



KUNDALINI MEDITATION

The path to personal transformation and bliss



Kathryn McCusker



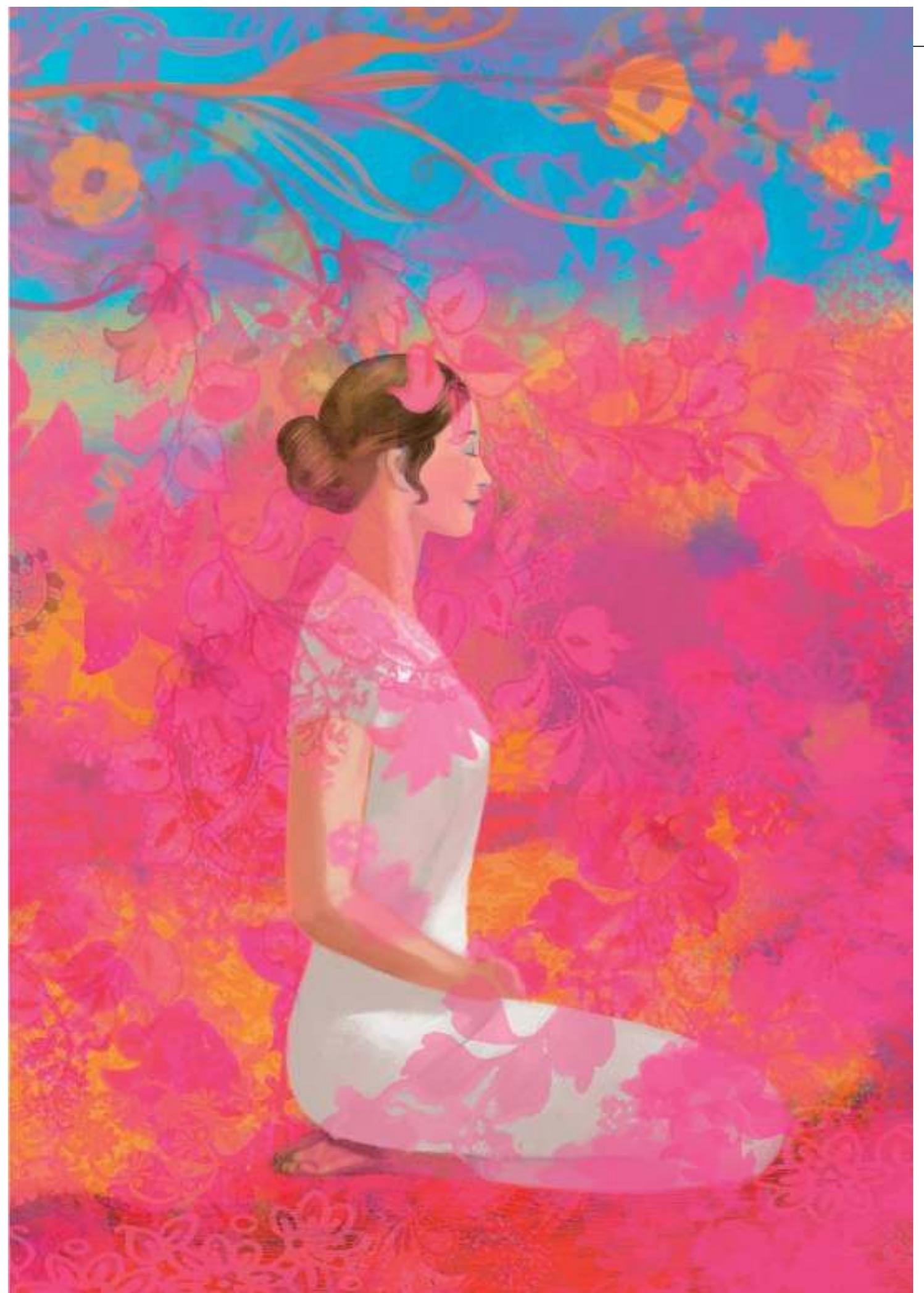
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This book is dedicated to Yogi Bhajan, whose tireless commitment to sharing the teachings of Kundalini yoga has inspired so many people around the world.

