

# Kundalini Yoga and Meditation as Taught by Yogi Bhajan

*A Contemporary Approach to Human  
Excellence and the Thirst of the Soul*

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“The purpose of all branches of yoga is to raise the Kundalini, to raise the dormant power of the being so that he can have excellence.”

—Yogi Bhajan

WHEN WE WANT to be aware, potent, practical, and intuitive, we awaken the kundalini in our being. When we want to find the way through any block and recognize the constant guiding presence of our higher self, we awaken the kundalini within us. When we recognize our true self within the self and want our prayers and projections to be effective, we awaken the kundalini.

If we really want to experience what it is to be a human being, in all its miraculous potential, we find a way to awaken the kundalini. When this is accomplished, the first sign, as Yogi Bhajan has said,

is that you are contained, you are content, and you are very continuously dependable. Your behavior reflects it. Your identity takes on a personality of royalty and reality. Royalty and reality must be in you. This is called Shakti Yoga. This is called Kundalini Yoga. This is called the Yoga of Power, Self, and Stimulation. It is also called the Yoga of Awareness.<sup>1</sup>

The kundalini is a force, a deep urge, within each of us to unfold: to express and act in our originality and uniqueness, to revel in the personal excellence that challenge evokes as we reside in the stillness that is the nucleus of our existence. It flows in each of us and in each particle of existence. It is as gentle as the fragrant blooming of each petal of a spring rose. It is as inexpressible as true love. It is as practical as a single act of kindness that is selfless, spontaneous, and effortlessly in rhythm with *all that is*. It accompanies every awakening. It cannot be forced any more than you can push the colors of dawn to hurry or to linger.

Above all, kundalini is not a property of the mind and its legions of thoughts. It is not understood by any amount of study, reading, or thinking. It can be grasped through the wisdom that comes to us through a deep experience of grace. That experience is best cultivated by consistent discipline and matured by the surrender that only love allows.

The writings of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell popularized this sense of the fundamental importance, power, and developmental nature of kundalini. They focused on the deep psychology and symbolism of kundalini and the historical rendering of chakras, energy, and human development. And contemporary writers have greatly extended and systematized these. What was missing was wide knowledge and access to authentic disciplines. Much of the teachings of kundalini yoga and meditation (also called *Raj* yoga) were oral.

Kundalini has been a personal journey of mine as well as a discipline of study. I always had a strong urge to awaken, to know what is true, and to teach what I have experienced. By my early teens I had studied most wisdom philosophies, and I began a journey of many years through mathematics, chemistry, physics, philosophy, and psychology under the strength of that inner urge. I wanted to encounter the world and my consciousness as they are. I did not care if there was a god or not, but I wanted to act with royal and godly character. I did not care which belief I had to test or put aside, but I wanted to be believable to myself.

At thirteen, in the days before personal computers, I wandered the dusty stacks of old libraries, sought teachers, went to learn with these teachers from their teachers, and tried whatever I could find as disciplines. As I read the esoteric literature, “kundalini” or “serpent fire” was always the missing key. The knowledge surrounding kundalini at that time was necessarily secret and required initiation, lifetimes of positive karma, or the blessing of a teacher to learn. I refused all initiations; I was too much of a scientist to agree to secrecy rather than the light of shared public testing. I also thought secrecy could create issues of control, power, and blind faith, all of which I saw as contributing to the tattered and blood-stained fabric of world history. I wanted to learn, to experience, to know. And I wanted discover the inner science that could benefit everyone without restriction.

I was both delighted and shocked to find Yogi Bhan in 1969 when I was entering graduate school in mathematics. Actually,

he found me. That meeting was a synchronistic tale of a student meeting the teacher, one laced with premonitory dreams, recalcitrant efforts to avoid the messages of the portended events, and a class in kundalini yoga that was astounding and gave flesh to the philosophic skeleton of knowledge I had.

When we met, lifetimes of memories rushed into my consciousness, and I was filled with instant recognition. And the dance of teacher and student began. Yogi Bhajan taught everyone publicly. There was no initiation. He formally accepted no students and presented the techniques as a science. He did not claim perfection or to be good or bad, only that he was a master of these technologies and would produce teachers to serve, heal, and lead. I started to teach, at his direction, the very next day. I studied with Yogi Bhajan for the next thirty-five years, until he passed in 2004.

