

The Concept of Kriya in Kundalini Yoga

▶ The word *kriya* means action. But *kriya* is not just any reflex or action; it is an action that leads to a complete manifestation; that lets a seed come to bloom, a thought come into actuality, a desire become a commitment.

▶ A *kriya* in yoga is a sequence of postures, breath, and sound that are integrated together to allow the manifestation of a particular state. When you do a kundalini *kriya*, the result of its repetition is the access to, and mastery of a particular, predictable, and stable state – a facet of your awareness.

▶ In Kundalini Yoga, *kriya shakti* is the power of the soul to manifest itself into each realm of experience: the realm of the mind through proper thought; the realm of the body through proper movement, shape, form; and the realm of action through the power of the will to manifest creativity to serve the Infinite.

You'll find the word *kriya* used frequently—Kriya Yoga, Kundalini *kriyas*, and *kriya shakti*. *Kriya* is also called *tattva shakti*, which is the ability of the great soul of the Universal Self to create new categories and levels of manifestation in mind, body, and the world.

When you learn to act with *kriya*, then action becomes aligned with the larger pattern of the Self. We get into *kriya* by the removal of the blocks, attachments, blindness, and ego that hold us back from acting when we ought to act.

To act with *kriya* is a state of spontaneous flow. It's free of all the blocks. You apply great effort just when great effort should be applied. You apply great relaxation just when great relaxation should be applied. There is a perfect match between the inner and outer, between the inner resources and the outer demands. There is no gap of doubt, no hesitation, no partial support of the action by only one area of your mind and not another. That sense of wholeness and appropriateness to the action creates a grace in your body, a central power in your thought, and a projective ability in your mind.

Mastering *kriya* brings with it a sense of grace, power, and the ability to complete things. You act both timelessly and timely. *Kriya* is not a random collection of actions. Just as you put together a transmission in a car, there's a number of gears that have to be in place, and they have to be there in a certain sequence. Then the power that's in the motor can be transferred to the wheels, and you can go where you need to. Just so, a *kriya* in yoga is a sequence of postures, breath, and sound that are integrated together to allow the manifestation of a particular state.

Asana (Posture) in Kundalini Yoga

Each *asana* or posture in a *kriya* is an exercise, a meditation, a connection to energy flow, and a self-diagnostic instrument for the Kundalini Yoga practitioner.

▶ *As an exercise*, the posture is used to isolate specific muscles, to pressurize specific points or areas that act as reflex triggers to enhance the functions of the glands and organs, and to re-direct, flush, or increase circulation.

▶ *As a meditation*, the posture creates a special link and foundation between the body and the mind. Each posture stimulates an area of the body as the meditation technique employed begins to release emotional masking and blocks. The frequency of the mind's thoughts and the emotional tone of the experience are intimately tied to the posture.

▶ *As a connection to energy flow*, the posture opens an energy pathway between meridian points. Even a baby in the womb moves and goes through 84 postures. If the baby skips one of those postures, that means that energy pathway isn't as developed, and they'll have to compensate later. That is why some postures are unexpectedly powerful and initiate great changes.

▶ *As a self-diagnostic tool*, particular postures may give you signals of pleasure or discomfort and pain that indicate conditions of the musculature, glands, or emotions.

Teach the Teachings As Given

An important aspect of the power of the legacy of Kundalini Yoga that we as teachers can convey to our students, is that each *kriya* is whole unto itself, a perfect jewel that acts to create a flow. They are perfectly designed sets meant to produce predictable and subtle impacts on the total Self. This is the mastery of the Master. Yogi Bhajan has emphasized the importance of keeping the teachings as given, with the exception of reducing the timing of postures.

Yogi Bhajan also specified that Kundalini Yoga teachers are not to mix Kundalini Yoga *kriyas* with any other kind of yoga.

Reflections on Asana & Kriya

Science is good, but it grinds very slowly. There are problems with scientific method because there is no trust in the human capacity to be extraordinary. In yoga, we say: "Become a real human being. Realize your full potential." The West and scientific statistics look at you in relation to the average. The West compares you to someone else; but yoga compares you to your own potential. It's a completely different relationship.

What about posture?

Everyone understands that a posture may build a specific muscle group. We begin to expand that. There may be reflexes—this hand may be connected to something else in the body. There may be interconnections throughout the body, connecting its most distant parts in unexpected ways.

