

# Kundalini Yogas FAQ

*Version 1.0, May 1996*

*Copyright Kurt Keutzer, 1996 (keutzer@eecs.berkeley.edu)*

The author grants the right to copy and distribute this file, provided it remains unmodified and original authorship and copyright is retained. The author retains both the right and intention to modify and extend this document.

This FAQ gives an overview of those kundalini yoga practices which require conscious effort. The Kundalini FAQ:

## [Kundalini FAQ](#)

is introductory material that is good to read before reading this FAQ.

Two other articles are strongly related:

## [Siddha Mahayoga FAQ](#)

## [The Siddha Mahayoga Tradition of Swami Shivom Tirth](#)

---

**I remember with gratitude those yogis who have with great skill and perserverance maintained the tradition of awakening and guiding our kundalini energy.**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS:**

What is kundalini?

What does kundalini have to do with spiritual enlightenment?

So how do I awaken kundalini?

How is kundalini awakened through mantra yoga?

How is kundalini awakened through hatha, laya and kriya yogas?

What are the techniques to unite *prana* and *apana*?

What are the techniques to unite *rajas* and *retas*?

Are those really the only techniques to awaken kundalini?

Are these forceful methods of awakening kundalini dangerous?  
What about Gopi Krishna's books?

But even if kundalini is dangerous, isn't it a faster way to enlightenment?

What are the origins of kundalini yoga?

What is the classical literature of kundalini yoga?

What is the precise role of the guru in kundalini yoga? Can't I learn it through books?

Where can I gain instruction on kundalini yoga?

Where can I learn more?

---

# What is kundalini?

“Kundalini” literally means coiling, like a snake. In the classical literature of hatha yoga kundalini is described as a coiled serpent at the base of the spine. The image of coiling, like a spring, conveys the sense of untapped potential energy. Perhaps more meaningfully kundalini can be described as a great reservoir of creative energy at the base of the spine. It's not useful to sit with our consciousness fixed in our head and think of kundalini as a foreign force running up and down our spine. Unfortunately the serpent image may serve to accentuate this alien nature of the image. It's more useful to think of kundalini energy as the very foundation of our consciousness so when kundalini moves through the sushumna and through our cakras our consciousness necessarily changes with it.

The concept of kundalini can also be examined from a strictly psychological perspective. From this perspective kundalini can be thought of as a rich source of psychic or libidinous energy in our unconscious.

In the classical literature of Kashmir Shaivism kundalini is described in three different manifestations. The first of these is as the universal energy or *para-kundalini*. The second of these is as the energizing function of the body-mind complex or *prana-kundalini*. The third of these is as consciousness or *shakti-kundalini* which simultaneously subsumes and intermediates between these two. Ultimately these three forms are the same but understanding these three different forms will help to understand the different manifestations of kundalini.

[Return to table of contents](#)

# What does kundalini have to do with spiritual enlightenment?

First we need a few concepts: In yogic anatomy the sushumna is the central channel and conduit for the kundalini energy that runs along our spine and up to the crown of our head. Along this channel are placed additional channel networks called cakras. These cakras are associated with major aspects of our anatomy - for example our throat, heart, solar plexus, and in turn these aspects of our anatomy are related to aspects of our human nature. According to the literature of kundalini yoga our experience of these centers is limited due to knots which restrict the flow of energy into these centers. Three knots are particularly important. The knot of *Brahma* which restricts the center at the base of the spine. The knot of *Vishnu* which restricts the heart center and the knot of *Rudra* which restricts the center between the eyebrows. These knots form an important framework in yogic thinking and the stages toward enlightenment are articulated in terms of breaking through these knots in the yogic classic the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* as well as in some of the yoga upanishads. Specifically, four stages of progress are described: *arambha*, *ghata*, *parichaya* and *nishpatti*.