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Special thanks go to: my publisher Duncan Baird for having the confidence in me to explore a book about Kundalini meditation; my editors, Sandra Rigby and Fiona Robertson, for their unswerving patience and understanding throughout the process; my teachers, especially Karta Singh, who awakened my curiosity and opened my eyes to a fresh and creative way of interpreting Kundalini; and my students and colleagues for their trust and support, in particular those whose stories have been included in this book.

Finally, love and gratitude go to my husband Paul for his unconditional support and understanding from the beginning to the end.

SAT NAM

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Introduction to Kundalini

Kundalini. This ancient Sanskrit term may conjure up for you all kinds of images and ideas. Mysticism, secrecy, ritual, perhaps even the attainment of bliss or enlightenment. But what exactly is Kundalini? Kundalini practices have been misunderstood for decades in the West, but recently increasing numbers of people have been discovering the benefits of the tradition. Kundalini yoga emerged from the meditative practices of ancient Hindu India, possibly as long as 4,000 years ago, and incorporates a focus on the chakras (the energy centres of the subtle body, see pages 36–9), movement, breathing exercises and chanting. Today, ordinary people are rediscovering Kundalini as a tool to relieve stress, to promote both physical and emotional healing, and ultimately to connect with profound and transforming spirituality. Kundalini truly has become accessible to everyone.

My own path to Kundalini has been a little unusual. For most of my career I have performed around the world as a professional opera singer. Early on I discovered yoga as a tool to help calm and centre me in the midst of the demands of my singing career. But my first experience of Kundalini took me way beyond the benefits of the type of yoga I had been practising up to that point. I was on a yoga retreat in Chichén Itzá, Mexico, burnt out after a hectic schedule of singing and touring. Intrigued by this form of yoga I knew nothing about, I signed up for a Kundalini class. Deep down I was searching for some inner peace, balance and a greater sense of connectedness through both mind and body. This initial encounter with Kundalini was a very powerful one and I realized during that first class that I had found what I was looking for.

Of course, I didn't immediately surrender my feelings of fear, resistance and doubt about this very different form of practice. However, once I tuned in to the techniques of Kundalini I found a new way of being. The beauty of Kundalini is that it takes you beyond the confusion and clutter of daily life to a place where you experience a sense of real freedom and stillness. At this point the neutral, meditative mind can allow access to inspiration, excitement and new possibilities. Your mind frees itself of the repetitive dialogue of negative voices and confused thoughts – the ancient echoes of the past. The newly raised energetic frequency at which your mind is operating allows you to listen to your mind's authentic voice, the voice of your dreams, passions and purpose. In this neutral space we can accept who we are and embrace all that we are – the light and the shadows, the good and the bad in us.



This Kundalini pose, known as the Ego Eradicator, helps us to disengage from our mental chatter and achieve a meditative mind.

Today, most people avoid being with their minds in silence. It can seem at the same time both terrifying and lonely. We avoid this experience by distracting ourselves with external stimuli and “busy-ness”, to prevent ourselves from going within and developing a conscious relationship with our mind. This helps to create an illusion of feeling safe and in control. But it is in the quiet, still moments that we have the potential to off-load the constant “chatter” and come to a point of peace.

The word “Kundalini” literally means “the coil in the hair of the beloved”, and symbolizes the uncoiling of the creative energy that lies dormant at the base of the spine. The image that is often used to describe this energy is of a coiled serpent sleeping. Once we awaken Kundalini energy, we raise our energetic vibration to release stress and allow our mind to come back to peace and balance.

Kundalini meditation combines powerful and effective techniques such as breathing, mudras (hand gestures) and mantras (sacred sounds) to accelerate this process toward a neutral, meditative mind. It is an extraordinarily powerful practice that we can all integrate into our everyday lives. Even if you have only a short amount of time to practise in your day, one Kundalini meditation can bring about real transformation.

In [Chapter 6](#) I have provided a series of Kundalini meditations to address specific issues, such as releasing anger and welcoming love. If you want to commit to a specific meditation for longer than a few days, I would suggest meditating for the same length of time on 40 consecutive days. The number 40 is symbolic – it is often given in ancient scriptures as the length of time needed for enacting change. And your practice will be deepened if you can find a few minutes every day to prepare yourself for meditation with a selection of yoga exercises combined with relaxation poses (see [pages 73–83](#) and [84–89](#)). Start with a minimum of three minutes of meditation if you are a complete beginner, building to 31 minutes if you have the time. For more on how to use this book, see [page 18](#).