Through those years I had the opportunity to learn and teach thousands of techniques around the world—as well as to confront my own limitations. Gradually, meditation and yoga opened a space for the awareness, energy, maturity, and experiences guaranteed with kundalini yoga and meditation as Yogi Bhajan taught it. In the end, it is all about the wondrously simple reality of being a human, sharing that humanity, and witnessing the miracles of life.

Along the way I encountered and enjoyed the many myths and misconceptions about kundalini and tested the effects of this yoga in labs. I had the opportunity to collaborate with great researchers in mind-body medicine, and knew or worked alongside many well-known yogis and healers. I have also tended a broadly based psychology practice that applies meditation and yoga therapeutically.

Now, the age is changing. Knowledge is everywhere. There is no need for searching, for scrambling through old libraries or up hidden mountains. All the thousands of techniques that were hidden are now an open legacy for all. We have no excuse.

There are teachers and teachings, so anyone can tap the spark of kundalini and enter this new time with intuition, caliber, kindness, and excellence.

## KUNDALINI MYTHS

I want to give you a better sense of kundalini yoga by addressing some common myths about it.

### *Myth #1*

The first myth to put aside is that kundalini yoga is slow or takes years of practice to show results. As Yogi Bhajan said in *The Master's Touch*:

Kundalini Yoga does not take very long—three minutes maximum, or eleven minutes, or sixty-two minutes. It creates in the brain the imprint of your self-evaluation of doing the exercises. You will find that there is no pain, just achievement within the self. And once the mind is trained to achieve, you can reach Infinity.<sup>2</sup>

There are guidelines on how to practice each technique. There are thousands of techniques. Some require only a few minutes, some half an hour, and some longer. When we measured effects on heart rate variation (HRV), on levels of brain activity in fMRI's, and on mood, we saw profound effects in ten to thirty minutes.

### *Myth #2*

The second myth is that it is only for people who can simplify life, live in ashrams, or make some commitment to distance themselves from the bustle of family and business life. Yogi Bhajan repeatedly stressed that kundalini yoga is aimed at the “householder”: a person who is busy and engaged in normal life pursuits. It is ideal for people who are committed to family, community, projects, business, and avocations. The techniques produce significant changes almost immediately. With regular practice, those gains

in personal development and functioning stabilize and become incorporated in normal life. There is no need to retreat, to forgo an active life, or to prepare for years until one is highly qualified. The practice will qualify the practitioner. The experience opens, broadens, and consolidates the consciousness and personality of the student.

It is certainly a pleasure to enjoy a beautiful natural environment alone or with people doing a similar practice. When we share these techniques with students, we encourage periodic immersions to focus on meditation and be with a community. We have many opportunities to meditate, for one or several days. But the core practice is the daily practice in the early morning hours.

It is in that special quiet time in the morning that we cultivate the inner stillness that can guide our outer activity, that we confront and control our mind so each thought we project is more effective, and that we exercise to be physically healthy and emotionally clear. This morning *sadhana* can be done wherever we are and no matter what we do.

### *Myth #3*

The third myth is that kundalini is raised only with kundalini yoga. Kundalini is the natural presence of awareness in our self and in all of nature. It finds its highest expression in a human being. Our nervous and glandular systems make our bodies the most complex and responsive matter in the universe. When we optimize that potential and expand our connectedness and sensitivity, kundalini increases its flow and presence. The natural results are subtle perception, intuition, and a sharpened applied intelligence. Without the normal flow of kundalini, we could only be mechanical and automatic. Wherever a prayer is effective, a mind expanded, and intuition accurate, kundalini is functioning.

Through its disciplines, kundalini yoga gives us the ability to intentionally awaken our self. We can increase our level of

awareness, choice, and sensitivity through a gradual, elegant process. The graceful self-presence that comes is not reliant on chance, accident, or a special philosophy or person. It arises through the experiences that evoke in us a new level of awareness and capacity to act effectively.