*Arambha* is associated with breaking the knot of *Brahma* and the awakening of kundalini. *Ghata* is associated with breaking the knot of *Vishnu* and with internal absorption. *Parichaya* the absorption deepens and in *nishpatti* the knot of *Rudra* is pierced and the kundalini may ascend to the center at the crown of the

head. In this state transcendence is integrated and, according to the yogic literature, the yogi has nothing more to attain.

Putting these elaborate physiological descriptions aside, the goal of kundalini yoga is the same as the goal of any legitimate spiritual practice: To be liberated from the limited bounds of the self-centered and alienated ego. In kundalini yoga this is associated with internal manifestations of the kundalini but the external manifestations should be similar to any other legitimate spiritual practice.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **So how do I awaken kundalini?**

Indirectly kundalini can be awakened by devotion, by selfless service, or by intellectual enquiry.

Broadly speaking there are two radically different direct approaches to awakening kundalini. One approach requires initiation by a guru and relies upon a technique called shaktipat, or "descent of shakti." It is variously called: Siddha Mahayoga, Kundalini Mahayoga or Sahaja Yoga (Spontaneous Yoga).

These approaches are treated in the [Siddha Mahayoga FAQ](#). The other approach uses intentional yogic techniques. The styles using intentional techniques include Mantra Yoga, Hatha Yoga, Laya Yoga or Kriya Yoga. These approaches are treated in this FAQ.

Fundamentally the approach of Siddha Mahayoga and the Kundalini Yogas are different. In Siddha Mahayoga the guru awakens the kundalini and after that the core of the practice is

the inactive and non-willful surrender to kundalini. In Kundalini Yogas the will is used to awaken the kundalini and to guide its progress. Clearly these are different approaches. Nevertheless, elements of the each approach occur in the practices of the other. Siddha Mahayogins may use asanas, pranayamas and other hatha yoga practices. On the other hand gurus in Kundalini Yoga may give infusions of shakti to their students to help them at particular points in their practice.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **What are the advantages and disadvantages of using effort, in kundalini yogas, as opposed to the grace of the guru, in siddha mahayoga, to awaken kundalini?**

Since every practitioner brings his own unique inclinations and obstacles to the practice of yoga it is very hard to generalize on this point. In terms of actually awakening kundalini gurus of Siddha Mahayoga claim that the kundalini is more easily and reliably awakened by the grace of the guru than by individual effort. In my limited experience I would agree with this assertion. While not every long-term student of either practice necessarily shows signs of kundalini awakening it is amazing how many people have had instant awakenings of kundalini through initiation from siddha gurus.

In terms of encountering difficulties along the path the siddha gurus would also claim that fewer problems due to kundalini awakening, such as mental imbalance, are encountered by students of Siddha Mahayoga. Here I think the results are mixed.

It seems to me that the guidance of the teacher in either Siddha Mahayoga or Kundalini Yoga is more a determining factor than which style of kundalini practice is employed.

Generally speaking each style of practice has its strengths and weakness. The strength of Siddha Mahayoga is the ease with which it awakens the kundalini. The weakness is that because the kundalini is so easily awakened by the guru students of Siddha Mahayoga often have completely undisciplined personal meditation practices. Time is spent instead to trying to recreate some of their initial experiences by following the guru around hoping for his or her grace. Some people spend 20 or more years in this manner without ever developing an inner core of practice or experience.

The strength of the family of Kundalini Yogas is that the progress is at least apparently more under the control of the student of the yoga. These students seem more likely to have disciplined personal practices and more of an understanding of how the practice relates to their own experience. Unfortunately for some students this leads to a fairly egotistical approach to their practice and ultimately the kundalini energy is used to bolster the ego rather than to merge the ego in bliss.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **How is kundalini awakened through mantra yoga?**

In mantra yoga the student is initiated by means of a mantra. If the kundalini is to be awakened by means of this yoga then it is essential that the guru gives consciousness or ``chaitanya" to the

mantra. This consciousness can be viewed as the *cit-shakti-kundalini*. Through repetition of the mantra the *cit-shakti-kundalini* of the mantra resonates with the *cit-shakti-kundalini* of the student and in this way the student's kundalini is awakened.

