

KUNDALINI YOGA & MEDITATION – TECHNOLOGY FOR THE TIMES

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ABSTRACT: As we move into the 21st century, we find ourselves in an age of information overload, widespread and constant stress, lack of time, and increased social and personal demands. Human activity is directly and negatively impacting the web of life on a global scale, and yet our consciousness as a species is still limited and self-centered. How can we move beyond our limited ego-self, building spiritual capacity? How do we maintain mental, emotional and physical flexibility and stamina and integrate the spiritual aspect of our life with the material and technological? How do we understand deeply the interconnectedness of all things, and act consciously and courageously from that deep understanding? Kundalini Yoga & Meditation as taught by Yogi Bhajan provides a framework for an internal paradigm shift --- from “me” to “we”; from intellectual knowledge to a new relationship to intuition, emotion and instinct; from confusion to clarity; from isolation

to connection; from fear and insecurity to conscious, courageous action. This paper introduces critical elements of Kundalini Yoga practice – Pranayam, Kriya, Meditation & Mantra – and explains how this embodied spiritual practice develops awareness, consciousness, and the courage to act from the heart as “spiritual warriors” in this time of unprecedented planetary chaos.

Keywords: Yoga. Meditation. Mantra. Pranayam. Spirituality.

RESUMO: À medida que entramos no século 21, deparamo-nos com uma era de saturação de informação, de stress generalizado e contínuo, de falta de tempo e de crescentes exigências sociais e pessoais. A atividade humana tem um impacto direto e negativo na teia da vida à escala global e, no entanto, a nossa consciência enquanto espécie é ainda limitada e egocêntrica. Como podemos ir além do nosso eu-ego limitado e desenvolver capacidade espiritual? Como conservar flexibilidade e resistência mentais, emocionais e físicas, e integrar o aspecto espiritual da nossa vida com o material e o tecnológico? Como compreender profundamente a interligação de todas as coisas e agir consciente e corajosamente a partir dessa profunda compreensão?

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A Yoga e a Meditação Kundalini, ensinadas pelo Yogue Bhajan, proporcionam um enquadramento para uma mudança interna de paradigma – do “eu” para o “nós”; do conhecimento intelectual para uma nova relação com a intuição, a emoção e o instinto; da confusão para a clareza; do isolamento para a união; do medo e da insegurança para a ação consciente e corajosa. Este documento apresenta elementos fundamentais da prática de Yoga Kundalini – Pranayama, Kriya, Meditação e Mantra – e explica como esta prática espiritual incorporada desenvolve a sensibilização, a consciência e a coragem, para agir a partir do coração, enquanto “guerreiros espirituais”, neste tempo de caos planetário sem precedentes.

Palavras-chave: Yoga. Meditação. Mantra. Pranayama. Espiritualidade.

RÉSUMÉ: Alors que nous entrons dans le 21ème siècle, nous nous trouvons confronter à une époque de surabondance d'informations, de stress constant et généralisé, de manque de temps, et de demandes personnelles et sociales accrues. L'activité humaine influence directement et négativement la toile de la vie à l'échelle mondiale, et pourtant notre conscience comme espèce est encore limitée et égocentrique. Comment pouvons-nous aller au-delà de notre capacité de développement spirituel à égo limité ? Comment pouvons-nous maintenir la flexibilité et la vigueur mentale, émotionnelle et physique et intégrer l'aspect spirituel de notre vie avec le matériel et le technologique ? Comment pouvons-nous comprendre en profondeur l'interdépendance de toutes choses, et agir consciemment et courageusement à partir de cette compréhension profonde ? Le Yoga Kundalini et la méditation enseignés par Yogi Bhajan fournit un cadre pour un changement de paradigme interne --- du «moi» au «nous»; de la connaissance intellectuelle à une nouvelle relation à l'intuition, l'émotion et l'instinct; de la confusion à la clarté; de l'isolement à la connexion; de la peur et de l'insécurité à l'action courageuse consciente. Ce document présente les éléments essentiels de la pratique du Kundalini yoga – la respiration (pranayam), la série d'exercices (Kriya), la méditation et le mantra - et explique comment cette pratique spirituelle incarnée développe la conscience, la sensibilisation, et le courage d'agir avec cœur comme des «guerriers spirituels » en cette période de chaos planétaire sans précédent.

Mots des clés: Yoga. Méditation. Mantra. Pranayam (respiration). Spiritualité.