#### *Myth #4*

The fourth myth is that it is dangerous. Scattered through scriptural, historical, and political writings are warnings for those who practice kundalini yoga. There were several reasons for these warnings. The matrix of energies that compose our body and mind operates by laws and is highly complex. A technology that enhances and releases those energies must be precise, and precisely managed. So there is a need for a teacher to guide or certify the teachings and how to use them.

This was a great problem for millennia. Much of what was taught was secret, restricted to privileged classes of people or passed on only orally. That has changed now. In the information age, information is no longer inaccessible. As a master of kundalini yoga, Yogi Bhajan threw aside all secrecy and recorded the techniques from many traditions that had been kept secret or transmitted only orally. He felt these techniques were a legacy that belonged to all people and would serve anyone who practiced them. He acted as a guide and certified each thing he taught, asking his students to not change those *kriyas*. As long as they are practiced as given, there can be no danger, only steady and gradual awakening. To assure this and to open the door for every person to practice without difficulty, he created the Kundalini Research Institute (KRI), a nonprofit organization to ensure authenticity of technique, provide the highest quality of teachers and instruction, and promote applications and research.

Another reason for warnings about yoga was to ensure survival under hostile political environments. Whenever strong people arise who are aware and fearless, they threaten established power.

Power depends on a story, and self-awareness lets you break the hypnosis of that story. So for protection, the practices were hidden by use of codes and special language or by interlacing them in other writings.

The greatest danger is simply that rising awareness and vitality brings new perspectives, reevaluation of activities and relationships, and change. This improves many things, and it can disrupt old patterns that no longer support you. Yogi Bhajan said it clearly:

In the beginning you are you, in the middle you are you, and in the end you are God. There's nothing else. There's nothing to it. Nothing was, nothing is, nothing shall be.

For thousands of years the Piscean Age has lied to us to make us find God out there, while they knew that we are gods.

Longitude and latitude are given to everybody. Altitude and attitude are given by Kundalini Yoga. When the kundalini spiral rises to penetrate through all the chakras, the man knows he's Brahma—the Divine Creative.

That's why they used to warn that Kundalini Yoga is dangerous. It's dangerous because it takes away from man the ability to be exploited by another man. And for some, life without exploitation has no juice.<sup>3</sup>

### *Myth #5*

The fifth myth is that yoga and meditation in the kundalini disciplines are separate—or that meditation is “higher” than the physical yoga. Body and mind are not separated. They form a seamless matrix of substance and process. Kundalini yoga uses meditation to affect the body and the body to effect meditation. Many meditations involve physical movements, posture, sound, and focus. Meditation is not restricted to attention or thought



alone. It is a process that confronts the flow of thoughts and feelings and uses many techniques to create balance or change in the meridians, chakras, nerves, and glands.

The body is viewed as Guru Nanak presented it: part of the sacred pattern of the universe that enacts the highest embodiment of potential and awareness. All the resources needed to awaken our spirit and initiate profound healing are within the body in its gross and subtle structures. It was said that “the angels weep for lack of a body to experience the swirl of emotions and senses that present us with the chance for choice.” There is no higher or lower between body and mind.

### *Myth #6*

The sixth myth is that the goal of kundalini yoga is to gain psychic or paranormal powers. The goal is happiness. It is to be fulfilled as a human being. It is to awaken our potential for awareness and to synchronize our finite and infinite realms into seamless, effective action. The ultimate control we have is our attention and awareness that add choices to our life beyond the constant flow of instinctual thought, feelings, and reactions that form the habitual patterns we live.

As the energies of the body and mind grow, release, and are used in new ways, we can experience the extraordinary. We have many abilities that are dormant or unconscious. We can sense the universe. We can know many things at a distance through that sensitivity. We have unmatched capacity for empathy and mirroring others. Those same abilities let us heal each other through talk, touch, and pure awareness.

It is also possible to awaken these abilities and misuse them, like any talent. It is essential to cultivate humility and kindness along with enhanced sensitivities and energy. Instead, we sometimes attach to them and distort our ego and sense of self. Think of it as using one muscle to the extreme and neglecting the rest of the body: you can curl five hundred pounds with your biceps,

but your legs are too weak to stand steady. This would make you extraordinary and limit you at the same time. Add to this ego and you might see the whole world through those biceps.