The reader may have noticed that there doesn't seem to be a great deal of effort applied in this approach. This is true and in many ways this approach is more akin to Siddha Mahayoga in which the guru can use sound or ``shabda" as the instrument of initiation.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **How is kundalini awakened through hatha, laya and kriya yogas?**

The practices of hatha, laya and kriya yoga employ literally hundreds of individual techniques to purify the channels and awaken kundalini. Despite this tremendous diversity of approaches to the awakening of kundalini there are only a few underlying models of how kundalini may be awakened with effort in these practices. The following description draws from the classical texts on kundalini yoga the Nath and Tantric Buddhist lineages as well as on contemporary instruction by American, Indian and Tibetan masters of kundalini yoga. For each model of the process of kundalini yoga a little additional yogic terminology will be required.

The description of kundalini given earlier suffices for general purposes; however, if one wishes to practice the kundalini yogas a more detailed description is necessary. In fact there are a number of highly related yogic concepts which must be



understood. Kundalini is often associated with a fierce hot energy. In the hatha yogic terminology of the Nath tradition this energy is known as *rajas* and also as *surya*. In the tantric Buddhist tradition this energy is known as red *bodhicitta* and also as *candali* in the Sanskrit language or as *gTummo* in Tibetan. The word *gTummo* literally means ``the fierce woman." The association between kundalini and a fiery energy runs so deep that this fiery energy is often considered to be synonymous with kundalini. Strictly speaking these two energies are separate; however, whenever the fiery *surya* energy is activated then kundalini stirs and often when kundalini stirs the fiery energy is also activated. So while these energies are not equivalent, from a practical standpoint the activation of one energy will most often result in the activation of the other.

The most universal description is that kundalini is awakened by the uniting of the ``winds" or ``energies" of *prana* and *apana*. *Prana* is the life-giving energy associated with inspiration. It is associated with feelings of expansion and its center is in the heart. *Apana* is the downward-voiding energy associated with defecation. It is associated with feelings of contraction and its center is in the anus. The uniting of these two very different forces creates a ``spark" which awakens the kundalini from its slumber.

Another description is that kundalini is awakened through the uniting of the energies of the two channels of *ida* and *pingala*. The *ida* and *pingala* are two side channels which run parallel to central channel, the *sushumna*, on its left and right sides respectively. The *ida* channel is associated with a cool energy that descends from the crown of the head. The *pingala* channel

is associated with a hot energy that ascends to the crown. From the yogic viewpoint ordinary waking consciousness our winds or energies run in these two side channels and as a result our minds are unsteady and prone to anger, greed and delusion. The kundalini yogin aims to cause the energies to move out of the *ida* and *pingala* and into the *sushumna*. When this occurs the knots which hold the kundalini energy in place are loosened and the kundalini is able to rise.

A similar description is that kundalini is awakened through the uniting of the two bindus of *rajas* and *retas*. First of all bindu, or literally ``drop", means a constituent of the subtle body. The bindu *rajas* is associated with the egg (or sometimes menstrual blood) of woman but it more fundamentally refers to a subtle constituent of both the male and female body. In some texts it says that this constituent resides at the navel. In other texts it says that it resides near the perineum. The Tantric Buddhists call this constituent ``red bodhicitta" or literally the ``red mind-of-enlightenment." Whatever it is called, this constituent is associated with a fiery red energy that rises. It is also associated with the sun. One may also find other associations such as the ``red lion" of alchemical traditions.

The complement to *rajas* is *retas* or shukra. The bindu *retas* is associated with the sperm of man but like *rajas* it more fundamentally refers to a constituent present in both men and women. Classical texts are in agreement that this resides in the subtle body at the crown of the head. The Tantric Buddhists call this constituent ``white bodhicitta" or literally the ``white mind-of-enlightenment." Whatever it is called this constituent is associated with a cooling white energy and is associated with the

cooling rays of the moon. One may also see associations with the ``white eagle" of alchemical traditions.

