kundalini Yoga can produce immediate results as you travel on your path to consciousness. It balances the glandular system, strengthens the nervous system, expands the lung capacity, and purifies the bloodstream. It brings balance to the body, mind and soul. It trains your mind to think positively and be in control of your thoughts and attitudes. It builds your inner strength and self-awareness to its maximum, assisting you in reaching your highest potential.

Kundalini Yoga has existed for thousands of years. In India its teaching was restrictive and was maintained as a secret oral tradition for thousands of years which protected the techniques from being abused, but also created an unnecessary image of mystery. When Yogi Bhajan came to the United States in 1969 he began to teach this Yoga openly and explained its technology in detail. Since then, he has been teaching Kundalini Yoga to students throughout the world. He has said, "Kundalini Yoga harnesses the mental, physical, and nervous energies of the body and puts them under the domain of the Will, which is the instrument of the Soul."

Yoga literally means "union." In this sense, it serves as a vehicle to unite your soul and your Creator. With Kundalini Yoga, you uncoil yourself; you reveal your true identity. Kundalini is the creative potential of human beings. As explained by Yogi Bhajan, "Kundalini Yoga is the science to unite the finite with Infinity and it's the art to experience Infinity in the finite. It is straight. It is simple. It creates no complications."

Kundalini Yoga is said to be the most powerful of the twenty-two schools of yoga. What separates Kundalini Yoga from all other types of yoga is its diverse capacity to include all elements of the ancient teachings of yoga: by combining the use of sound currents (Mantras), breathing techniques (Pranayama), Body Postures (Asanas), Hand Positions (Mudras) and Meditation.

Kundalini Yoga is ideal for today's society since it is designed for the active, everyday person with normal responsibilities of work, family and school. Kundalini Yoga can be practiced by anyone if it is done gradually and according to the instructions. When you tune in to the opening Mantra, *Adi Mantra*, (described below) you connect with your inner Teacher and the Golden Chain of all Kundalini Yoga teachers and you will be protected.

As our society becomes increasingly more dependent on technology, our world becomes more intimately connected and influenced by its numerous cultures. The pace of change is on the rise and the stress on our body's nervous system is increasing. The science of Kundalini Yoga allows us to tap into a system, that is an ancient technology, to help us cope with this escalating demand. The inner science of the mind is the tool that will enable us to cope with the pressure of these changes. It is the mind that interprets our outer and inner worlds and it is the mind that we must train to guide us through the flow of change.

Kundalini Yoga is called the Yoga of Awareness. Awareness is a finite relationship with infinity. We all have dormant energy sleeping within us, waiting to be awoken. Kundalini Yoga gives you the experience of being truly you. Unfortunately, amid today's hectic schedule, many of us have forgotten who we are and why we are here. There is only so much wisdom you can get out of a book, but wisdom cannot sustain you. Wisdom only becomes knowledge once you have experienced it. Kundalini Yoga will give you the experience that we are "spiritual beings having a human experience not humans beings trying to have a spiritual experience"; and then you can experience

the infinite joy, health, and happiness, which is our birthright.

If you are a beginning student you should go at a pace that suits your flexibility and endurance. As you feel more comfortable with the exercises, begin to practice as often as you can. If you can practice at the same time each day, you will find that you will improve rapidly. There is no pressure in Kundalini Yoga to push the body too far; there should be no pain or discomfort. To begin with, you should stick to the minimum time limits, and gradually build up to the maximum. Remember: do what you can; that will be perfect.

### **How to Prepare for Yoga**

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Wear loose clothes of natural fiber (preferably white cotton – as this increases the aura and gives you extra protection and radiance).

Tie your hair back (preferably on top of the crown of the head).

Use an exercise mat or preferably a sheepskin (a sheepskin or other natural fiber such as wool, cotton, rayon or silk provides an electro-magnetic insulation from the ground, allowing your meditation practice to go deep).

Do not eat anything heavy two hours before your yoga practice. If you must eat something, eat a piece of fruit or something very light.

Take your socks off when doing yoga. Our feet have around 72,000 nerve endings in them. When our feet breathe we allow our nervous system the chance to connect with the energy surrounding us.