8:00a.m., October 4, 2011. As I tidy up the dusty wooden stage of the theater and clear the remnants of chocolate cake and empty champagne bottles from the adjoining green room, participants begin to arrive and spread their mats – stretching, yawning, chatting. Soon, the entire stage and the floor between the front row of seats and edge of the stage are filled with mats and bodies. On this 2nd day of the *Across The Threshold: Creativity, Being & Healing* conference at the Federal University in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, we come together – not as South Americans, North Americans, Europeans -- but as spiritual beings in this human incarnation. Our common language is the language of embodied spirit, which manifests through the *prana* that circulates through each of us as we chant the *mantra Ong Namo, Guru Dev Namo*, consciously breathe together, move together through our *kriya*, focus our minds in meditation, sink into deep relaxation. Through this group practice of Kundalini Yoga & Meditation, we move beyond perceived barriers, awakening our awareness of the Oneness that pervades all.

This Oneness we experience through embodied practices that humans have discovered/ developed over centuries and through different cultural traditions is the overarching theme of *Across The Threshold* gatherings. The four gatherings that have taken place over the last four years in Durham, North Carolina, USA, and Salvador, Bahia, Brazil have been bridge-building events – bringing together artists, scientists, mystics, academicians, medical practitioners, traditional healers, religious practitioners – for the purpose of healing on individual, community, and planetary levels. In this article, I will introduce the fundamental elements of Kundalini Yoga & Meditation as taught by Yogi Bhajan, and discuss how this embodied spiritual practice develops awareness, consciousness, and the courage to act from the heart as “spiritual warriors” in this time of unprecedented planetary chaos. The combined elements of Kundalini Yoga discussed in this paper work simultaneously to balance and strengthen all the systems of the physical body, focus and discipline the mind, and connect the practitioner with her/his spirit. In a world that demands more and more in less and less time, it is a challenge to hold to our center, keep



up with our daily responsibilities, and enjoy life along the way. Kundalini Yoga is a comprehensive technology that was developed for “householders”, or people who maintain active lives in the world, rather than “renunciates” – those who withdraw from normal worldly activities. As such, it works quickly and effectively with even a brief amount of time devoted to a regular and earnest practice. It gives us the stamina and grit to keep up with our lives and to stand up for the rights and welfare of ourselves and others.

“In yoga a person has to be humble, have the power to merge, and to be spiritually, mentally, and physically committed for exalted experiences.” (Bhajan, 2003/2007, p. iii)

Yogi Bhajan – Master of Kundalini Yoga

Harbhajan Singh Puri, more commonly and affectionately known as Yogi Bhajan, was born in 1929 in the district of Gujranwala in what is now Pakistan, but at that time was still a part of India. (Khalsa, 1979, p. 18). He was declared a Kundalini Yoga master at the age of 16 ½ by his teacher, Sant Hazara Singh. When he arrived in the United States in December of 1968, Yogi Bhajan stated his mission quite clearly. He said, “I have come to create teachers, not to gather disciples.” He was not a philosopher or a preacher. He was a transmitter of the same mastery that he achieved (Khalsa, Ed., 2002, p. 69).

In 1969 when Yogi Bhajan taught his first class in Kundalini Yoga in the United States, hardly anyone had accurate information about this ancient, sacred, and up until then, secret, science. Its technology for transformation and empowering of the individual human being had been given only to those students who could prove their devotion, dedication, self-discipline, humility, and obedience to the Teacher. Despite scriptural warnings that whoever taught Kundalini Yoga publicly would not live to see his next birthday, Yogi Bhajan flaunted tradition and began teaching the practice openly to all who were willing to learn

(Bhajan, 2003/2007, p. v)

Planetary Shifts – The Challenges of These Times

Yogi Bhajan felt compelled to “go public” with these practices because of the planetary shifts that are now taking place. Astrologists and yogis characterize this as the shift from the Piscean Age to the Aquarian Age. According to Yogi Bhajan, the Piscean Age was dominated by machines and hierarchies. Knowledge about human potential was guarded by secrecy, and people could hide and get away with corrupt behaviors – embezzlement, destruction of the environment, oppressive regimes. In the last 3,000 years of the Piscean Age, gender relationships have been dominated by exploitation of women and men whose fearful and insecure behavior led to the creation of more and more weapons of destruction. But the most destructive trend of the last century, Bhajan states, “is that man started finding God outside himself. Man forgot that God is the working God, *Karta Purbk*, which, Nanak said, works and breathes in us. It’s part of us; It’s not separate. We were blind to God’s presence everywhere” (Bhajan, 2003/2007, p. 7). When we see God as being separate from ourselves, it becomes easy to view the world from a dualist “us against them” perspective, leading to justification of discriminatory practices, massive incarceration, suspension of social programs, unadulterated greed, torture, war. And while it is easy to condemn those of our leaders who profess a belief in God while sanctioning/engaging in the above-listed actions, if we sit passively and do nothing, we are unwitting partners in the continuation of this dualist “power-over” paradigm.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama expresses a similar concern:

We live at a time when human actions have developed a creative and destructive power that has become global in scope. And yet we fail to cultivate a corresponding sense of responsibility. Most of us are concerned only about people and property that are directly related to us. We naturally try to protect our family and friends from danger. Similarly, most people will struggle to defend their homes and land against destruction, whether the threat comes from enemies or natural disasters such as fire or



flooding . . . We take the existence of clean air and water, the continued growth of crops and availability of raw materials, for granted. We know that these resources are finite, but because we only think of our own demands, we behave as if they are not. Our limited and self-centered attitudes fulfill neither the needs of the time, nor the potential of which we are capable (Macy & Brown, 1998/2011, p. xv).

The un-consciousness that the Dalai Lama refers to above – our “limited and self-centered attitudes” and a lack of a sense of global responsibility – can be partially attributed to the structures of power that have developed during the Piscean Age. Director, writer, actress, activist and teacher Lib Spry (1994) writes, “While most of us can and do exercise some choice in our lives, we are all part of power relationships that allow dominating and exploitative structures to maintain the status quo. Often people are so alienated from their reality that they are unable or unwilling to recognize what power they have or where they stand in the hierarchy” (p. 173). Spry (1994) continues her examination of this concept of “power-over” by quoting from the book *Dreaming the Dark* by Starhawk (1988), the California-based feminist, political theorist, peace activist, psychologist, and witch:

For though we are told . . . that rape is an issue separate from nuclear war, that a woman’s struggle for equal pay is not related to a black teenager’s struggle to find a job or to the struggle to prevent the export of a nuclear reactor to a site on a web of earthquake faults near active volcanoes in the Philippines, all these realities are shaped by the consciousness that shapes our power relationships. Those relationships in turn shape our economic and social systems; our technology; our science; our religions; our views of women and men; our views of races and cultures that differ from our own; our sexuality; our Gods and our wars. They are presently shaping the destruction of the world. I call this consciousness “estrangement” because its essence is that we do not see ourselves as part of the world. We are strangers to nature, to other human beings, to parts of ourselves. We see the world as made up of separate, isolated nonliving parts that have no inherent value . . . [This] allows

the formation of power relationships in which human beings are exploited. Inherent value, humanness, is reserved for certain classes, races, for the male-sex; their power-over others is thus legitimized. (pp. 4-6)

“The Age of Aquarius is coming our way. Emptiness, insanity, and pain shall be everybody’s affair. They shall come to you. As insane as they are, if you do not take away their pain, and instead you sit in judgment, you are wrong people.” (Bhajan, 1998, p. 3). One of Yogi Bhajan’s oft-repeated aphorisms is “*It’s not the life you live, but the courage that you bring to it*”. He recognized the power that fear and insecurity have to paralyze us – sending us into states of denial, depression, alienation. In this age of information overload, widespread and constant stress, lack of time, increased social and personal demands, how do we maintain our spiritual center? How do we maintain mental, emotional and physical flexibility and stamina? How can we seamlessly integrate the spiritual aspect of our life with the material and technological?

And, most critically, how do we understand deeply the interconnectedness of all things, and act consciously and courageously from that deep understanding? The Dalai Lama warns us, “In our present state of affairs, the very survival of humankind depends on people developing concern for the whole of humanity, not just their own community or nation. The reality of our situation impels us to act and think more clearly. Narrow-mindedness and self-centered thinking may have served us well in the past, but today will only lead to disaster.” (Macy & Brown, 1998/2011, p. xvi)

Kundalini Yoga is an antidote to the “estrangement” consciousness that has shaped our power relationships, limited our thinking and creativity, put us at odds with our fellow humans and the very air we breathe, water we drink, and the earth on which we depend for our existence. The word *yoga* comes from the Sanskrit *jugit*, which means “to join together,” or “to unite.” Yoga is the union of our individual consciousness with the Infinite Consciousness, and a yogi is a person who surrenders and merges the unit self with the Supreme Self (Bhajan, 2007, p. 14). Through the practices that will be described below, a Kundalini



yogi acquires wisdom that comes from the experience of the interconnectedness of all life. The depth of this experience is a true knowing – *gian* – which opens us to a consciousness of unity and gives us the power and discipline to act from that truth. Yogi Bhajan (2007) states, “Just because you know about or believe something is true, does not mean you can act on it. But if you discover a truth and act on the path of that truth, and if you can find bliss, success, and fulfillment in yourself as a result, then no power on Earth can make you veer from that truth or do wrong” (p. 14).