Be patient with yourself, as sometimes the benefits of Kundalini meditation aren’t obvious straightaway. Keep going and you will eventually notice the changes in ways both subtle and profound. If you are consistent with your practice, you will clear away negative subconscious patterns.

replace them with new positive patterns, and transform your life!

Yogi Bhajan – A Visionary

There are different paths to Kundalini. My path was through the teachings of Yogi Bhajan, who brought Kundalini yoga and meditation to the West in 1969. Before that, the techniques of Kundalini as practised in India and Tibet were closely guarded, passed down from master to student.

Yogi Bhajan was born a prince in 1929 in the province of Punjab, in what is now Pakistan. A devout Sikh, it was clear from a young age that he was destined for a spiritual life. He had mastered Kundalini yoga and meditation by the time he was 16 and at the age of 18, when British India was being partitioned into India and Pakistan, he led the inhabitants of his village into India. He completed a master's degree in economics and had a successful career in the Indian civil service. In 1968 he was invited to teach yoga at the University of Toronto, Canada, and in 1969 he moved from there to California. Yogi Bhajan recognized that Kundalini could help the West cope with the increasing pressures of modern life. He offered an alternative to people experimenting with mind-altering drugs as the sense of connectedness and heightened experience that many were searching for could be accessed through Kundalini.

During his time in the West, Yogi Bhajan built up a legacy of teachings about Kundalini, including over 100 books applying yogic techniques to meditation, drug rehabilitation, healing, rebirthing, business, relationships, psychology and other fields. Yogi Bhajan's intention was "to create teachers, not to gather disciples", and he trained thousands of teachers, encouraging them to share his traditions worldwide.

Yogi Bhajan died in 2004 and will be remembered as an inspiring and uplifting teacher with a tireless global vision to help humanity, in his words, "keep up" with the ever-growing demands of the 21st century. This book has been inspired by him, by my teacher Karta Singh and by my deep love of the teachings and my desire to share them with as many people as possible.

The Power of Meditation

I came to Kundalini meditation through my own issues with stress – something that I’m not alone experiencing. Today, we all face enormous pressures in every aspect of our lives – work, home and relationships. Huge economic, environmental and technological changes are taking place on our planet, and the pace of life is accelerating. We have an overwhelming amount of choice available to us and while this is exciting, it can also feel like information overload. Computers, mobile phones and televisions constantly feed us with information and messages. We are bombarded by radioactivity waves emanating from household appliances. All these stimuli affect our minds and our capacity to function at our best. More and more people are suffering from burnout, depression and other psychological problems. But there is one technique that is both accessible to all and effective in counteracting these negative effects – and that is meditation.



The Half Lotus pose facilitates the flow of Kundalini energy during meditation.

Kundalini meditation is a powerful science that can help us to put aside the thoughts that burden the mind, create stress and cause illness in the body. In Western society we have been conditioned to think that the best way to treat depression is with anti-depressant medication, but by being open to healthy natural alternatives such as meditation, we can come to realize that we no longer have to be slaves to our minds.

Kundalini meditation will help you develop a conscious relationship with your mind, so that instead of being controlled by your thoughts, you become their master and can eventually remain in a state of elevated consciousness as you go about your everyday life.

The exercises and meditations set out in this book are an opportunity for you to accelerate change. ~~Instead of allowing stress to harm your well-being, you will experience renewed energy levels, giving you the strength, stamina and clarity that are necessary for modern living. You don't need to understand the Kundalini techniques fully to realize their benefits; neither do you need to live a monastic life to experience their power. It is perfectly possible to work them effectively into your ordinary daily life.~~

As you grow in your Kundalini practice, your mind will become clearer, calmer and less reactive and you will develop a more peaceful relationship with yourself and those around you. Some of the transformations can occur in as short a space of time as 40 seconds, which makes Kundalini practice a highly effective tool for coping with the intensifying energy that we are all experiencing on the planet today. Bringing your thoughts under control may seem like an overwhelming task, but you will discover how to do it. One of the first steps to a meditative mind is bringing the body into stillness. Within that stillness the mind can begin to find its neutral space. When you start to practise Kundalini meditation, you will encounter lots of different and colourful “personas” – facets of your own self, both positive and negative, each with its own agenda. It is your choice to engage or not with them.

