



Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan

What is Kundalini Yoga?

A Beginner's Guide

This set is presented to you by Stacy Hayden (aka The Wandering Yogi) from the The Yoga of Travel.

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Go to TheYogaofTravel.com to learn more about practicing Kundalini Yoga along with a whole lot of other information on yoga, travel and life design for the wandering yogi in all of us!



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What is Kundalini Yoga?

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You either master your energy or it masters you. Kundalini energy is your creative potential as a human being. Kundalini yoga is the yoga of awareness whereby you fine tune the energy in your nervous and glandular systems so that you become very sensitive and effective at swaying even your subtlest energies. In doing so you can ride your wave of energy versus drowning in it. Through the power of direct experience you become conscious of the infinite creative force that exists within you and the universe, as there is no separation, and you begin to radiate this truth.

In Kundalini the whole being is recognized. You may find yourself doing exercises for the major bodily systems, organs or structures, for subtle energetic system such as the chakras (energy centers) and Nadi's (energy channels), as well as for specific emotions, thoughts and experiences.

Kundalini exercises are done in sets called Kriyas. The exercises in a Kriya consist of postures, breath and sound that are done in very specific ways, in specific orders, with specific time frames all for a specific purpose.

While many other forms of yoga have the tradition of renunciation, Kundalini Yoga is for householders, people who have families and do business.



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The Structure of a Kundalini class or at home practice

When you come to a Kundalini Yoga class or practice at home the practice structure is typically the same.

You always tune in with the Adi Mantra, Ong Namoh Guru Dev Namoh, meaning, I bow to the divine wisdom, to the Golden Chain, or line of teachers and to the teacher within.

Occasionally you may do a warm up such as short sun salutations, pranayam (breath exercises) or even another short kriya.

The kriya is practiced next and it might consist of many exercises or even just one exercise done for a longer period of time.

Typically you will have relaxation (shavassana) next and then a final meditation, however these are sometimes switched depending on the kriya.

The practice is closed by singing The Sunshine Song (yes, from the Incredible String Band) as a positive affirmation and blessing to all.

May the long time sun shine upon you
all love surround you,



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and the pure light with in you

guide your way on

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To end, chant at least 1 long Sat Nam (I vibrate Truth)

Time Frames

When you are practicing a kriya you will see that an exercise has a certain number of movements or a given time attached to it. It is very important that you do not extend beyond these time limits. If you practice a kriya and you do not have time to do the whole thing or you are building up your practice you can shorten the times but try and shorten the time comparatively across all exercises in the kriya to eliminate picking and choosing out of desire and aversion.



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When practicing meditation you will often see that you can build up the meditation to extended times such as 31 minutes and more. Typically time frames for building up a meditation are 1, 3, 7, 11, 22, 31, 54 and 62 minutes as well as 2 and half hours! Sometimes however a meditation will have a limit on how long to practice it.

Easy Pose: Learn how to sit

Throughout your practice you will often find yourself sitting in Easy Pose. Because we spend so much time slouching through out the day, sitting up straight can be one of the biggest challenges for some people in their practice. Many exercises in kundalini are done from easy pose, but even the very act of sitting cross legged on the floor with the spine straight has tremendous value in strengthening our core muscles and realigning the spine.

To sit in easy pose, come into a cross legged position on the floor. You will want to use some cushioning such as a pillow or rolled up blanket to sit on if your knees are higher than your hips. Allow the legs to relax down to create a firm solid base in which to uplift from. Then inhale as you rise up through the spine, lifting your rib cage and your heart center. Keeping the spine erect, exhale as you relax the shoulders down and tuck the chin straight in (not down or up). When sitting in this posture you may start to notice time when the posture begins to collapse down.



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Each time you notice, inhale as your rise back up through the spine and realign yourself.

If you tend to slouch often there will be some discomfort in this posture due to weakened back muscles. With some practice your muscles will quickly strengthen and your posture will begin to be corrected not only in your yoga practice but throughout your day. Whether in Easy Pose or sitting at your desk, practice sitting completely upright, yet totally relaxed.

Pranayam: Do you know how to breath?