The work of activist, teacher and author Joanna Macy parallels and compliments Yogi Bhajan’s teachings in both philosophy and praxis. In the Preface to *Coming Back to Life* by Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown (1998/2011), Macy and Brown write, “With wars igniting around the globe, the forests falling, the hungry and homeless on our streets, the poisons in our food, water, air, and breast milk, and the extinction of whole species and cultures, it grows harder to take hope in our common journey. We are tempted to shut down, narrowing our sites to our own and our family’s short-term survival. In the face of all the bad news, the challenge of creating a sustainable civilization can seem absurdly unrealistic” (p. 6). Yet Macy goes on to state, “it is germinating now, that sustainable society on which the future depends” (p. 6). What Yogi Bhajan characterized as “the transition to the Aquarian Age”, Macy calls the “Great Turning”. Macy’s defines the age that we are moving from as “a self-destructive industrial growth society” – Bhajan’s and astrologer’s Piscean Age. Synchronistic with the concept of the Aquarian Age, Macy defines the epochal shift that is now in process as movement towards “a life-sustaining society” (p. 6). Bhajan, Macy & Brown, the Dalai Lama, Spry and Starhawk all concur that a shift in consciousness that must take place to make a life-sustaining society a reality. Yogi Bhajan felt compelled to openly teach Kundalini Yoga & Meditation at this particular time in history because it is a powerful, concise technology for transforming consciousness.

Moving into the Aquarian Age – Creating a Life-Sustaining Society

Macy & Brown (1998) see the Great Turning as “happening simultaneously in three areas or dimensions that are mutually reinforcing. These are: 1) actions to slow the damage to Earth and its beings; 2) analysis of structural causes and creation of structural alternatives; and 3) a fundamental shift in worldview and values” (p. 17). According to Macy, the last area – the shift in worldview and values – is the foundation for the actions, analysis and creation occurring in the first two areas. This shift flows from a confluence of our collective awareness and anguish, scientific breakthroughs provided by quantum theory, astrophysics and general living systems theory, and ancestral teachings. (p. 21)

The transformative ancestral teachings of Kundalini Yoga & Meditation as taught by Yogi Bhajan provide the framework for the necessary internal paradigm shift that in turn shifts our worldview and values --- from “me” to “we”; from intellectual knowledge to a new relationship to intuition, emotion and instinct; from confusion to clarity; from isolation to connection; from fear and insecurity to conscious, courageous action. Through specific movements, postures, breath work, hand positions, optical focus, sounds, mental focus and relaxation, this ancient practice helps to bring all the systems of the body into balance and alters the frequency of the mind and the state of the brain.

Starhawk (1987) remarks that we have been so shaped by the power-over paradigm “that the insides of our minds resemble the battle field and the jail” (p. 9). This individual anguish of the mind is the collective anguish that Macy refers to, and it is through the transformation of individual consciousness that we change the collective consciousness. Imagine for a moment that in every school across the globe, students, teachers, and administrators begin each day with a practice of long, deep breathing. As the children close their eyes and focus on their breath, the teacher reminds them that there are children all over the world breathing this same air – that this air is in fact breathing life into all creatures on the planet. As the

children experience their breath, they experience their connection with all living creatures, and the importance of having clean, fresh air to breathe. As this practice is reinforced each day, the children move from individual consciousness to a collective consciousness that is the foundation for action that serves a life-sustaining society.

Fundamental Elements of Kundalini Yoga & Meditation practice as taught by Yogi Bhajan

Kundalini Yoga encompasses an entire philosophy and a life-sustaining way of being in the world. Kundalini Yoga is a *Raj* (royal) path that incorporates ethical precepts called *yamas and niyamas*, *asanas* (postures), *pranayam* (breathing techniques), *pratyahar* (controlling the thought waves in the mind), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation), and ultimately *Samadhi* (liberation, or complete absorption in Spirit) (Khalsa, 1996, p. 176). The practices of **Pranayam**, **Kriya** (which includes asana), **Meditation and Mantra** (which include *pratyahar*, *dharana and dhyana*) are all essential to Kundalini Yoga. *Kundalini*, literally translated as “the curl of the lock of hair of the beloved”, is our creative potential – the flow of energy and consciousness which exists within each one of us (p. 48). In the West, the concept of kundalini has not always been understood, resulting in Kundalini Yoga sometimes being called “dangerous.” When asked about this, Yogi Bhajan explained:

It is just an energy. Kundalini is a latent energy that can be used for total consciousness. The only dangerous thing is the person whose kundalini is raised properly. That person is totally conscious. He cannot be lied to or cheated or politically swayed. The kundalini is essential. As long as you practice a total discipline or a complete and balanced kriya, there is no difficulty. In Kundalini Yoga, you will notice that every meditation and kriya has some form of mantra in it. This ensures the channelization of the energy (White, Ed., 1990, p. 144).