Note: If you are pregnant or menstruating, do not do Asanas that stimulate the navel point. Substitute Breath of Fire with Long Deep Breathing

### **A Typical Kundalini Yoga Session**

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1. Opening Mantra (see below): Ong Namoh Guru Dev Namoh (I bow to the Infinite Creator within)
2. Warm-Up Exercises
3. Main Kriya (Specific Set of Exercises)
4. Meditation
5. Deep relaxation

## The Science of Breathing

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### **Pranayama**

The yogic technology of breath is called Pranayama. Kundalini Yoga uses the breath to change energy flow and achieve a specific state of mind. In Kundalini Yoga, a wide variety of breathing techniques are used, ranging from fast (Breath of Fire) to long, slow and deep breathing. There is nothing more powerful than meditating on your breath. The slower your rate of breathing, the more control you have over your mind. And remember that the mind follows the breath, and the body follows the mind. The following are the most commonly used breathing techniques in Kundalini Yoga:

### **Long Deep Breathing**

In our society, we normally breathe shallow, using only a small portion of our lung capacity. This may lead to many different dysfunctions in the body. Average lungs can enlarge to a volume of almost 6,000 cubic centimeters. Normally we use only 600 – 700 cubic centimeters of that capacity. If you do not expand the lungs to their full capacity, the small air sacks in the lungs cannot fully clean their mucous lining properly. By breathing long and deeply you can expand the lungs by about eight times, building up your endurance and patience, and maintaining you in your center, even under pressure.

So it is important to cultivate the habit of breathing long, deep and slow breaths. If you can slow your breath to eight times per minute (we normally breath on average fifteen breaths per minute), the functions of the pituitary and pineal glands are greatly affected. Breathing one time a minute or less puts you into a deep meditation.

*Instructions* First relax the abdomen as you inhale through the nose, then begin pushing the navel point outward, expanding the belly and allowing the lungs to fill with air to their capacity. Then drop the shoulders relaxing them continuing to take in the last bit of air. Hold the breath in for a comfortable length of time. As you exhale let the chest deflate first as the ribs knit together and then pull the navel in toward the spine until all the air is expelled from the lungs. The diaphragm drops down to expand the lungs on the inhalation and contracts to expel the air on the exhalation.

*Benefits* This breath relaxes and calms you even under the most intense conditions; adjusts the aura; increases lung capacity; builds up your endurance and patience, maintaining you in your center.

### **Breath of Fire**

Breath of Fire is a balanced breath with equal emphasis on the inhalation and the exhalation. The restricted flow of air through the nostrils prevents hyperventilation. Master this breath slowly and methodically. It causes an immediate detoxification reaction in the body. So if you start feeling dizzy or light-headed, drink lots of water, at least 6 to 8 glasses per day.

*Instructions* This breath is done through the nose with a closed mouth throughout the inhalation and the exhalation. Breathe fairly rapidly (2 to 3 breaths per second), continuously and powerfully with no pause between inhalation and exhalation. This breath focuses the energy at the navel point. To inhale, the abdomen relaxes, the diaphragm extends down, and the breath comes in a natural rhythm. To exhale, push the air out by pulling the navel point in towards the spine. During Breath of Fire you are pumping your stomach in on the exhalation and relaxing it on the inhalation. The chest stays moderately relaxed. You should feel the pull of the muscles in the navel area.

Breath of Fire can be confusing at first and will take some practice to master this breath. If you start to feel dizzy or light-headed, try to focus at the brow point, as your body adjusts to the new breath and to the stimulation of your nerves. However, in other cases, it may be that you are releasing toxins. Note: if you are a beginner, you may be breathing backward, pulling the navel point inward during inhalation instead of outward, and exhaling filling the stomach with air instead of emptying it of air. This makes the space for the breath less rather than more. Remember: Inhale = tummy out, Exhale = tummy in.

If you are doing Breath of Fire incorrectly, you may also start feeling queasy and light-headed, so in this case, stop doing it immediately and concentrate on your navel point by placing your hands on your stomach and practice feeling the difference when expanding the stomach with air as you inhale, and pulling the navel point in as you exhale. Once this is set, then start Breath of Fire slowly keeping the same patterns of breathing.

*Benefits* This breath cleanses the blood and releases toxins from the lungs, mucous lining, blood vessels and cells. Strengthens the nervous system. Expands the lungs quickly. Reduces addictive impulses for drugs, smoking and bad foods. Adjusts the aura. Boosts the immune system. Repairs the balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nerve systems. Creates a focused, intelligent and neutral state of mind. Note: while pregnant or menstruating, substitute Long Deep Breathing for Breath of Fire.

