

KUNDALINI YOGA CLASS HANDOUT

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# What is Kundalini Yoga?

Kundalini Yoga is described as the ‘Yoga of Awareness’ and also as the ‘householder’s yoga’. It is for everyone, people can gain results from their very first class. It is an uplifting blend of physical and spiritual (non-religious) practices incorporating movement, dynamic breathing techniques, meditation and some chanting of mantras (you don’t need to be able to sing!). It builds physical vitality, gives you new perspectives and capacities, flexibility, balance, stamina and the ability to remain calm, centred and clear through life’s challenges. While perhaps sounding quite gentle and spiritual, it is also very practical, powerful and scientific, designed by the yogis to maximise healing powers, strengthen the immune, nervous and glandular systems.

# Class Format

A Kundalini Yoga class follows a set pattern – we tune-in, we might do some pranayama (breathwork), then we might have some warm-up exercises, we then do a set of exercises for a particular purpose (a kriya), then relaxation, then a meditation (unless the kriya contained a meditation). We then close the space. Within that structure no class is the same, some classes may be quite heart-centred and restorative, others may be more physical and aerobic!

## Tuning IN

At the start of each class or home practice we tune in by chanting the Adi Mantra: ‘**Ong Namo, Guru Dev Namo**’ 3 times. This means ‘I bow to the subtle divine wisdom, the divine teacher within’. It connects us to our highest self, the infinite teacher living in each of us and it spiritually guides the teacher and students during the class. The mantra connects us to The Golden Chain - all the teachers who have gone before us.

We do this sitting in easy pose (legs crossed), making sure we’re grounded sitting on our sitting bones, palms together in prayer pose, thumbs at our heart centre and gently pressed into our sternum. Lift the sternum up, bring the chin in. Take a couple of deep breaths – expanding the belly on the inhale; on the exhale - bringing the belly in, squeezing out all the stale air from the lungs. Inhale to begin the Adi Mantra above which we chant 3 times.

For tuning-in it’s not *essential* to chant the Mangala Charan mantra: ‘**Aad Guray Nameh, Jugaad Guray Nameh, Sat Guray Nameh, Siree Guroo Dayv-ay Nameh**’, but I always do this after the Adi Mantra as it’s a lovely mantra for protection. It clears the clouds of doubt and opens us to guidance and protection. It surrounds our magnetic field with protective light. (Try it before setting off on a car journey!) It means ‘I bow to the primal wisdom. I bow to the wisdom true through the ages. I bow to the true wisdom. I bow to the unseen wisdom’. We also chant this mantra 3 times.

When chanting mantras, resonate the sound, pronouncing each sound with the lips and the tongue. Project the sound. With these two mantras connect to *your* inner teacher and infinite wisdom.

I also like to invite you to set an intention for the practice before moving onto the next part of the class.

## PRANAYAMA and/OR WARM UP

After tuning in we often do some warm-up exercises to prepare us for the kriya that comes next. In some classes we may also do some pranayama first before any warm-up.

### Pranayama

Pranayama is breathwork. Our prana is life energy itself. When we learn how to breath consciously, we can calm our minds and achieve greater mastery of our lives. Without conscious breathing we are more liable to anxiety (going into fight, flight or freeze modes), low mood and low energy. It’s also harder to think rationally. There are lots of useful and wonderful pranayama in kundalini yoga such as left-nostril, right-nostril, alternate-nostril breathing, breath of fire and whistle-breath (see <https://www.3ho.org/kundalini-yoga/pranayam/pranayam-techniques> for more details). If we haven’t done these in a class you’ve attended and you want to know more, please nudge me to put them in a class. We don’t do pranayama as a separate component in all classes, but conscious attention to and use of the breath will be part of the whole class each week.

### Warm up

Warm-up exercises should warm the muscles, move the blood, flex the spine and deepen the breath.

Recommendations – sun salutations: 3-5 rounds, sufi grind, spinal flex, spinal twist, shoulder shrugs, neck rolls, butterfly, cat-cow, cat-cow alternate, life nerve stretch.