In summary, the fundamental approaches to awakening kundalini are through the uniting of the *prana* and *apana*, or through the uniting of the *rajas* and *retas*.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **What are the techniques to unite *prana* and *apana*?**

In the rich yogic literature extending over at least one thousand years two techniques for uniting *prana* and *apana* stand out. These are the *vase breath* and the *bandha traya* or three bandhas. These two will be briefly described below. A few things are important to note first. These descriptions are only detailed enough so that the techniques can be unambiguously identified. They are not instructions for practice. As will be discussed later there are inherent dangers in awakening the kundalini and there are also dangers in mis-practicing techniques which aim at awakening kundalini. Anyone who wishes to awaken kundalini should find a qualified teacher. The descriptions below are only to give the seeker a little orientation as to the nature of the path.

The vase breath (Sanskrit: *kumbhaka*, Tibetan: *rlung bumpa can*) is a technique in which the the *apana* wind is first drawn up from the perineum region to a point about two inches below the navel. The *apana* wind is drawn up using a technique called *mula-bandha* or literally ``root-lock." There are a variety of descriptions of this technique. The *prana* wind is then inspired

and drawn down to the the same area as well. The student then swallows and then slightly tenses the navel region to create the pot-like posture from which the technique draws its name. In the yogic literature it is often noted that one should never use much force in retaining the breath and should only gradually increase the duration of retention. To gain success in the vase breath it is valuable, if not essential, to become very familiar with the *prana* and *apana* winds or energies. If the nature of these do not become very clear then this technique will only be another mechanical exercise. If one does gain facility and moving these energies then without a doubt kundalini can be awakened from her long slumber.

Another fundamental technique for uniting *prana* and *apana* is through the application of *bandha traya* or three *bandhas* or locks. The first lock applied is the *mula-bandha* used to drive upward the *apana* wind as described above. The second lock is *uddiyana*. Some writers give the etymology of this term as ``flying up." It is not fully clear but the name of this may be derived from the ancient land of Odiyan which was a haven for Buddhist and Hindu Tantrics. In *uddiyana bandha* the breath is expelled and the abdomen is brought backward. In this way the energies in the navel area are drawn in and up. Photographs often show yogins who appear to have squashed their entire abdominal region. This is not necessary. The goal is simply to subtly draw the winds together. The third of lock is *Jalandhara bandha*. The name of this lock may come from an Indian Mahasiddha who was revered by both Hindu Yogins and Buddhist Tantrics or alternatively from the city, associated with kundalini yogic practiced, that is located at the border of the Punjab. In *Jalandhara bandha* the head is brought back a bit and

then the chin is brought down on the chest. This lock keeps the *prana* locked below the throat.

In summary, the goal of the vase breath pranayama and the *bandha traya* is the same: the uniting of the *prana* and *apana*. In the vase breath exercise this is done by using phases of inspiration and retention and adding muscular control to cup the winds in a vase or pot below the navel. In *bandha traya* this is accomplished by phases of expiration and retention and adding muscular control to force the winds together in the abdominal region. Intuitively there also seems to be something of a vacuum effect in *bandha traya* which is aiming to create a vacuum in which a suction force will be used to arouse the kundalini.

Some will be drawn to try to practice these techniques but I believe that to do so the guidance of a teacher is necessary. If a teacher is unavailable one might simply try to become more aware of the *prana* and *apana* winds. To become aware of the *prana* wind just pay attention to the inspiration phase of an ordinary breath. The Tibetan word for *prana* translates as "life-holding wind." Try to become sensitive to the life sustaining properties of this wind. Sensitivity to the *apana* wind can be developed by paying attention to the muscles and their sensations during evacuation. If you were raised in Western culture this itself may prove plenty of challenge!

