

Kundalini Yoga

Frequently Asked Questions

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Level One Instructor

Question: What is Kundalini Yoga?

(There are numerous ways to answer this question. This is just one of them.)

Kundalini Yoga's origins come from the beginning of time and seem to have roots in the wisdom traditions of every culture in which a spark of consciousness has been lit. It gives the tools, technology, the sadhana, the personal discipline, to awaken awareness.

Kundalini Yoga is a science which works on the seven chakras, the arc line and the aura. It works directly on the total energy, and that flow of energy has one simple way: either YOU sway it or IT sways you. Either you are above the energy riding it or you go below the energy and it rides you. That is where Kundalini Yoga fits in : you will learn to ride your energy, to experience it and penetrate any given situation to attain balance.

What is kundalini actually? It is your creative potential. You experience it when the energy of the glandular system combines with the energy of the nervous system to create such a sensitivity that the totality of the brain receives signals and integrates them. Then you become totally and wholly aware, and your creative potential becomes available to you.

The power of Kundalini Yoga lies in the actual experience. It goes right into your heart and extends your consciousness so you may have a wider horizon of grace and of knowing the truth. Ultimately you come to understand your existence in relationship to the universe and understand you already are, and this brings you to the practical experience of Infinity. You can then radiate creativity and infinity in all aspects of your daily life.

Question: Specifically, what is the difference between Kundalini Yoga and other yoga?

All forms of yoga focus on stimulating and regulating the human energy that is the very essence of consciousness. This energy is called the kundalini. As it originally evolved, each student of yoga worked on all aspects of himself. He exercised the physical, disciplined the mental, analyzed and discussed the world intellectually, etc. Yoga was holistic permeating every level of human existence. With the passage of time, the techniques became diluted and divided. As individuals catered to their different needs and personalities, they chose to emphasize and practice separate components of the total yogic system. Some preferred just exercise, ignoring mantra, some did mantra and meditation without breath control.

All the traditional Hatha yoga systems were aimed at students who could limit or withdraw from normal life. The beauty of Kundalini Yoga is that if you can just physically sit there, fix the automatic rhythm of your pranayam, add a creative inner naad, your mind becomes focused and balanced. In one kriya you can immediately achieve a complete physical, mental and spiritual balance. It works so effectively and quickly because of this completeness, balance and energy; Only Kundalini Yoga is direct, quick, and a perfect practice for the pace of a modern household.

It is a master science of experience and awareness. It is a Raj Yoga (the royal unitive discipline, a Maha Yoga) that awakens you inside.

Question: Why is there no headstand in Kundalini Yoga?

In Kundalini yoga we do not do headstand because it can be dangerous for the delicate structure of the neck, and it can create permanent damage that you may be unaware of. For example, long-term cumulative damage of the cervical discs, their nerves, and ligaments may go unnoticed for years. In addition, headstand is not advised for medical conditions: any problem with the spinal skeletal system, neck, and shoulders; high or low blood pressure; eye diseases; ear disorders; nasal congestion; tooth infection. Instead we use shoulder stand, which gives similar benefits as the head stand but without the risk. We do not do shoulder stand during menstruation and pregnancy.

Question: What is the reason for the turban my teacher may wear?

The hair regulates the inflow of sun energy into the body system. To let the solar energy flow without obstruction, let the hair grow to its full natural length, and take good care of it. If this is done, the amount of energy that goes downward from the 7th chakra increases tremendously. The kundalini energy is activated by the radiant force of the solar plexus and moves upward in response to the solar energy coming down. This balances the body energy and maintains total equilibrium. If the hair is unkept, down, or uncovered so that it is electrically imbalanced, this natural process of raising the kundalini energy will be impeded. Actually the hair is so important that the word for consciousness, kundalini, actually derives from kundal which means "a coil of the beloved's hair". The hair is best kept uncut and tied on top of the head in a rishi knot at the solar centres, to concentrate the solar energy at the pineal gland. It encourages the raising of the kundalini.

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. Covering the head creates a focus of the functional circuit of the hemispheres of the brain, and tunes the neurological system. The whole head is to be covered, not just the crown chakra. The benefit of wearing a turban is that when you wrap the 5 to 7 layers of cloth, you cover the temples, which prevents any variance or movement in the different parts of the skull. A turban automatically gives you a cranial self-adjustment. You can pay for a cranial adjustment, or you can tie a turban for free!

Question: Why should Kundalini Yoga be done on an empty stomach?

A meal should not be eaten 2-3 hours before class, or the blood and energy will be tied up in the digestive process, instead of being available for yoga practice. (Light snacks are okay.) Also, doing yoga too soon after eating obstructs poses like Plow Pose and Shoulder Stand for some people. It is fine to drink water before and during class.

Question: How can you support the cleansing processes that are stimulated through the yoga?

Go to bed early each night to aid the natural self-cleansing processes of the body. During the day, drink lots of pure water, so the body can clean itself through sweat and urination. In addition drink yogi tea and other cleansing teas. Take cold showers on rising daily so that the circulation and cleaning processes of the skin get improved. Undertake occasional cleansing diets.