### **Sitali Pranayama**

*Instructions* Curl the tongue protruding it slightly past your lips. Inhale deeply and smoothly through the tongue and exhale through the nose, closing the mouth.

For those who cannot roll their tongue due to genetic reasons, just inhale over an extended tongue.

*Benefits* Soothes and cools the spine in the fourth and sixth vertebrae areas; thus regulating the sexual and digestive energy. Heals fevers, digestive ailments and normalizes blood pressure. Shifts anger and negative moods. Gives power, strength and vitality.

### **How to hold the breath**

Breath suspension will make your body operate at a higher level of efficiency. It will also train you to use good judgment under pressure. To master this is to master the inflow and outflow of the life force itself. Throughout the practice create a calm internal spot in your awareness and observe the changes of the body and mind.

Remember: if you begin to get dizzy during any exercise, stop the exercise, and apply the Root Lock, *Mul Bhand*(explained below) or just breathe long and deep to orientate yourself. The goal is a gradual reconditioning of the nervous system. This practice must be built with patience and discipline. Pushing past your capacity will not help.

A basic element to master the breath is the ability to hold the breath in or out. This is a simple skill. A lot of students when holding the breath will pull the chin in, tighten the neck and throat muscles and stiffen the tongue. This technique can create too much pressure in the eyes, back of the skull, heart and neck. The correct way to hold the breath in or out is to suspend the breathing mechanism. To suspend the breath means to relax the muscles of the diaphragm, ribs and abdomen responsible for the constant flow of the breath.

Instructions: Inhale deeply, bringing your attention to the collarbone and upper ribs. Lift the upper ribs slightly and fix them in place. Relax the shoulders and belly. It should be easy to hold the diaphragm steady once you relax the belly outward. Finally, pull the chin in. Let yourself be still and calm. To hold the breath out, start with a complete exhalation. Pull the navel point

back toward the spine, lifting the lower chest and diaphragm. Let the upper ribs relax and compress. Finally, pull the chin in. If you have the breath suspended out, and your muscles start a reflex to inhale, consciously exhale a little more to extend the length of the suspension without struggling.

## **The Science of Body Postures**

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### **Asana (Body Postures)**

All forms of yoga use Asana as a part of their practice. Kundalini Yoga encompasses many different types of Asana and angles; which is one of the secrets of its success. In Kundalini Yoga there are many different angles used which create specific pressure on glands and organs depending on the angle of the lift. Putting pressure on the glands causes them to start secreting. When the pressure is released and the body is held motionless, the glandular secretions start to circulate freely throughout the body, having a specific effect on your emotional stability.

When holding a particular Asana, it is important that all your body parts are comfortable, well aligned and well balanced, so that the energy flows freely. If there is any imbalance in the body, then the body may jerk or the muscles may spasm to adjust any misalignment there may be. Be careful not to over-extend yourself or put unnecessary pressure on yourself to hold a certain Asana. Intense pain is a sign that you have gone too far or too long.

## **The Science of Body Locks (Bhandas)**

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There are certain combinations of muscle contractions that are called *Bhandas* or Locks. Each lock has a function of changing blood circulation, nerve pressure and the flow of cerebral spinal fluid. They also direct the flow of psychic energy and prana into the main energy channels that relate to raising Kundalini energy. The Bhandas concentrate the body's energy expanding the awareness and producing self-healing.

### **Jalandhara Bhandha**

Jalandhara Bhandha, or Neck Lock, is the most common of the Bhandas. Normally used in all meditative, easy pose Asanas. The Neck Lock is produced by pulling the neck and throat back so that the chin rests in or near the notch between the collar bones, making sure that at the same time the head stays level without tilting forward. It is important that the spine and the neck straighten to allow the increased flow of pranic energy to travel freely up to the upper glandular centers of the brain, opening up the pranic Nadis (nerve channels) that may be blocked.

## **Mul Bhandha**

Mul Bhandha, the Root Lock, is frequently used in Kundalini Yoga. It involves pulling in the rectum, sex organs and navel point all at the same time, generating the psychic heat that can release the Kundalini energy. This lock can be applied on the inhale or exhale, as specified in the exercises. This lock unites the two major energy flows of the body: Prana and Apana. (Prana is the generative energy of the upper Chakras, the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>; and Apana is the eliminating energy of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Chakras. The first part of the Mul Bhandha is to contract the rectum and draw it in and up as if trying to hold back a bowel movement. Then draw up on the sex organs as if trying to hold back from urinating. Lastly, pull in the navel point by drawing back the lower abdomen towards the spine so the rectum and sex organs are drawn up toward the navel point.