Take a posture as a yogi

You'll go through stages as you adjust to the effects of the posture. At first, you may feel awkward. You may fall back on your Western habit of extroversion and look at everyone else instead of yourself. When you first take a posture, you take it very consciously. It's new. The first thing you do is take the unconscious, full of habits and patterns, and you put it into a specific, consciously established, fixed or rhythmic posture or *asana*. Awkwardness comes because you encounter the rigidity of your own ego and habits—consciously.

If you hold it, it starts to feel better. The *asana* starts to find a natural place in you. Your body adjusts, the shoulders relax, you relax the muscles you didn't need to use. You find a muscle that you didn't know you had. You place your mind in the right way. Suddenly there's a relationship established between you and you. Suddenly, that which is conscious starts to feel natural, starts to give form, shape, flows of energy, and patterning, to that which is unknown in you. There starts to be a bridge, a communication between the conscious and the unconscious, between your right-now intentional patterning and all the patterning you don't even know you had. You start to give all of that energy a new form.

So, first there is awkwardness, then the posture begins to be natural, and then you start creating form. If you hold the form long enough, the unconscious picks it up and says, "Oh, I can do that," and starts doing it. The unconscious does what it usually does: it starts replicating and repeating it, even without thinking about it. First you create the form, then you start transforming all the things you're not even aware of.

Entering what is called kriya

When that process connects the conscious and the unconscious, it forms a bridge of energy that re-aligns you between the body and the mind. Then you enter into *kriya*. *Kriya* is the spontaneous fulfillment of action through the engagement of *asana* that links the Infinite Self of you to this finite moment. It has to tear apart the old attachments, and reform you in the transformed relationship between this body and the world body, between this moment of your mind and your total mental potential. That is posture in the form of *kriya*, expressing the joy of your soul! It is different than the mechanical perspective we take in most Western thinking. It's a creative project, not a static body. Every posture is a dynamic, formative creation.

If you do this with your physical body, you are also establishing a posture of emotion and attitude. You are taking a stand. We say that in English. If you ask someone their attitude, don't they answer both verbally and show you a posture? Which do you believe? The words they say or the posture they take? You believe the posture more than the words. The body doesn't lie. The body records that shaping and displays the practiced truth of your own habits.

We go through another change when we take a posture. A posture makes you conscious of a body area. As you hold it, you become self-conscious. Then you become conscious of yourself, and if you really put yourself into it, you become a conscious self. And if you reach this awareness across many postures, you become a conscious consciousness.

The ultimate posture

These are the stages of refinement in relationship established by posture between you and your Infinite Self. With *asana* that leads to *kriya*, which is a spontaneous flow of life energy, you start by posturing with your ego. Then *asana* gives you a posture. Then *pratyahar* comes, when your mind substitutes a positive thought for a negative thought, and re-aligns you toward your goal. The mind commits. Once you have a committed position, then you start to have a projection. Projection is called *Akaal Moorat*, which literally means "timeless picture." You start to look like Infinity. You start becoming a picture of you beyond you. The final stage would be perfection, *Saibhung*—self-illuminated, when you are a resource unto yourself, communicating with your own Infinity—needing nothing. The ultimate posture is one of prosperity. The ultimate posture is not of you fulfilling your own requests. The ultimate posture is one asking for that which is yours.

That's what yoga posture is all about. It's very practical. There's no such thing as an abstract concept without a posture, *kriya*, or *sadhana* to give you the capacity to experience it.

Angles & Triangles

Kundalini yoga is a science of angles and triangles. Every angle created with the body has a corresponding energetic effect. For instance, lifting the legs 30 degrees affects the navel point. Lifting the arms 60 degrees affects the heart and lungs. From the yogic view, the body is a whole, energetic, vibrating, creative entity—seven chakras, three *gunas*, five *tattvas*, ten bodies—a huge complex of energies on many different levels. Certain actions encourage that energy flow, and gives you the strength you need to experience yourself and enjoy this world.

In Kundalini Yoga, we are aware of the balance of the geometry of the body and how it affects the flow of energy, motion, and emotion. There are 18 major muscle groups that get involved. You can sense the body's balance by exploring the many triangles between key points. For example, a triangle is formed between the Navel Point and the hips. If that's off even the slightest amount, it will create energy problems. You may find yourself unable to express yourself with enough energy.

By practicing a wide variety of Kundalini Yoga *kriyas*, you will balance the angles and triangles throughout the body and give a new vitality to your entire structure.