In the context of this paper, two points are particularly important in the above quote. First – through the proper raising of the kundalini, the practitioner reaches a higher level of awareness/

consciousness. Attaining this level of awareness, s/he “cannot be lied to or cheated or politically swayed”. In other words, s/he is able to see rhetoric and actions of fear, greed and separation for what they are. Second – Bhajan refers to the importance of practicing a “total discipline”. The elements of the Kundalini practice described below work together in a very specific way to awaken the kundalini in a controlled and safe manner. Kundalini Yoga & Meditation, as taught by Yogi Bhajan, follows a specific framework and is a discrete set of techniques that are to be practiced without alteration.

Pranayam

When a baby is born, we eagerly listen for that first breath – the first inspiration. As the breath breathes us, we live, and with our last exhalation, we expire. Yogis claim that breath is not just the transporter of oxygen and carbon dioxide, but the carrier of *prana* – the subtle life force that rides on the breath. As the oxygen feeds our cells, so prana feeds our subtle life energy, and opens us to the realms of emotions, thoughts, intuition. According to Yogi Bhajan (2007) “*Pranayamis* the science of breath, controlling the movement of prana through the use of breathing techniques” (p. 91).

There are many pranayam techniques in Kundalini Yoga, and learning to breathe fully and completely without excess tension is one of the most important and fundamental elements of the practice. “Stress causes poor breathing – shallow, erratic, upper-chest breathing with a faster breath rate, which leads to chronic tension and weak nerves” (p. 91). Poor breathing then creates more stress, which puts us in a feedback loop that can lead to emotional imbalance, physical illness, and/or mental instability.

In the practice of long deep breathing, as we sit quietly with a lengthened spine, eyes closed and focused in between the eyebrows and slightly up at the “3rd eye point”, relaxed jaw and shoulders, we focus our concentration on listening to and feeling the inflow and the outflow of breath through the nose. As we inhale, we allow the belly to expand and the ribcage to expand in all directions, and let our lungs fill all the way to the top of the sternum.



On the exhale, we allow the air to drain out as the belly comes back to a resting place, and we focus on letting that last little bit of air out of the lungs.

This simple practice alone can produce profound benefits:

- Relaxes and calms, due to influence on parasympathetic nervous system
- Increases the flow of prana
- Reduces and prevents the build-up of toxins in the lungs by encouraging the clearing of the alveoli
- Stimulates endorphins
- Brings the brain to a new level of alertness
- Pumps the cerebrospinal fluid to the brain, giving greater energy
- Cleanses the blood
- Regulates the body's pH, which affects the ability to handle stressful situations
- Activates and clears the nerve channels
- Aids in speeding up emotional and physical healing (p. 92).

Pranayam functions as a mechanism to increase our physical health and control our mind and emotions. Each breath is a reminder that Something beyond ourselves breathes in us, and serves as a reaffirmation of the Divine presence in all (Khalsa, 1996, p. 20).

Kriya

“A kriya in yoga is a sequence of postures, breath and sound that are integrated together to allow the manifestation of a particular state” (Bhajan, 2007, p. 100). Kriya means action - not just random action, but action that is free of blocks, leading to a completion of the seed of the action. Over the course of Yogi Bhajan's 36-year teaching career, he taught hundreds of different sets of yoga exercises, or kriyas, each set with a specific sequence, and all claiming to have a unique therapeutic value (Shannonoff-Khalsa, 2006, p. 2). Some of the most common kriyas include “Basic Spinal Energizer Series”, “Kriya for Elevation”, “Magnetic Field & Heart Center”, “Pituitary Gland Series”, “Stress Set for Adrenals & Kidneys”.

Within a kriya, each *asana* (posture) serves as an exercise, a meditation, a connection to energy flow, and a tool for self-diagnosis (Bhajan, 2007, p. 100).