## KRIYA

**The word**kriya**means action. In Kundalini Yoga a**kriya**is a series of postures, breath, and sound that work toward a specific outcome.** Practicing a kriya initiates a sequence of physical and mental changes that affect the body, mind, and spirit simultaneously. There are kriyas that support the liver, balance the glandular system, make you radiant, stimulate the pituitary, increase the flexibility of the spine, and many more. **Each**kriya**has a different effect, but all work on all levels of your being.**

It is best to be part of a class and have a teacher when beginning kundalini yoga. It’s also good to attend a regular class once you are more experienced so someone else can hold the space for you. The group energy enhances the experience. There are some beautiful kriyas on the 3HO website (<https://www.3ho.org/kundalini-yoga/kriya/featured-kriyas>). It is important you follow every detail of the instructions as the kriya is an exact science – you can’t pick and choose what bits you like. As a beginner you can reduce timings/repetitions if you need to though – just be consistent – so perhaps go for a half or quarter throughout the kriya. If you use other online recordings or instructions make sure it states ‘Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan’ and people are wearing white and have their head covered – otherwise it may not be authentic.

There are hundreds of kriyas. Each one is different – it’s good to come with an open mind, go within, listen to your body and experience what shifts for you.

Things to remember:

* Eye position – Eyes are usually closed, unless otherwise stated, with your focus at your brow point. During a class you will probably have your eyes open to get instructions for a posture, then once you know what you’re doing you close your eyes. Kundalini yoga is a personal practice – your focus should be within, not on other students, what they’re doing or any comparisons.
* Mulbandh (root lock) – We apply the root lock at the end of an exercise to correct our flow of life energy. It is a 3-part lock – we first contract our anal sphincter, lifting the muscles upwards and inwards, then we contract the muscles around the sexual organs (which feels like a slight lift and rotation of the pubic bone as if trying to stop the flow of urine), then we contract the lower abdominal muscles and navel point towards the spine. With practice it quickly becomes a smooth motion. Unless otherwise stated, after each exercise apply the lock and draw your energy up your spine to your crown chakra (top of your head) while suspending the breath.
* Jalandhar bandh (neck lock) – We apply neck lock in all chanting meditations and during most pranayama exercises. Whenever you are holding your breath in or out it is usually applied unless otherwise instructed. Sit comfortably with our spine straight. Left chest and sternum upward. At the same time gently stretch the neck straight by pulling the chin towards the back of the neck (do not force head forward or down). Head stays level and centred, does not tilt forward or to either side. Muscles of neck and throat remain loose. Brow and face muscles relaxed. The neck seal seals the energy generated in upper brain, creates nerve flexes that stimulate and balance thyroid and parathyroid glands and prevents changes in blood pressure that can happen during exercise and breathing. It acts as a safety valve that regulates pressure by reducing dizziness that can result from practice.

## RELAXATION

Relaxation is done in Corpse Pose (lying flat on your back, ankles together, feet relaxed, palms facing up). Really let your body rest into and be held by the mat/ground. Your head should be flat on the ground (no pillow), you can use socks and blankets to keep warm. It is an important part of the class or home practice as it allows the body to integrate all the changes brought about during the class. It could be anything from 5 minutes to much longer, in class it’s usually around 10/11 minutes.

Coming out of relaxation – breathe deep into the body, inhale and exhale, wiggle your fingers and toes, circle wrists and ankles around one way, then the other, stretch the spine, stretch arms overhead, stretch both sides, knees to chest, rub hands and feet together, rock side to side, rock up to easy pose.

## MEDITATION

Kundalini Yoga contains hundreds of different meditations for different purposes. Part of the purpose of the physical parts of a kundalini class is to quieten the ‘monkey mind’ to ready us for meditation. Even if you think you’ve tried before and you ‘can’t’ meditate, students often find it easier in Kundalini Yoga because the given meditations may use breath, mantra, mudra (hand positions), movement and focus. Therefore, we have more anchors to stop our mind from being distracted. There are meditations to reduce stress, depression, work on addictions, for healing etc. Some are as short as 3 minutes; 11 minutes or longer is more typical.3HO has some meditations listed you can try (<https://www.3ho.org/kundalini-yoga/meditation/featured-meditations>). Spirit Voyage can also be a good site to look at with regular 40-day meditation practices (<https://www.spiritvoyage.com/meditation-home.aspx>). Even if doing just a meditation at home, remember to tune in and out.

## TUNING OUT

At the end of a class we ‘tune out’, closing the space by chanting ‘The Long Time Sun’ and long ‘Sat Nam’s which are blessings for ourselves and others.

It starts as the same process as tuning in – we sit in easy pose with palms together, thumbs at our heart centre, touching the sternum. We lift the sternum up, bring the chin in. Inhale, expand the belly. Exhale, bring the belly in. Inhale deeply. Exhale fully.

‘May the long time sun shine upon you. All love surround you. And the pure light within you, guide your way on’ (Sing two times) This is a blessing.

Then finish with three long Sat Nams: ‘SAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAT NAMM’ Meaning – truth identified I am truth.