[Return to table of contents](#)

**What are the techniques for uniting *rajas* and *retas*?**

To unite *rajas* and *retas* inside the body requires causing the winds or energies to enter the central channel. Ultimately this achieves the same end as the process of uniting *prana* and *apana* but the emphasis is a little different. To cause the winds to enter the central channel there are a continuum of approaches ranging from very gentle to very forceful.

In the very gentle approaches one attempts to bring the winds into the central channel by imagination or concentration alone. One visualizes an image, such as a deity or a seed-syllable in the central channel and lets mind become absorbed in that. It is a common tenet of yogic lore that where the mind goes the winds will follow. So if the mind can be kept steadily focussed on inside of the central channel then the winds will enter there. When the winds enter there the knots holding the *rajas* and *retas* loosen and the two are allowed to flow together. It is worth noting that it was Gopi Krishna's practice of a very similar method that led to his tremendous difficulties with kundalini. So even very gentle methods can lead to imbalances. In the more forceful practices the visualizations described above are complemented by breathing practices such as the vase-breath practice described earlier.

If upon reading these descriptions one would like to try to practice them then a teacher is necessary. If one lacks a teacher but has a surplus of curiosity one might simply try to become familiar with the central channel. Take an ordinary breath. How does the spine feel when inhaling? How does the spine feel upon exhaling? Success in these yogic practices will require a great sensitivity to the central channel and much of this sensitivity can be obtained by simply improving one's awareness of that area.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **Are these really all the techniques for awakening kundalini by effort?**

Of course life couldn't possibly be this simple. There are a wide variety of techniques that serve to awaken kundalini through either uniting *prana* and *apana* or uniting *rajas* and *retas*. Most of these bear some similarity to those described above.

There are a few radically different methods. Some of these are extremely forceful. Some yogins, take literally the meaning of *rajas* and *retas* and seek a literal uniting of these constituents. Others take the slumber of the kundalini very literally and attempt to very forcefully wake her up by dropping on the floor while seated in the lotus position.

At the other extreme, in many other approaches no attempt whatsoever is made to awaken the kundalini directly. In these practices all of the effort is placed on purifying the nerve channels through physical, mental and breathing exercises. In the practice of Kriya yoga as taught by Baba-ji and Lahiri Mahasaya the kundalini is ``magnetized." Apparently in this practice energy is circulated around the central channel without forcing it into the central channel. In this way it is expected that the kundalini will be drawn into the central channel.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **Is forcefully awakening kundalini dangerous?**

If we take the psychological perspective and view kundalini as the power latent in our unconscious then it is easy to understand that awakening this force is going to bring a greater amount of unconscious material into our consciousness. Even in the best of circumstances this is likely to be uncomfortable and if an individual is barely coping with his unconscious even under normal circumstances then awakening kundalini may push the individual over into psychosis. This phenomenon has been documented many times.

Forceful methods of awakening kundalini pose additional dangers. As has been mentioned, the breath or *prana* is strongly interdependent on the mind. If one begins to actively control the breath then the mind will be affected. Many kundalini yogas rely on this connection. Unfortunately, with incorrect practice rather than bringing the mind to a greater state of equanimity the breath control practices can also create even greater imbalances in the mind. Typical signs of this are extreme agitation and anxiety. In the panorama of human suffering there is probably no greater suffering than that of a mentally unbalanced individual and no sadder example of this than someone who has actually brought a state of mental imbalance onto himself through improper practice of kundalini yoga.