Be patient and give yourself time to explore the techniques suggested in this book. Gradually, as you begin to make peace with all the hidden voices that can be buried deep in the subconscious mind – expressing judgment, doubt, fear, confusion, envy and competitiveness – you will shift to a new perspective in which those voices dissipate and you feel more enthusiastic, creative and willing to embrace change and enjoy each moment in your life's journey.

Kundalini meditations can seem strange at first – and there have certainly been times when I myself have been surprised by the instructions – but if you let go of your fears and inhibitions and trust in the process, you will discover how the practice can work for you.

Meditation and Your Well-being

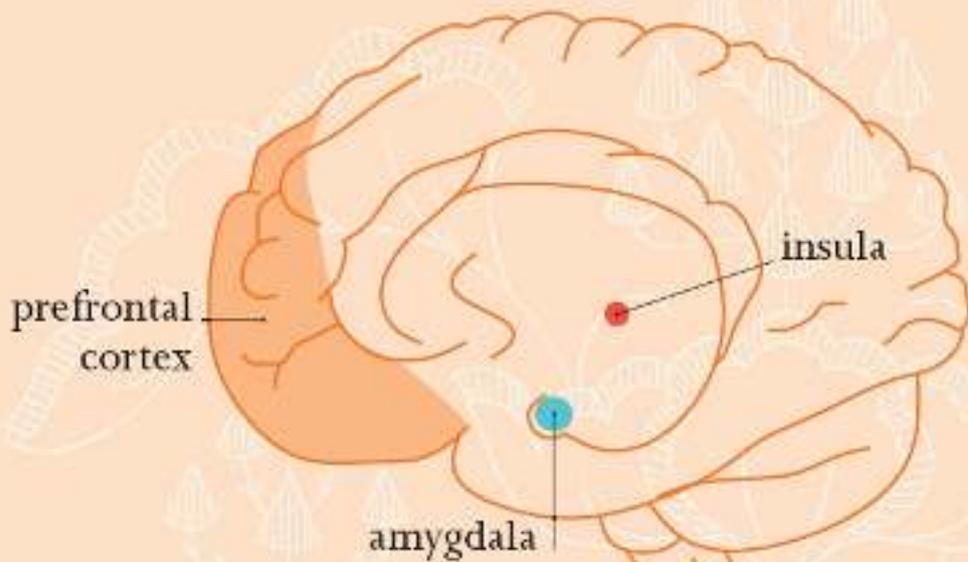
While Kundalini is usually recognized as a largely spiritual practice, there is now medical proof for the many health benefits of meditation for people suffering from chronic pain, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, substance abuse, eating disorders, insomnia, psychosis and many other psychological disorders, as well as for those with terminal illnesses such as cancer.

Scientific studies involving magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and electroencephalograph (EEG) scans, which allow researchers to observe parts of the brain that are more active than others, have measured the effects of meditation. Neuroscientists observing the brain activity of Tibetan monks with many years of practice in loving-kindness meditation found evidence of significant activity in the insula. Located in the cerebral cortex, the insula helps to monitor emotions and physiological responses such as blood pressure and heart rate, as well as the part of the right side of the brain that is responsible for empathy. This research concluded that we all have the potential to train our minds to become more empathetic and compassionate.

Having visited Tibet and been in the presence of monks and lamas during meditation, I can confirm that the serene calmness and happiness radiating from their minds are reflected in their faces. Just sitting with them and feeling their energetic vibration was a profound and moving experience.

Recent work by the American neuroscientist Professor Richard Davidson, looking specifically at the effect of meditation on the brain, involved the analysis of hundreds of brain scans, as well as asking his subjects to report on their mood. Those scans of people who described themselves as anxious and depressed showed increased activity in the right prefrontal cortex and the area around the amygdala (the two groups of nuclei involved in emotion-processing). However, in people who were happy and calm, the left prefrontal cortex was the more active area. Davidson concluded from his research that regular meditators were happier than average non-meditators.