Experiencing the Triangles

Following is an example of a guided visualization that can be used to bring awareness to the triangles of the body. This can bring a sense of connection, flow, energy, and balance to the triangles.

- ▶ Experience the triangle from the tips of the big toes up to the Navel Point. Feel the feet on the ground steady, secure.
- ▶ Experience the triangle from each side of the pubic bone down to the tip of the sacrum, feeling it balanced equally on the two sides. If you like to visualize, see it bathed in a reddish-brown color, or just in pure white.
- ▶ Experience the central triangle made by balancing the two sides of the pelvis and moving into the navel.
- ▶ Meditate on the triangle from the Navel Point up to the nipples. Feel the balance equally on both sides of the triangle. If you like to visualize, imagine a spring green color, or imagine pure white.
- ▶ Meditate from the nipples up to the neck point of the collar bone. Feel the triangle equally on both sides. If you like to visualize, see a blue radiance in all that area, or pure white.
- ▶ Meditate on the triangle between the two outer corners of the eyebrows and the tip of the chin. Feel very light and airy.
- ▶ Meditate on the double triangle: the eyes to the tip of the nose, and the eyes and the Brow Point—a lower and upper triangle. Feel like you're flying in the sky, weightless. If you wish to visualize, see all the colors of the blue sky up into the Heavens. Feel at the crown of the head a huge projected light that goes to Infinity and connects to all the stars, all realms, all levels of being.

Warm-up Exercises

Yogi Bhajan never taught warm-up exercises himself when leading Kundalini Yoga *kriyas*, but acknowledges that in some instances warm-ups can be useful. Here are the options to choose from if you determine it is necessary to include a warm-up before teaching a Kundalini Yoga *kriya*:

- ▶ You may choose any short Kundalini Yoga *kriya*. Some examples of good Kundalini Yoga *kriyas* for warm-up purposes are listed at the end of the Sets chapter.
- ▶ Pranayam sequences are especially good for waking up the body and opening the lungs.
- ▶ Do a few repetitions of the short version of Sun Salutations (*Surya Namaskar*) included in this Manual. (Yogi Bhajan taught this in the 70s, so we include it in the Kundalini Yoga archives.)
- ▶ You may also lead Life Nerve Stretches, Spinal Flex and Cat-Cow, all of which can stand alone, and which can be used as a warm-up series.
- ▶ You can also recommend that students do their own stretching exercises before coming to class, or before the class begins.
- ▶ If leading warm-ups, identify when you begin the *kriya*. In this way, the students are clear about the sequence of the *kriya*, and understand that we maintain the integrity of sets as they were taught by Yogi Bhajan.

Basic Sitting Postures

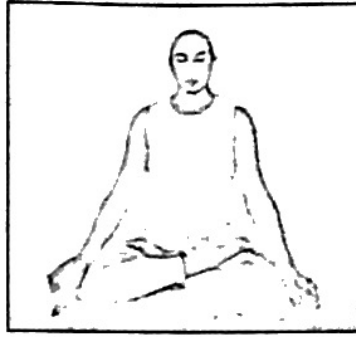
When an exercise in a kundalini kriya requires sitting in a meditative or cross-legged posture, any of the sitting positions listed here will be appropriate, if not specifically given by Yogi Bhajan. The main requirement is for the spine to be straight and the posture to be balanced, with Neck Lock applied. When sitting for meditation, it is important to feel balanced and stable. If one is leaning to one side or has great pain in the knees or ankles, one cannot meditate. If you do get into meditation in an off-balance posture, you run the risk of misdirecting the energy and blood circulation that the kriya has stimulated.

Remember that all parts of the body are interconnected and affect each other. Your posture should always feel well-balanced and comfortable to you. It should reflect harmony.

Choosing a Surface to Sit on

Choose the surface for meditation with consideration for the care of the spine and electromagnetic integration of the nervous system. The surface must be neither too cold, nor too hard. That is why most yoga practitioners sit on a sheepskin or mat. A thick pad or large pillow will not work well enough because neither offer enough support to stabilize the spine. A sheepskin is just the right thickness. It provides an electromagnetic insulation from the ground, to prevent feeling tired or drained of energy when meditating. The next best materials to sit on are wool, cotton, and silk. The worst surface to sit on is concrete or stone.