The same kind of unbalanced development can happen in the chakras and the subtle body. Then you can perform an unusual feat of strength, psychic perception, or influence on another person. It can be as tangible as an irresistible charisma so strong that others follow you without question. It can be the ability to command an element like water to heat or freeze. All wisdom schools say not to do this. The cost is the distortion of the chakras. When you die you become bound to the overdeveloped chakra. You lose authenticity and true freedom in exchange for the small gain of those paranormal tricks, and they do not make you more human, wiser, or happier.

Kundalini yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan does develop intuition, intelligence, healing, and spiritual insight. In a steady, polite way, it can awaken natural gifts you already possess. But it only gives you to yourself instead of creating an attachment to powers.

### *Myth #7*

The seventh myth is that once you awaken kundalini and the inner knowledge that comes with it, you can teach or practice anything that “spontaneously” arises. There is a line in classical writings that says you practice “spontaneous kriya” when kundalini rises. This is often misunderstood and misused by teachers. Spontaneous does not mean impulsive. Nor does it mean to act out your authentic emotions. It means to act from your awareness and real self. It means you can act without duality. Each action is like a kriya that blends commitment of your finite self and emotions with reliance on the infinite self. The ego is not active, so all action comes from the stillness of the self in the present. A spontaneous action or kriya is one that you will stand behind for a hundred years since there is no split, shadow, or hidden agenda interfering with the simple reality of the moment. It has a quality of action that we call *kriya*.

Each kriya—each exercise and meditation sequence—of kundalini yoga is as structured as a classical sonata and imbued with the spontaneity that comes with full presence, awareness, and commitment in each action.

### *Myth #8*

The eighth myth is that kundalini yoga is esoteric and will never be testable or scientific. Its techniques have been discovered, used, and mastered by dedicated practitioners over centuries, and the results of this legacy are beginning to be studied. Early studies in the 1930s began a profile of the physiological changes that occur during yoga and meditation. In the early 1970s, as tools improved, the profile of changes became more extensive, and with the work of pioneers like Herbert Benson, the meditative state was recognized as a distinct, stable physiological one. Since that time, research has steadily increased, and the tools that let us explore those processes have improved exponentially.

Here are a few of the directions toward which research points to understand and apply meditation and kundalini yoga:

- The autonomic nervous system that controls excitement and relaxation can be trained, developed, and systematically influenced by breathing practices and yoga exercise.
- Kundalini yoga optimizes heart rate variation to combat depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders as well as improve cardiovascular health.<sup>4</sup> It is an antidote to many of the systemic effects of stress. The rhythmical exercises of kundalini yoga and Breathwalk are powerful stimulants of endogenous nitric oxide and other chemicals that interrupt the cascade of stress hormones that do damage to our body and mind.<sup>5</sup>
- Different meditations produce similar changes in brain function as seen in fMRI, SPECT, MEG, EEG, and other tools. But many also have distinct signatures that can lead

to targeted protocols for clinical treatments.<sup>6</sup> (Kundalini meditation is very effective for adjusting insomnia and many other sleep disturbances. This leads to improved health, blood pressure, and cognitive functioning.<sup>7</sup>)

- It is very effective clinically in relieving anxiety, dysthymic disorder, mild to moderate depression, ADHD, and excessive rumination.<sup>8</sup> With consistent meditation, the brain responds and develops both in neurological complexity and density. This is true in specific areas related to the frontal cortex, attention, memory, and emotional regulation.
- It improves empathic capacity and interpersonal perception.
- It greatly improves the cognitive abilities to be alert and hold multiple thoughts in comparison to each other, and metacognition.

There are many researchers and thousands of papers exploring these and other facets of meditation and yoga for lifestyle, health, and clinical applications. Dr. Sat Bir Singh Khalsa, the director of research for KRI, for example, is a Harvard researcher in sleep disorders. He has become globally prominent in yoga research and has contributed to many areas of the research mentioned as well as spurring conferences and collaborations on applied yoga therapy.