As an example an individual named Gopi Krishna awakened his kundalini by doing unguided meditation on his crown chakra. His life after awakening was both blessed by ecstatic bliss and tormented by physical and mental discomfort. Eventually his experience stabilized. He wrote down his experiences in a recently re-released autobiography entitled ``Living with Kundalini." Gopi Krishna's autobiography appears to be an



honest representation of his experiences but it is only one extreme datapoint in the panorama of experience on kundalini yoga. It represents dangers in forceful unguided practice but it is not representative of a typical practitioner's experience. Some gurus and students of kundalini yoga seem to feel that such warnings regarding kundalini practice are overblown, but there is simply no doubt that improper application of breath control practices can lead to mental imbalance. Breath control practices which typically do not use breath retention are much safer. Kriya yoga practices which do not focus on purifying or ``magnetizing" the central channel without directly attempting to awaken the kundalini are also much safer. Finally, the role of a fully qualified guru cannot be estimated here. It is not just that the guru has traversed the path but a fully qualified guru of kundalini yoga has the ability to intervene in the mind and body of the student to correct imbalances.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **But even if kundalini is dangerous, isn't it a faster way to enlightenment?**

First of all it may be useful to observe that there is no technique currently known on earth that appears to be rapidly catapulting large number of individuals toward enlightenment. Because kundalini yogas deal so directly with a powerful enlightening force it seems natural that they would be ``faster", but there appears to be alot of tortoise and hare phenomena at work with newbie kundalini yogins. Many people begin kundalini yogas, have strong initial experiences and then become frightened. Many who perservere through this initial phase become

distracted by the energy and focus on temporal and phenomenal applications of the energy.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **What are the origins of the kundalini yogas?**

Hatha, laya and kriya yoga all trace their origins back to the era of the Indian Mahasiddhas. This era spanned the 8th and 12th centuries in Northern India, Nepal and Tibet. The key figures in this era included the Mahasiddhas Matsyendranath and his student Gorakshanath as well as Jalandhara and Jalandhara's student Krishnacarya. Gorakshanath and Matsyendranath are venerated as the originators of the Natha lineage. Jalandhara is commemorated in the practice of the Jalandhara mudra but he and his student Krishnacarya are also deeply venerated for their roles in the early years of Tantric Buddhism. In fact each of these great yogins is venerated both in Hindu Tantric and in Buddhist Tantric schools. Of these individuals there are several works attributed to Jalandhara and Krishnacarya in the canon of Indian Buddhist Tantric literature which has survived in Tibetan translation.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **What is the classical literature of kundalini yoga?**

The classical works of hatha, kriya and laya yoga include: Gorakshashatakam, Hatha Yoga Pradipika, Gherandha Samhita, Shiva Samhita, and a group of about twenty works known as the

Yoga Upanishads. References to translations of these works will be given in the answer to the question [Where can I learn more?>](#)

Each of these works is very brief, typically less than 500 verses and yet the entire literature of hatha, kriya and laya yoga is drawn from these works. Anyone interested in kundalini yoga can benefit from taking the time to read these classical works but to actually practice the techniques described in these works a teacher is required. This is reiterated within the text of these works themselves.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **What is the precise role of the teacher in kundalini yoga? Can I learn kundalini yoga through books?**

The teacher is highly revered in kundalini yoga, just as in other schools of yoga. A recurrent theme in the texts of kundalini yoga is that if one needs a teacher to learn everyday skills such as reading and writing how much more one needs a teacher to master the practice of kundalini yoga.

The first role of the teacher in kundalini yoga is as an instructor in the practices of kundalini yoga. The classical works of kundalini yoga repeat again and again that only those practices learnt from the guru will bear fruit and all other attempts to practice will only bring misery. This may seem a bit melodramatic but the point is that these practices are sufficiently subtle that they can only be properly conveyed through personal

instruction by an individual who has himself been properly instructed.

The second role of a teacher in kundalini yoga is in monitoring the progress of the student. A tremendous variety of positive and negative experiences can manifest on the path of kundalini yoga. A true kundalini teacher will not only have encountered a wide range of these experiences but will have a subtle sensitivity to the students nervous system and will be able to intuit when practice is leading to imbalance.

Ultimately, whether following the path of effort or the path of grace, the true guru is the *guru-tattva* or guru-principle - this is the kundalini-shakti herself.