Most of us were not taught how to breath. It just seems like a given as we don't actually have to be conscious for the process to occur. Unfortunately, most of us are walking around breathing short shallow breaths into the upper chest. The breath become even shallower in times of stress.

Through your breath you have the ability to instantly connect with your physiology. By deepening the breath down in to the belly by the power of the diaphragm you are able to change your heart rate, blood pressure and brain chemistry for the positive.

There are may forms of conscious breath. There are two you will find the most often in Kundalini; long deep breathing and breath of fire.



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Long Deep Breathing

Breathing through the nose, inhale slow and deep first allowing the lower belly to expand outward, then move the breath up towards the heart center, expanding through the rib cage and back. Exhale from the heart center, then gently pull in the belly. Continue to breath working on deepening and lengthening the breath while keeping the inhale and exhale balanced.

Breathing long and deep has many benefits including calming the nervous system, releasing toxins, relaxing the mind, slowing the heart rate and regulating blood pressure.

Breath of Fire

Breath of fire is a deep, powerful and rapid breath through the nose. With each exhale you want to quickly pull the belly in so that the diaphragm lifts upward to force the air out, try to inhale an equal amount of air as you exhaled. The speed is very rapid, however it is important that you are full and equal inhales and exhale. When you are first starting out you may find that you are not putting enough emphasis on the inhale and therefore start to get dizzy. In the beginning, slow the breath down and focus first on the depth and power of the breath as well as the contraction of the belly and diaphragm. You can work on the speed over time as you continue to practice.



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Breath of Fire will ignite the nervous system causing secretion of the glands and purification of the blood while the mind becomes very clear and still.

What's with all the chanting?

Working with sound is an integral part of Kundalini yoga. Naad is the essence of sound. When practicing Kundalini we are often tapping into the practice of Naad Yoga in order to attune to higher vibrational currents. We do this by utilizing mantras, so we can experience how sounds affect the body, mind and spirit. Mantras are formulas used to alter mental patterns, as well as the chemistry of the brain.

The idea is what we vibrate and project is who we become. For instance, when we project (aloud or silently) “Sat Nam,” meaning “truth is my identity or I vibrate with truth,” we are working to overwrite our deeply ingrained, negative vibrations, such as “I am not good enough.” When we chant a mantra we are physically vibrating that mantra through the body and the body, in turn, begins to vibrate with the mantra. We are also stimulating the meridians channels, as the tongue flicks different area of the upper pallet in the mouth.

Practicing Naad Yoga within our Kundalini practice begins to bring awareness to how we communicate with ourselves, others and the universe, so that we can begin to change those patterns that do not



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positively serve. Our internal sound vibrations (thoughts) lay the foundation for our entire life experience. Also one single projected word from you can alter someone's life, and you may never even know it!. This is the power of sound!

Aside from tuning in with Ong Namō Guru Dev Namō and ending our practice with the sunshine song there is one mantra used more than any others.

That mantra is “Sat Nam”. As mentioned Sat Nam means “truth is my identity or I vibrate with truth.” It is a bij or seed mantra. Just like a tiny seed can contain a mighty oak, a short seed mantra contains all wisdom. Sat nam is said to be able to slice through all negative thoughts and vibrations. By chanting Sat Nam aloud or silently we are connecting to the divine consciousness in all things. When practicing an exercise in a kriya it will often be stated to silently inhale “Sat” and exhale “Nam.” It is encouraged to come back to this mantra even when it is not stated to do so, unless another mantra is given for a specific exercise.

You will find many other beautiful mantras are practiced in Kundalini yoga as well.

Mudras: Postures for the hands

Mudras are hand gestures that guide energy flow to the brain. When we



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put our hands in certain “postures” we can create a flow of communication within the body as each area of the hand is connected to a reflex in a certain part of the brain as well as the body as a whole.

Though there are several mudras utilized regularly in Kundalini one that is used the most often is Gyan Mudra. This mudra occurs when you press the tip of the thumb on to the tip of the index finger with the other fingers extended straight yet relaxed. The index finger represents the planet Jupiter, which relates to knowledge and expansion. It also stimulates the Root chakra, or first chakra, helping to keep you grounded. Whenever you are seeking to expand or uplift yourself, having a solid grounding keeps you balanced. Gyan mudra is calming to the mind and also helps to sharpen concentration.