EFFECTS OF MEDITATION ON THE BRAIN



Regular meditators show increased activity in the left prefrontal cortex – the area connected with happiness. And extra activity in the insula, said to control empathy, has been noted in loving-kindness meditators.

Dr Barbara Fredrickson has studied the effect of “loving-kindness” meditation, which requires focus on feelings of compassion and kindness. Her research found increased positive feelings, improved relationships and reduced depression in meditators, as well as better physical health. Another form of meditation, “mindfulness”, which was first developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the late 1970s as a stress-reduction programme, has been proven in studies to be effective in helping people with anxiety, chronic pain and fibromyalgia.

In recent studies at the University of California (UCLA), those practising only 11 minutes of Kirtan Kriya meditation (see pages [130–31](#)) every day showed improved short-term memory and cognitive function, and reduced stress levels. This meditation, which uses a Kundalini mantra and mudra (hand gesture), was found to alleviate stress, fatigue and anxiety in adults with memory impairment and those suffering from Alzheimer’s disease.

In my own experience as a professional singer, meditation has helped me enormously in overcoming my pre-performance nerves as well as improving my concentration in preparing for and performing roles. Meditation will help you to strengthen your mind, so that you can guide your body into achieving your dreams, instead of being held back by negative thoughts.

Kundalini – A Unique Approach

Every form of meditation is powerful, but the unique approach of Kundalini makes it especially transformative. It is the combination of five specific elements in Kundalini that is so important. These are: asanas (yoga positions), mudras (hand gestures), bandhas (body locks), breathing and mantras.

Asanas, mudras and bandhas

Many people meditate effectively and powerfully without practising yoga postures, and it is possible to take this approach with Kundalini meditation, too. However, simple body postures known as asanas can allow you to become more tuned in to your body and sensitive to the changes that take place. As Kundalini rises and balances the energy of your body's chakras (see pages 36–9), asanas relating to the major chakras (see pages 73–83) will significantly increase your awareness of your energy level. For example, Frog Pose (see page 79) is excellent for channelling creative sexual energy in the sacral chakra, while Neck Rolls (see pages 82–3) help you to tune in to the throat chakra, which is associated with our capacity for clear and truthful communication. Any sitting pose where the base of the spine is in contact with the ground is good for creating awareness of the base chakra, such as Half Lotus, Easy Pose (see page 86) or the more demanding Full Lotus.



Buddha Mudra helps the meditator to access the neutral, meditative mind.

Mudras are hand gestures that create subtle energetic connections through the nadis (energetic channels, see pages 34–5) to the brain. They can powerfully evoke a spiritual idea or symbol and connect your mind in a very direct way to different parts of your body. The ancient yogis believed that

five fingers each symbolized a different human quality, element and planetary influence: for example the thumb symbolized happiness; the index finger, knowledge; the middle finger, patience; the fourth finger, energy; and the little finger, intuition. Certain mudras, such as Venus Lock and Yoni Mudra (see pages [122 and 123](#)), are very Tantric, balancing male and female energy. The mudras shown in this book (see pages [121–3](#)) can be used in isolation, but will be more powerful when integrated into specific Kundalini meditation (see [Chapter 6](#)).

Bandhas or body locks (see pages [70–72](#)) are used to direct the flow of energy in your body and are a key in raising Kundalini.

Breathing

Breathing techniques are another key aspect of Kundalini (see [Chapter 4](#)). Yogis traditionally believe that our normal breathing pattern is too rapid and shallow to raise Kundalini energy effectively. Exercises focusing on the regulation of breath play a large part in Kundalini practice, and principally involve slowing down inhalation, holding the breath and then gradually exhaling. In the process we absorb more prana (life-force) and enjoy the physiological and psychological effects of a meditative state.

Mantras

This is the aspect of Kundalini that in many ways interests me the most. As a singer, I find that the chanting of mantras reveals different and fascinating aspects of my voice and mind. The sounds contained in mantras have positive meanings that stimulate energy to clear negativity from the mind (see [page 116](#)). In my experience, the sound vibration can be so powerful that the mind is instantly calmed and a feeling of euphoria created. The effect is profound.