In any of these sitting postures, some people may be too stiff in the lower back, or have pain in the knees, legs, or ankles. Sitting on a stiff cushion that lifts the buttocks about 6 to 8 inches can help the back and take pressure off the knees.



Lotus Pose (Padmasana)

Bend the left leg so the left heel comes to the groin. Lift the left foot onto the upper right thigh. Bend the right leg so that the right foot goes over the left thigh, as close to the abdomen as possible. (*This posture may also be done reversing the legs.*) Straighten the spine. Lift the chest and press the lower spine slightly forward. In this position you will feel locked in place. Once you are in it you can meditate very deeply and the position will maintain itself. There are very few exercises or meditations which require this posture, but it is recognized as one of the best *asanas* for deep meditation.



Perfect Pose (Siddhasana)

This posture is excellent for stimulating the nervous system and utilizing the body's sexual energy. It requires practice to perfect, but once it is mastered, simply sitting in this posture puts you into meditation. Bring the left heel under the sex organ. The left heel should touch the spot on the pelvis between the sex organ and the rectum. Bend the right leg and put the toes of the right foot behind the left knee. The toes of the right foot are contained in the bend of the left knee. Only the big toe is exposed. Pull the spine straight.

Sitting in a Chair

If none of the basic sitting poses are comfortable, you may sit in a straight-backed chair that gives you firm support. It is essential that the feet be equally placed on the ground ensuring that the lower spine and hips do not get out of balance, and that the blood distribution in the pelvic area will be balanced with respect to the two sides of the body.

Easy Pose (Sukhasana)

The following three variations of Easy Pose require less flexibility and are easier on the knees than the Lotus Pose. The drawback is that you must be more conscious of keeping the lower spine slightly forward so the upper spine can stay straight.



Variation One
Half Lotus (Ardha Padmasana)

Put the left foot into the groin so that the sole of the foot is against the uppermost part of the thigh. Place the right foot over the left ankle, so that it rests on the right thigh, sole of the foot turned up as pictured.



Variation Two

Assume Sukhasana and lift the heel of the foot near the groin. Arrange the foot on top so it rests directly on the calf, with the ankle of the top foot about two inches up from the ankle of the bottom foot. In this pose, make sure to press the lower spine forward. It will have a tendency to slip backward.



Variation Three

If the first two postures are too strenuous, try this variation. Put one foot under the opposite knee and then draw the extended foot under the other knee. Pull the spine up straight and press the lower spine slightly forward.



Rock Pose (Vajrasana)

This asana is well known for its beneficial effects on the digestive system. It gained its nickname from the idea that one who masters it can "digest rocks." It also makes you solid and balanced as a rock. Start by kneeling on both knees with the top of the feet on the ground. Sit with the heels under the sitting bones. The heels

will press the two nerves that run into the lower center of each buttock. Keep the spine pulled straight.



Virasan (Hero or Warrior Pose)

Sit on the left heel, with the right knee up near the chest. Hands are in Prayer Pose. The heel is ideally on the perineum, near the anus. Instead of collapsing the foot, one may put padding under and over the left foot, to comfortably maintain the right position. If you sit with the flat part of the foot turned out and the spine crooked, you

tip to one side. Sitting on the heel straightens the spine.

Rock Pose or Easy Pose?

Question: Many students feel Rock Pose is more comfortable than Easy Pose during yoga class or meditation. Is it acceptable to use them interchangeably, especially if one has back problems?

Answer: For many Westerners who are not trained to squat or sit on the ground, it is uncomfortable to sit cross-legged in Easy Pose. It is in fact not "easy" at all. The central need is to have a straight spine, all locks applied appropriately, and an alert mind.

Sitting on the heels in Rock Pose, using a small bench, sitting on firm meditation pillows, or sitting straight in a stable, firm chair can be a close substitute for Easy Pose.

Full Lotus provides the best meditative advantage since it automatically locks the projection from the Navel Point, applies a light *mulbandh*, and balances the energy of the Earth and Ether through the upturned soles of the feet.

Easy Pose does not lock the Navel Point and sacral motion as tightly, so it requires a gently applied *mulbandh*. Rock Pose requires the *mulbandh* and an additional focus on the spine to keep it straight and aligned. It lessens the lock on the sexual area, so it needs a slightly more conscious application of the Root Lock. Rock Pose does have the benefit of stimulating the digestive functions from the pressures in the buttocks and quadriceps.