## **Uddiyana Bhandha**

Uddiyana Bhandha, the Diaphragm Lock, is considered to be a powerful lock as it allows the pranic force to transform through the central nerve channel of the spine up into the neck region. It is normally applied on the exhalation. The spine should be straight, lift the diaphragm up high into the thorax and pull the upper abdominal muscles back toward the spine. This creates a cavity, which gently massages the heart muscles. This Bhandha gives a sense of compassion and youthfulness to the entire body.

## **Maha Bhandha**

Maha Bhandha is the application of all three locks (Jalandhara, Uddiyana and Mul Bhandha) all at the same time. When you apply this lock, the nerves and glands are rejuvenated. This Bhandha relieves sexual tension, regulates blood pressure, reduces menstrual cramps and increases flow of circulation to the lower glands, i.e., the testes and ovaries.

## **The Science of the Sound Current – Mantra**

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### **Mantra**

“Man” means mind; “Tra” means to tune the vibration. Mantra is a sound current, which tunes and controls the vibration of the mind. It is the specific use of sound to achieve a desired affect on the consciousness. It is one of the most important aspects of the Kundalini Yoga experience, next to breathing. Mantra consists of different combinations of words and syllables, which have great power to help you to be able to meditate more deeply and focus. As you repeat a certain mantra, you actually start to stimulate some of the 84 meridian points found in the root of the mouth, which cause the secretion of chemicals in the brain. This evokes a specific effect on you mentally, emotionally, vibrationally and physically.

Remember: Chanting is not singing it is vibrating. And to make a mantra more effective, chant it from your navel point.

Here are the three main mantras used in Kundalini Yoga:

### **SAT NAM**

#### *Truth is My Identity*

This is a Bij Mantra, or “Seed” Mantra. Bij mantras are the most powerful, and have a very profound effect on the subconscious mind. Sat Nam reinforces the divine consciousness in everyone. It is also used as a greeting. While breathing, normally we inhale Sat, exhale Nam; and as a prayer to bless the food before eating; and just before closing a Kundalini Yoga class we chant a long Sat Nam.

**ONG NAMO GURU DEV NAMO**

*I bow to the Infinite Creative Consciousness.  
I bow to the Divine Wisdom within and without.*

This mantra is used before we begin each Kundalini Yoga class. It is absolutely necessary that we chant this Mantra at least three times before we begin any Yoga exercise. It connects us with the Divine Teacher inside every human being, so that we can receive the highest guidance, inspiration and protection. As we chant this Mantra, we automatically become connected to the Golden Chain energy, which puts us in the vibration of all those Teachers who gave us these sacred Kundalini teachings. We become channels for their vibration to flow through us and teach us their wisdom which we use to expand our consciousness and that of others.

Instructions: Place the palms flat together at the center of the chest, at the heart center. The thumbs should be putting pressure on the middle part of the sternum – this is called Prayer Mudra. Your neutrality is at the center of your Heart Chakra. Your eyes are closed and focused on your Third Eye point: about 1/2 inch up from the space between the brows. Inhale deeply, and then exhale deeply. Inhale to begin:

**ONG** (the Creator): a nasal sound, vibrating the upper palate of the mouth

**NAMO** (reverent greetings): an abdominal sound. Its consonants “N” and “M” close off the front of the mouth.

**GURU** (the teacher who brings the light of wisdom to the darkness): projected out from the heart, chest and lungs area.

**DEV** (God-like; transparent): resonates at the throat and into the nasal passages. It connects the throat center with its power of understanding to the vast knowledge of the third eye.

As you inhale, concentrate at the third eye point. As you exhale try to chant the entire Adi Mantra. If you find this difficult, inhale after “Ong Namō”, and then continue to chant the rest of the mantra. Extend the mantra as long as possible. “Dev” is chanted a note slightly higher than the other words in the mantra.

**THE SUNSHINE SONG**

**The 3HO Mantra**

To close each Kundalini Yoga class, we sing this song as taught by the Master of Kundalini Yoga, Yogi Bhajan. It blesses everyone and brings peace and clarity of mind to all who chant it:

May the long time sun shine upon you

All love surround you

And the pure light within you

Guide your way on

Guide your way on

Guide your way on

Sat Nam (long Suuuut, short Nam)