One of the signature asanas in Kundalini Yoga is *Sat Kriya*. *Sat Kriya* is one of the few exercises that is considered a complete kriya unto itself. The practice of *Sat Kriya* begins by sitting with a lengthened spine, ideally in *Rock Pose* – sitting on the shins, knees together, heels under the “sit bones” (ischialtuberosities). The arms are straight overhead, with the hands clasped, fingers interlaced, and index fingers together and pointing up. The eyes are closed and focused at the 3rd eye point (in between the eyebrows and slightly up). As the practitioner chants the word *Sat* (truth), she pulls the belly button in and up, like squeezing a sponge. As she chants the word *Nam* (name/identity), she releases the belly button. As a beginning practice, this is done for 3 minutes, followed by 6 minutes of rest. A more advanced yogi can build up to a practice of 31 minutes of *Sat Kriya*.

As an exercise, *Sat Kriya* stimulates the digestive system and strengthens the parasympathetic response. The meditative aspect of *Sat Kriya* occurs with the recitation and focus on the *mantra* “*Sat Nam*”, which is considered a *bijor* seed mantra that establishes a quality of neutrality in the body-mind. The connection to energy flow is perhaps the most profound effect of *Sat Kriya*. To understand this connection, one must first understand the yogic concept of *chakras*. In his book *Kundalini Yoga Meditation* (2006), Dr. David Shannanhoff-Khalsa states:

Agas ago, yogis devised a practical and systematic view of consciousness that involves eight discrete levels. Each level is related to what yogis call chakras, repositories or centers of psychic energy, and an individual's consciousness is then determined and affected by the amount of energy and activity in these eight centers. Each chakra or center is both symbolic for and instrumental in determining the mode of behavior, personality structure, and level of awareness. . . The intensity of activity in any one chakra imparts an effect that reflects a world perspective, understanding of cause and effect, and source of motivation and desire that is unique to each center. (p. 31)

The first 3 chakras, the “lower triangle”, relate to survival/security, reproduction/ creativity, and ego/will. Because the lower triangle forms the basis



for our basic survival in the world, Shannanhoff-Khalsa remarks that “much of society’s ills are the result of an imbalance in the first three chakras” (2006, p. 31). Sat Kriya works specifically on balancing the energies of the lower triangle through mixing of the *prana* and the *apana* at the navel center, generating a heat in the system which opens the *nadis*(channels for prana – comparable to meridians in the acupuncture system) to the upward flow of energy. A regular practice of Sat Kriya is said to help reduce phobias and transcend fears and emotional disarray, and channel creative energy (Bhajan, 2007, p. 113).

Through the practice of kriya, we put ourselves under specific short-term pressure (i.e., holding the arms up for a period of time, as in Sat Kriya) to build up our internal systems and mental and psychic strength so that we can withstand the pressures we face in our day-to-day lives.

Meditation

In the rich and vast body of work that is Yogi Bhajan’s legacy, perhaps the most important and fundamental to moving beyond limiting and self-centered attitudes into the experience of interconnectedness are his teachings on the mind. He challenged students to have “an intelligent confrontation with your own experience” (Bhajan, 1998, p. 3). Yogi Bhajan characterized the mind as an essential faculty that is faster than time and space. It can be the agent of our destruction, leading us into delusional, manipulative, unintentional behaviors, or, conversely, it can be so beneficial that we can create miracles (p. 3). One of his oft-quoted aphorisms is that the mind makes a wonderful servant, but a horrible master. He emphasized that mastering the use and command of the mind is the gateway to living peacefully, truthfully, and prosperously.

A Kundalini yogi works to master the mind by first understanding what the mind is and is not. In Western culture, we put a premium on intellectual activity. “S/he has a brilliant mind” is considered one of the highest compliments one could receive. Particularly in an academic setting, we begin to think that we ARE our minds. But when we operate from the mind alone, leaving behind the heart and soul, it becomes easy for the ends to justify the

means and for human beings to become pawns to dictators, government experiments and corporate manipulation. Naomi Klein’s (2007) *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* is a brilliant and heartbreaking chronicle of the intellectual origins of economic theories propounded by Milton Friedman and the University of Chicago Economics Department, the implementation of which have caused death and suffering around the globe. In a Kundalini Yoga practice, the mind is disciplined so that it can serve the heart and soul – not the individual ego.

To be a spiritual warrior, one must deal with and move beyond fear, denial, and other self-limiting patterns in the mind. The breath practice of pranayama slows down the mind and strengthens and opens the heart center, which is where we can physically hold fear. Kriya strengthens and balances the endocrine system and the nervous system so that we can slow down, relax and still the body for meditation. Other important elements of pranayama, kriya, and meditation practice are *drishti* (specific eye focus), *mudra*(specific positions or movements of the fingers and hands), and *bhandas* (“locks” or pressure applied in different parts of the body to move energy). Meditation is ideally practiced after one has performed a kriya and/or pranayama.