Question: Why is yoga done barefoot?

On a subtle level, you are always trying to do things that allow your energies to flow most freely, to accompany the changes you induce by doing Kundalini Yoga. The feet have nerve endings that go to all parts of the body, and are the major exchange area for prana between you, the Sun energy, and the Earth energy. Bare feet maximize that flow of energy and help us to cleanse and revitalize.

Question: If I do Kundalini Yoga, will I suddenly become enlightened and full of kundalini energy?

For the serious student, practicing regularly, 40 days of Kundalini Yoga can create profound transformation. But "sudden enlightenment" is not the goal of Kundalini Yoga practice. You slowly develop through the different stages of spiritual growth: saram pad, karam pad, shakti pad, and sahej pad to sat pad. It is a gradual process of increasing your inner light and cleaning old fears and karmas.

Question: I read a book where the author claims he was almost burned by the kundalini energy, and nearly went crazy!

That person did not do Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan. He meditated on a golden flower above his head for two hours daily for twenty years. He failed to prepare his body and nervous system. His experience is comparable with that of many people experiencing spontaneous kundalini awakenings. They can be extremely difficult to handle. Spontaneous awakenings have nothing to do with the gradual and balanced development of the kundalini in the practice of kundalini yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan. Kundalini Yoga by itself never causes these dangerous and extreme energy imbalances. However, we do help people that suffer from them--when they start Kundalini Yoga they become more grounded again, and it is possible for them to channel the energies.

Question: I'm a Christian and I feel that mantras like "God and me, me and God are one" go against my beliefs. Do I have to do them?

Every tradition has both mystical and ritual based teachings. Some are inclusive and open, others exclusive and oriented at conversion. All of the techniques of Kundalini Yoga are aimed to elevate the individual capacity, so their own sensitivity and awareness can guide their spiritual choices and their choices about promoting and demoting habits. It is fundamental to yoga that we experience and master the polarities that are dynamic in our minds and in our lives. We have many techniques and mantras that help us experience the relationship between our finite self and our infinite or expanded self. That is yoga. It is not a religion. It is spiritual in the sense that it always gives you the experience of connecting to the larger self, to the community of others and to the greater realms you participate in. People generally report a deepening of their spiritual experience in whatever tradition is their base as the mind clears, energy rises and emotions become more refined.

Question: I feel strange about these mantras. How can they work for people in the West?

There are students who experience a feeling of alienation from their western culture when confronted with the Indian influences in Kundalini Yoga. Culture, however, is a living entity. There have always been countless cultural exchanges between nations. In the Age of Aquarius there will be many faceted world culture using and mixing anything cultural that is available on this planet regardless of nationality and geography. In the future, it will be easier for people on the spiritual path to learn universal spiritual values prevalent in many cultures. Many cultural groups have access to treasures of universal spiritual techniques. There are many such groups in India. Even in the Judeo-Christian tradition there exist many mantras, although they may not be recognized as such. For example, Amen (derived from the Sanskrit mantra OM), Hallelujah, and Kyrie Eleison.

Question: After the class last week I had a headache all evening. Why?

This may be a part of the natural cleansing process stimulated by doing kundalini yoga. The toxins that are stored in the muscles are released into the circulation so they can be eliminated through the kidneys, lungs, intestines, and skin. However, before waste can leave the body it temporarily makes the blood slightly toxic in people who are sedentary. A headache after a class can be a normal symptom of this increase in the toxic level of the blood. It may also be caused by insufficient pure water, hydration, before exercise, especially in hot climates. If symptoms persist or seem extreme, certainly refer them to professional medical advice. It is best to drink a lot of pure water so the body can clean itself more efficiently, and then go to sleep.

Question: I noticed that teachers in my Hatha Yoga class spend a lot of time on the details of a posture compared to teachers in a Kundalini Yoga class. Why is that?

The emphasis in a Kundalini Yoga class is the flow and movement of the kriya, the sequence of exercises and meditations. Many teachers give precise descriptions of postures, and teachers are trained in detail. But postures are considered a foundation. Each posture gets part of its effect from how it is included in the kriya. There is a body intelligence we become sensitive to as awareness grows that guides us. So Kundalini Yoga teachers do pay attention to posture but they also focus on many more aspects of a kriya that create the profound effects of this practice.

Question: Some poses seem different than in Hatha Yoga, like Archer Pose. Why is that?

There are several differences in Kundalini Yoga since it was given for householders- non ascetics. For example, Vatskar Kriya is done by sipping in air. In Hatha Yoga this same exercise is taken into the stomach and out the intestines. This is not required, since we use kriyas, nor is it appropriate for householders in a busy life. Archer Pose has many variations and we use the active form as well as the hero form. Also, there are some postures and mudras you will see in Kundalini Yoga and not in Hatha Yoga because of the vast legacy of advanced practices that used to be secret which are now shared with us all by Yogi Bhajan.