Dhrist: A focus for the eyes

A dhrist is an eye focus for meditative awareness. There are many different eye focuses utilized in Kundalini kriyas and meditations which are used to stimulate different meridians and areas within the brain. The one used most often is the Shambavi Mudra where the eyes closed and the focus is in between the eye brows and above the root of the nose in order to stimulate the third eye chakra. Focusing here also helps to stimulate the prefrontal cortex of the brain where higher levels of human consciousness and reasoning take place. The dhrist also activates the Shushmana



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or central energy channel, often said to correspond to the central energy of the nervous system. Many kriyas and meditations will state when a specific eye focus should be used, otherwise this eye focus is encouraged to hold during exercises even if there isn't specific direction to do so.

Bhandas: Internal locks for the flow of energy

The bhandas, or body locks, practiced in Kundalini Yoga help to bring about an equilibrium between our prana and apana or expansive and eliminating energies. One of the most used body locks in Kundalini yoga is Mulbandh, also known as the Root Lock.

The Root lock is applied in 3 parts. First contacting the muscles of the rectum, then contracting the area around the sexual organs (as though you were stopping the flow of urine), finally contracting the abdominal muscles towards the spine. Though done sequentially, it is a smooth and rapid movement. This lock is usually done with either the in breath or out breath held gently suspended. For new students it is typical that the leg muscles, as well as other muscles, contract when the breath is suspended and when the lock is applied. As you practice in time, work on refining the lock so that only the muscles necessary are used while the rest of the body is relaxed and open.

Root Lock also improves digestion, bladder control, longevity and core



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stability, as well as well as improving subtle awareness and transformation of the physical and energetic body.

Clothing

White, natural fiber clothing is worn in the Kundalini tradition. White contains every color and is reflective in nature, helping to expand your aura, radiance and projection. Plus you must also be more aware of how you move your body and interact with the world around you when you are wearing white so as to not get your clothing dirty and stained!

Practice barefoot (no socks!) to expose your nervous system and subtle energy channels more fully into the environment.

On covering your head:

“Wearing a head covering enables you to command your sixth center, the Ajna Chakra. Covering the head stabilizes the cerebral matter and the 26 parts of the brain, which are interlocked with the neurological system and electromagnetic field.” Yogi Bhajan

Yogi Bhajan

Yogi Bhajan, taught his first Kundalini Yoga class in L.A. in 1969 in order



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to realize the vision of bringing Kundalini Yoga to the West. His goal was not to collect students but to train teachers to help support humanity as the Age of Aquarius nears – a time of rapid change. To learn more about Yogi Bhajan, visit www.yogibhajan.com

A few things to consider

This guide is just a very small piece of a vast, lifelong practice, however it should be a useful tool to help support you in the beginning stages of your Kundalini Yoga experience.

Know that when you go to a Kundalini yoga class you will find that the teachers do not come around and physically adjust their students. It is left up to you as the student to begin to become aware.

Keep in mind that when you first start practicing there is usually two things that happen and they may both happen regularly and may continue to do so for a long time. Sometimes you will start to listen to your mind chatter when an exercise starts to become more intense and you will look for every reason why you should not continue even though you are more than capable. The beauty of Kundalini, and other forms of practice, rest in the challenge. It is in the challenge when we begin to more clearly see our unconscious fears become reactions and learn how to steer the body and mind into a state of grace even in the face of



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difficulty. You will also have times that you want so badly to do or finish an exercise that you may over extend or even injure yourself. Be mindful of both of these self defeating thoughts of the ego.

Yogi Bhajan say's "Keep up, and you will be kept up." So keep up, give your all and if you feel like something is not right (you are dizzy, there is a sharp pain, etc) then gracefully relax and come back as soon as you can. If you simply can not do an exercise modify by coming as close to it as possible or maintain the breath while imaging yourself doing the exercise. In order to "keep up" you need to become aware of how to honor your specific needs while also learning how to expand past your preconceived and false limitations.