When asanas, bandhas, mudras, breathing and mantras are brought together, Kundalini meditation takes you to a new level of awareness and peace.

How to Use This Book

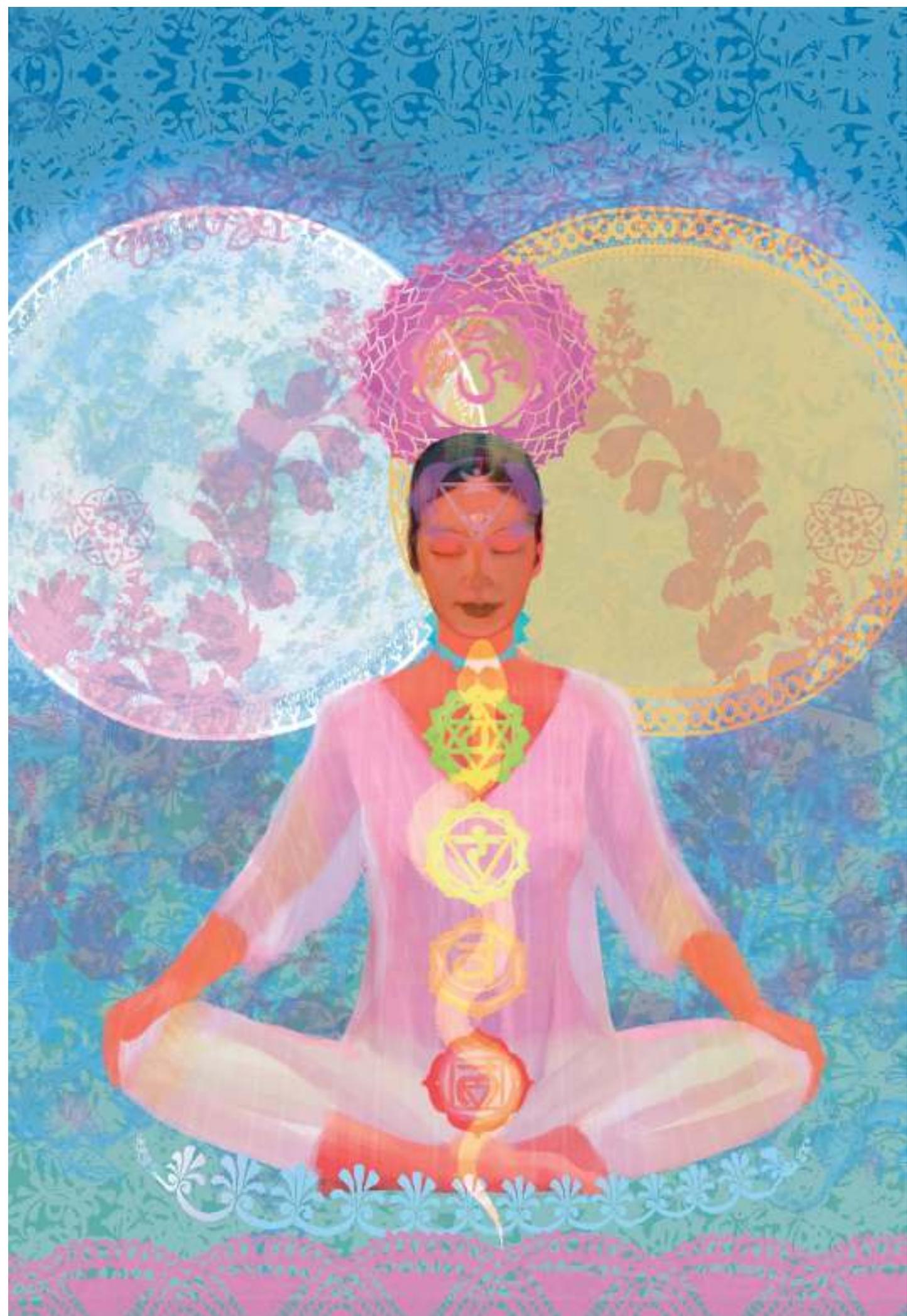
At the beginning of this book I give some background on what we know about the origins of Kundalini and its link to ancient Tantric approaches to spirituality, developed in India many centuries ago. The basic idea of the Tantric approach is that we can all reach a new level of spiritual connectedness through our practices, and through seeing ourselves as microcosms of the energy of the universe. So in [Chapter 1](#) you will learn about some gods and goddesses used as metaphors for Kundalini, as well as the body's subtle energy system (including the chakras) and the sacred power of sound.