Through meditation, we learn to build and hold our awareness. We learn to observe the aspects of the mind: the negative mind (our protective mind that lets us know what could go wrong in a situation); the positive mind (our “cheerleader” mind, which sees opportunity); the neutral mind (the mind that yogis work to cultivate, which can take information from the other two aspects of the mind and make decisions that align with the Soul). Paradoxically, we use the mind to move beyond self-limiting patterns of the mind. Yogi Bhajan (1998) taught:

This is the key to training the mind. Use the mind to project to and stay at a point beyond the mind’s own nature. When your mind stays with the self-illuminated soul within you, then all pains and suffering disappear and your presence radiates and works. If you try to train your mind by confronting your ego and desires, it



only causes pain. Train the mind by directing it to confront your unlimited soul. The mind will be elevated, and you will be elevated. That consistent projection and training is called a permanent state of bliss. . . It only takes one clear mind that acts beyond its intrigues to seed the world with truth (pp. 56-57).

The mind determines our attitudes, emotions and actions. Yogi Bhajan taught that we have 1,000 thoughts in the wink of an eye – the mind is constantly in motion, and functions on contrast, automatically categorizing input. Another interesting point he stressed about the mind is that it is just as material as the body, only subtler. Just as water exists in degrees of subtlety (ice, liquid, vapor), you can think of the mind as vapor, feelings as liquid, and neurons and connections as ice. He describes the mind as simultaneously a structure, a process and an energy that we can observe and change. We can affect the mind with gross things like food, powerful things like breath, and subtle things like thought. (Bhajan, 2007, p. 121) But meditation is our most effective tool to discipline and control the mind, allowing the mind to act as a servant to the Soul. When the Soul is in charge, we live to serve Spirit.

Mantra

We live in an ocean of vibration. All matter vibrates at certain frequencies. The sacred science of *mantra* uses special sounds that tune us to the frequency of the Infinite. Georg Feuerstein explains the etymology of the word *mantra* in *The Yoga Tradition* (1998):

There is no adequate English equivalent for the work *mantra*. It is derived from the root *man* (“to think” or “be intent”), which also is found in the terms *manman* (“to ponder intently”), *manas* (“mind”), *manisha* (“understanding”), *manu* (“wise” or “man”), *mana* (“zeal”), *manyu* (“mood” or “mind”), *mantu* (“ruler”), and *manus* (“human being”). The suffix *tra* in *mantra* suggests instrumentality. However, according to an esoteric explanation it stands for the word *trana*, meaning “saving.” Thus, a *mantra* is that which saves the mind from itself, or which leads

to salvation through the concentration of the mind (p. 67).

The power of mantra is explained in both physical and metaphysical terms, as it operates simultaneously on both levels. As musician and yoga teacher Mata Mandir Singh explains in “Aquarian Times” (August/September 2008):

In yogic terminology there are two kinds of sounds in the Universe, *Abadand Anabadsounds*. *Abadsounds* are sounds created by something striking something else. If I pluck the “A” string of my guitar, it will vibrate 440 times per second, creating a vibration in the surrounding air that transfers that exact vibratory rate into the surrounding environment. That is an *Abadsound*. The wind blowing through the trees, the breath striking the vocal chords and mouth – these are *Abadsounds*. *Abadsound* vibration must travel through matter, because these sound vibrations are transmitted through the movement of molecular structures. *Anabadliterally* means the un-struck melody. In yogic cosmology and science it is said that the Universe is made of sound. . . Beyond all physical phenomena and matter is the primal creative sound vibration that began the creation. In Christianity it is called *The Word*. Sikhs call it the *Naad*. It is what scientists call “*Cosmic radiation*” – the constantly creative sound left over from the Big Bang. Yogis call it *Anabat*. Whatever one calls it, it is constantly vibrating, creating, and expanding the Universe --- infinitely, endlessly (p. 4).

Kundalini Yoga & Meditation utilizes some mantras in English (“God and me, me and God, are One”, “I am, I Am”), but most mantras used in the practice are from the *Shabd Guru* contained in the *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*. Yogi Bhajan taught that these particular sounds come from one common source and are therefore part of a universal code behind language and human communication. When the sounds are chanted with proper pronunciation, the correct rhythm and intention, the movement of the tongue in the mouth stimulates meridian points which causes chemical changes in the brain. We can alter our consciousness by changing the chemical composition of the brain fluids (Bhajan, 2007, p. 66-67).