Yogi Bhajan was committed to the scientific study of kundalini yoga. He supported collaborations in this and encouraged future research, although he saw his primary contributions as recording the vast number of techniques that are useful and training teachers to share them. Sometimes he would share the classical explanations and mechanisms for a kriya and stop with a laugh. He would say, “Why continue? Your understanding will completely change, and you will have a new scientific language: energy, atom, frequency, neurotransmitters, quantum, and more. Everything will have an equation. Religions and philosophy will

give way to experience and science.” So two things define the future: the refined experience of practitioners combined with the tools and tests of a new science of consciousness.

### *Myth #9*

The ninth myth is that kundalini yoga is a religion or part of one religion. Techniques that raise the kundalini are part of every great wisdom tradition. They are not unique to one culture or time. In some societies, like India, they were incorporated into the mainstream culture and disseminated broadly. In others they were held tightly in special groups or classes.

Kundalini yoga is a source of experience and a discipline for mental and physical health and for spiritual development. It has never been a religion nor has it been against religion. It is only for awareness and against ignorance and pain. As Yogi Bajan put it:

Kundalini Yoga is not a yoga for everybody or anybody. The one who practices Kundalini Yoga commands the five tattvas, the three gunas, the seven chakras, and all 108 elements in the universe, including a conscious creation of the Creator. Let's be clear about it. Kundalini Yoga is not a religion. Religions came out of it. Kundalini Yoga is not a fad, and it's not a cult. It's a practice of experience of a person's own excellence which is dormant and which is awakened.<sup>9</sup>

### *Myth #10*

The tenth myth is that you will become perfect with kundalini yoga. You can become perfectly human and profoundly aware. You can become intuitive. You can increase your caliber, character, and effectiveness. You can be prosperous and creative. You can be humble and powerful.

You will not suddenly have a perfect personality with no flaws and irritating peculiarities. Kundalini yoga does not create

“cookie cutter” people or teachers. It brings awareness to each person so that each can act from and honor his or her uniqueness and be connected to the uniqueness of the entire universe.

Kundalini yoga creates masters who master themselves. The first rule of kundalini yoga is that you do not show—obnoxiously or politely, humbly or powerfully—any power of your own. Perfection in this approach is the ability to perfectly put aside the ego you have and act from awareness. As Yogi Bhajan commented:

The first principle of a kundalini teacher is, “I am not.” If you cannot practice shuniya, you cannot be a teacher of Kundalini Yoga. “Shuniya” means zero. The moment you become zero, then all powers will prevail through you. The power of a teacher of Kundalini Yoga is in his zero, in his shuniya. In shuniya you become zero, you reduce everything to nothing: “I am nothing. Everything is nothing. There’s nothing to be nothing.” The moment you become that, then everything radiates from you.

Second, you are a servant. The moment you become a servant, you automatically become a master. You can never become a master if you want to be a master.<sup>10</sup>

### *Myth #11*

The eleventh myth is that you must be initiated or belong to something in order to learn, practice, and receive the benefit of kundalini meditations and mantras.

There is no initiation or secrecy in kundalini yoga. It is taught as a science. It is open to be experienced and tested. The only requirement is to put aside your ego and practice with precision the authentic techniques as taught. The teachings guide you, and putting aside your ego and doing them as given protect you from errors. In Yogi Bhajan’s words:

We have kept the teachings of Kundalini Yoga pure from the time we know to the time we are. That's why when some people teach Kundalini Yoga it doesn't work. They teach philosophy, they teach chakras, sometimes they make up kriyas. It's a good time, but it will not touch the core. It is as simple as that.<sup>11</sup>

You do not need a special person or energy from a special person. Strong blessings and the projection of a good teacher are always welcome, but the connection needed to practice kundalini yoga is in the legacy of the teachings themselves and does not depend on a personality. Yogi Bhajan emphasized this:

In Kundalini Yoga neither do we initiate the man nor do we worship the man. We follow the Golden Chain—the teachings. We are grateful to the Teacher—he gave us the teachings. That doesn't mean we worship him. It is very difficult to change this. If I am your Teacher, you will like to love me and respect me and honor me. But there is a way to show that you really love me, and really exalt me, and really honor me: you will be perfect in the teachings themselves.<sup>12</sup>

### *Myth #12*

The twelfth myth, and the last, is that the practices of kundalini yoga are daunting or severe.