For those individuals that have not been able to find a teacher there are a few published materials that are apparently intended for beginning self study. There are a number of manuals available from Yogi Bhajan and his students. These are referred to in the section immediately below. Swami Chetanananda has a guided meditation that serves as an introduction to the practice of kundalini yoga. It is available from Rudra Press.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **Who teaches kundalini yoga?**

Yogic practices aimed at raising the kundalini through effort are taught in a number of ashrams and centers in India, the US and around the world. The following is a list of known centers in the United States and each of these serves as one of the principal seats of the teacher . Although I am no expert or authority on

any of these teachers, where I have some first-hand information I thought it would be useful to add it - it may be a bit anecdotal for some tastes. If anyone finds any of the information below is inaccurate please inform me and I will update it. Good luck!

Yogi Bhajan (Siri Singh Sahib Bhai Harbhajan Singh  
Khalsa Yogiji)

3HO-Foundation

International Headquarters

P. O. Box 351149

Los Angeles, CA 90035

(213) 552-3416

[Yogi Bhajan Web Page](#)

Yogi Bhajan brought kundalini yoga to the West in 1969, at the age of 39, and founded the Happy, Healthy Holy Organization (3HO). Yogi Bhajan is a Sikh and his writings indicate that he is ``the Chief Religious and Administrative Authority for the Sikh Dharma in the Western Hemisphere." Yogi Bhajan has taught an organized regimen of yogic practices aimed at clearing the subtle nerve channels and ultimately awakening the kundalini.

The precise lineage of Yogi Bhajan has been impossible for me to determine. Equally difficult has been to understand at what point in time the hatha yoga teachings taught by the founder of the Naths, Gorakshanath, became intertwined with the Sikh teachings tracing from Guru Nanak. Over the hundreds of years in India these two groups must have often come in contact but the precise time at which the yogic teaching passed into the Sikh lineage is unclear. A number of introductory yoga manuals and videotapes have been published by 3HO and should be available via the number above. In addition, Yogi Bhajan has been liberal in his training of teachers to pass on his lineage and a few are quite active. We will mention only one, Ravi Singh.

Ravi Singh

The New York Center for Art and Awareness  
61 4th Avenue 2nd Fl.  
New York, New York 1003

[Ravi Singh Web Page](#)

Among Yogi Bhajan's students Ravi Singh has been especially active in establishing his center and in publishing books and videotapes. I found his book *Kundalini Yoga for Strength, Success and Spirit* among the best of those published by Yogi Bhajan's students.

B. K. S. Iyengar  
Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health  
P. O. Box 793  
Lenox, MA 01240  
(413) 637-3280

B. K. S. Iyengar is a teacher in the hatha yoga tradition that passed from Shri Ramamohan Brahmacharya, to Tirumalai Krishnamacharya and then onto B. K. S. Iyengar. For quite some time I was under the impression that B. K. S. Iyengar's exposition of hatha yoga did not extend to encompass hatha yoga practices aimed at awakening the kundalini and I once made this assertion in response to a question on the net. A series of email exchanges with a student in Krishnamacharya's lineage straightened me out on this score although such advanced teachings are not a part of the normal regimen.

` Swami Janakananda

[http://sunsite.kth.se/DDS/tv/lund/binde/sv4\\_swja.htm](http://sunsite.kth.se/DDS/tv/lund/binde/sv4_swja.htm)

<http://www.spiritweb.org/Spirit/Yoga/kriya-janakananda.html>

## **Kundalini Yoga in the Tibetan Tradition**

Kundalini yoga is taught in all four (Nyingma, Kargyudpa, Sakya and Gelugpa) of the major schools of Tibetan Buddhism. For this reason this FAQ would be very incomplete if it failed to

mention something about Tibetan schools of kundalini yoga. On the other hand it would be extremely mis-leading to simply give a list of Tibetan Buddhist centers in America as though one could walk right in and sign up for a course on kundalini yoga. Some history may help here.