When chanting mantra, we can think of ourselves as a Cosmic stringed instrument. The vagus nerve acts as the “central tuning string”, which activates the central channel or *sushmunain* the spine. This activates the vibration of the two supporting energy channels – called *ida* and *pingala*, which reverberate through the whole system. When we begin chanting, we are creating *abadsounds*. As we continue, surrendering our concentration to the sound current and the pulse of the correct rhythm, our central nervous system begins to vibrate the sound. The sound at this point becomes *anabad*(unstruck) – we can listen as our nervous system vibrates the mantra without our conscious effort, and the mantra is attuned to the frequency of the Infinite. At this point, our entire being is vibrating in concert with a pattern beyond anything we could create from our finite self/ego (p. 68). The mantra has acted as a key that, when used properly with the correct pronunciation, rhythm and projection, opens one to the direct experience of the vastness of Being, bringing intuition, an unlimited source of inner strength, joy, and relaxation. It is not surprising that sound current plays a crucial role in all religious traditions and most social movements. It is hard to imagine the Civil Rights Movement in the United States without the spirituals that were sung at every gathering, during marches and demonstrations, and in the jail cells.

Conclusion

“The time has come not to search for God, but to be God” (Bhajan, 2007, p. 8).

In this time of the “Great Turning”, or the “shift from the Piscean to the Aquarian Age”, enormous, radical and swift internal and external change is occurring. Many people are suffering from an inability to handle a constant overload of information and the increased demands on their time from many different directions, and institutions and ways of being that have served as the dominant paradigms are falling away. At this point in our evolution, we don’t need more information – we need a more subtle and refined wisdom that comes through direct experience.

Feuerstein (1998) offers:

The Indian liberation teachings – the great Yogas of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism – clearly represent an invaluable resource for contemporary humankind. We have barely scratched the surface of what they have to offer us. It is obvious, however, that in order to find our way out of the tunnel of materialistic scientism, we require more than knowledge, information, statistics, mathematical formulas, sociopolitical programs, or technological solutions. We are in need of wisdom. And what better way is there to rejuvenate our hearts and restore the wholeness of our being than on the wisdom of the East, especially the great lucid insights and realizations of the Indian seers, sages, mystics, and holy folk? (p. xxx)

The disciplined practice of Kundalini Yoga & Meditation gives us tools to create and maintain healthy, strong, disease-resistant bodies and meditative, resilient minds so that we can handle increased stressors, multi-task, and make decisions quickly and effectively. Through meditation, we develop intuition and an expansive sense of self – one that acknowledges our interconnectedness with entire web of life. Through group practice, we develop a group consciousness that helps us work together collectively. The practice of Kundalini Yoga & Meditation does not promote self-improvement, but gifts us with the wisdom of self-acceptance – reminding us that our True Identity is Spirit. Living from a place of Truth gives us increased capacity to make conscious choices in our words and actions that uplift ourselves and others, communicating intuitively, consciously, gracefully, and fearlessly. As we experience Spirit within ourselves, we create capacity to see Spirit in all, and stand as spiritual warriors in the Aquarian Age.

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4 A kriya in yoga is a sequence of postures, breath and sound that are integrated together to allow the manifestation of a particular state (Bhajan, 2007, p. 100).

5 Karta Purkh, from *Gurbani* (the language of the Gurus of the Sikh faith), translates as “the Doer of Everything”, and is from *Japji Sahib*, one of the daily recitations of devout Sikhs. *Japji Sahib* is the opening of the *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*, which is the principal Sikh scripture. Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan incorporates mantras from the sound current of the *Siri Guru Granth Sahib*. Yogi Bhajan described this sound current as the *Shabd Guru* – special sounds that act as a teacher to cut away the ego and merge with Truth.

6 Guru Nanak (1469-1539) was the first of ten Sikh Gurus in physical form. Guru Nanak’s teachings shaped the ethics and principles of the Sikh faith.

7 In Kundalini Yoga & Meditation as taught by Yogi Bhajan, “God” is used as an acronym for the Generating, Organizing, and Destroying/Delivering force in the universe. Therefore, the term is universal and not specific to or dismissive of any particular religion, spiritual path, or absence thereof.

8 See footnote #5.

9 See footnote #5.

FOOTNOTES

1 *Prana* refers to the sub-atomic life-force energy that rides on the breath.

2 *Mantra* is the creative projection of the mind through sound (Bhajan, 2007, p. 66).

3 *Ong Namō, Guru Dev Namō* is the “tune-in” mantra that is used to begin every Kundalini Yoga & Meditation class as taught by Yogi Bhajan. *Ong* means the Creation as manifest in the physical realm, *Namō* means “to bow”, *Guru* is that which brings us from darkness to light, and *Dev* means transparent/non-physical (Khalsa, 1996, p. 205).