In fact the practices are simple, gradual, varied, precise, and proportional. There are exercises that are easy for beginners and ones that require more preparation. None of them require severe physical exertion, unnatural functions, or physical mortification of any kind. This image arose from early contacts with India that showed fakirs who captured popular attention by standing still for years, eating almost nothing, walking in fire, and living in monasteries or caves.

The actual practices are based on the concept of kriya. A kriya can be very subtle, brief or long, easy or more challenging. Each kriya is precise. Just as in music, louder is not necessarily better, so in kriya, harder and longer effort is not necessarily better. Each practice has a syntax or natural structure that aligns the body, mind, and spirit for a predictable and effective result. The exercises are not done randomly or based on personal favorites or style. Kundalini yoga practitioners are like pianists who are offered a vast array of classical music to play. Each kriya, like a composition, leads to specific states of feeling, awareness, and energy. We can pick our favorite piece and use the geometry, energy balance, and processes coded in these well-tested kriyas.

Simple kriyas may take only three minutes. Use them to breathe and break your stress at work. There are meditations that are silent; others use sound or mantra, are spoken out loud or sung. Still others are rhythmical physical movements; many use attention and mindful states alone. In eleven minutes you can significantly change your nervous system, level of energy, degree of clarity, and sense of presence and stillness. Some meditations can be done for thirty-one minutes, sixty-two minutes, or even two and a half hours.

A little at a time is often the best practice. The foundation to a serious basic practice is to exercise and meditate in the early morning. Prepare for the day as you conquer the mind and its subconscious. The period of two and a half hours before dawn is considered the ideal time and is called the time of nectar: *amrit vela*.

The practices are done as a group in the *amrit vela* and in classes offered by KRI and in my teachings and in the 3HO (Healthy, Happy and Holy Organization). It is also practiced individually. We also do one to three days of intensive meditations as a group in courses of white tantric yoga, which is part of kundalini yoga.

And there is Breathwalk. This is a contemplative form of walking that incorporates breathing patterns and meditation,



strengthening mind and body. It awakens awareness and invites in your heart and spirit. It is the ultimate in meditation and walking for physical and mental health.<sup>13</sup>

You can find exercises and meditations in kundalini yoga that match your level of conditioning. Precision is more important than complexity, flow more important than level of difficulty, and steady growth more important than extreme experience. Many exercises that are done for several minutes can be physically challenging—like holding your arm out steadily. But they are normal exercises in a flow of exercises that challenge and strengthen the nervous system and focus the mind.

A central task in kundalini yoga is to conquer the mind.<sup>14</sup> We encounter the mind thought by thought, feeling by feeling. Each thought or feeling initiates change in our physical readiness, energy level, mood, and perception. Each thought!

The techniques bring your conscious and subconscious reactions to the natural flow of thoughts to neutral stillness. In that stillness you have a choice. You can express your true heart, your authentic self. When you experience this, it is deeply satisfying and effective your in life. Mastering the mind also opens your experience to your spirit. You act without the conflicts engendered by the ego.

In the mind, we guide each thought through its negative, positive, and neutral aspects and act with intuitive intelligence. In the body, we balance the flows of the meridians in the left (ida), right (pingala), and central (sushmana) channels. Realization comes as we act from awareness, love, kindness, and reality.

## KUNDALINI IN THE AQUARIAN AGE

The age of kundalini yoga is just beginning. It is a source of strength as we face the future. It is a source of peace as we experience the present. It is a source of healing as we engage our life fully. I look forward to the ways in which we will practice and talk about these authentic technologies of human awareness as

science and experience give birth to the languages of spirit in the Aquarian Age.

Find out more at [kundaliniresearchinstitute.org](http://kundaliniresearchinstitute.org), [breathwalk.com](http://breathwalk.com), and [Gurucharan.com](http://Gurucharan.com).