The tradition of the Indian Mahasiddhas who founded Hatha yoga and the Indian Mahasiddhas who founded many of the important lineages of Tibetan Buddhism are intertwined. As a result it is no surprise that these two traditions share many practices in common. In particular kundalini yoga, known as candali yoga (Tibetan: gTummo rnal 'byor) in Tantric Buddhism, is taught in the Completion Stages of a number of Tibetan Buddhist practices. To better understand this it will be necessary to put the gTummo yoga practice in the broader context of Tibetan Buddhist practice. Unfortunately, there is only sufficient space here to barely overview the stages of Tibetan Buddhist Tantric practice. Briefly they can be organized as follows: First come preliminaries such as taking refuge in the Buddha and making prostrations and offerings to the Buddha, the teachings and the assembly. Some teachers will require that preliminary practices, such as taking refuge, be performed 100,000 times. When a teacher is satisfied with the students performance of the preliminaries then an initiation into a deity practice may be conveyed. This entails meditating on a deity and its mandala, repeating its mantra and performing service to the deity. In Tantric Buddhism a deity is not viewed as an external god but rather a state of one's own transformed mind. Deity practice eliminates one's clinging to one's ordinary appearance. With these practices a student begins the Generation (or Cultivation) stage of practice.

With the Completion stage come a variety of yogic practices. Of these candali (or kundalini) yoga forms the core of Completion stage practice in the Six Yogas of Naropa as well as the Cakrasamvara, Hevajra and Yamantaka tantras. The actual practice of candali yoga has its own preliminaries. These include physical yogic practices similar to asanas. Next come a series of imaginations (or visualizations) and finally breath control practices aimed at awakening the kundalini. The encouraging news here is that the hatha yoga lineages have been successfully maintained for over a thousand years within Tibetan Buddhism. The challenge for the student of kundalini yoga is to find access to them. Following the path from preliminaries, through Generation Stage practices to Completion Stage practices requires a great sincerity and commitment to Buddhist practice and many years of concentrated effort but there are great extremes in the presentation of these teachings.

For some teachers of Tibetan Buddhism gTummo is only taught within the context of a three year retreat. At the other extreme there are some teachers of Tibetan Buddhism who have openly offered detailed instruction in gTummo yoga to anyone who cared to attend a seminar. In one particular seminar everything from refuge, to initiation to gTummo instruction was offered within a single weekend. In summary, kundalini yoga has a pivotal role within the practice of Tibetan Buddhism but it is deeply embedded within this comprehensive path to spiritual development. As a result the devoted practitioner of Tibetan Buddhism will almost certainly be exposed to kundalini yoga at some point in his practice. On the other hand an individual looking to a Tibetan Buddhist teacher for immediate instruction



in kundalini yoga is almost certain to become frustrated and disappointed.

[Return to table of contents](#)

## **20. Where can I learn more?**

Good introductory survey:

White, John (Editor) (1990). Kundalini - Evolution and Enlightenment. New York: Paragon House.

### **Classical Works:**

The Babylon of books on hath, laya and other kundalini yogas is built upon a relatively small foundation of a few classical works on these yogas. Anyone wishing to truly understand these yogas would do well to start with these short and pithy classical works and then evaluate the later works from this foundation.

The Gheranda Samhita

Published with a commentary as Pure Yoga by Yogi Pranavananda. Translated by Tony Rodriguez and Dr. Kanshi Ram. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1992.

The Shiva Samhita

Translated by Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vasu Sri Satguru publishers, Delhi. 1979.

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika

Translated with a commentary by Swami Muktibodhananda (a disciple of Swami Satyananda Saraswati). Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar. 1985.

The Gorakshashatakam

Critically edited and translated by Swami Kuvalayananda and Dr. S. A. Shukla. Kaivalyadhama, Lonavala, (no date). A

translation of a less critically edited edition is more readily available in Chapter Fourteen of Gorakhnath and the Kanphata Yogis by George Weston Briggs. Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1982.

Selected works by the teachers mentioned. These are available from the respective centers. (I am aware that each of these teachers has published numerous works):

[Return to table of contents](#)