[Chapter 2](#) then gets you ready for your Kundalini practice by offering advice on preparing your meditation space, on food and exercises to cleanse your body, and on how to overcome the negative thinking that can block effective meditation practice. [Chapter 3](#) explores the subtle energy system of the body in more detail and explains the energy channels used in Kundalini. In this chapter you will find yoga positions (asanas) and relaxation poses to develop your awareness of Kundalini energy. [Chapter 4](#) focuses on the power of your breath and gives some breathing exercises to help develop control. [Chapter 5](#) looks in depth at some of the key components of Kundalini: mantras, mudras and yantras (sacred diagrams). You will discover how to work with these to enhance your regular Kundalini practice. Finally, [Chapter 6](#) concludes with 12 specific meditations and postures to help heal both body and mind. My hope is that by this stage you will have experienced many of the benefits that come from practising this ancient science.

Some of the meditations include chanting a mantra, and you can download these from my website www.kathrynmccuskerkundalini.com. Choose a mantra that resonates with you. As you practise the meditations, commit to being with yourself for that time, without distractions. Let your daily practice be your sacred moment, a gift to your body, mind and spirit.



“We can all reach a new level of spiritual connectedness through our practices, and through seeing ourselves as microcosms of the energy of the universe.”



CHAPTER 1

Awakening Kundalini

In this chapter you will discover the ancient origins of this practice and learn about Kundalini in terms of the body's subtle energy system, the primal power of sound and the union of Shiva (male energy) with Shakti (female energy).

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948)

What is Kundalini?

Kundalini refers to a special life-force that we are all born with. The term partly derives from the Sanskrit word for “coiled up” or “circular”, and Kundalini energy is often described as a coiled serpent that lies dormant at the base of the spine. We can all learn how to activate it.

The experience of Kundalini can expand your awareness, leading to full consciousness. By awakening the energy within us, we can realize our true nature and embrace our full human potential. The purpose of this book is to show you how to do this gradually, safely and naturally (see [page 42](#)). You will begin to feel the benefits of your practice and notice real changes in a very short period of time.

Ancient texts describe Kundalini as a female energy, called Shakti, and explain how this energy of power and consciousness can rise through the body to unite with pure consciousness in the form of the male Hindu supreme deity, Shiva. In many ways Kundalini yoga can be seen as the uniting of the dualities present in all of us – positive and negative, active and passive, male and female.

Through the practice of Kundalini techniques, this dormant energy is ignited, to rise up through the chakras. In physiological terms (see [pages 40–41](#)), this can be explained as the rise of energy up the central column of the spine to the top of the skull where it activates the pineal gland, which sends messages to every cell in the body to relax. When the pineal gland secretes chemicals into the brain, we experience a major shift in consciousness. We feel that our body is properly in balance and that we are fully integrated with our reality. We experience a profound peace.

It is not uncommon for people to go through their entire lives without awakening Kundalini; in fact, most people are unaware of the existence of this energy. But anyone who practises some form of yoga discipline, or who has had a genuine spiritual experience, may already have experienced the enormous potential of psychic energy – the body’s most powerful thermal current. Why do we want to awaken Kundalini energy? We do so in order to integrate more fully with reality and to realize our full potential. By activating and channelling this energy we raise our consciousness through the chakras and transform our spiritual awareness into productive action. The gift of Kundalini meditation is the capacity to confront the ego and clear away its attachments, so that you can then listen to your own truth and fulfil your life’s purpose.



The Kundalini serpent uncoils and rises up the spine of a sage to his highest chakras in this 18th-century Indian miniature.

The Origins of Kundalini

Although it is difficult to be precise about the origins of Kundalini, most of our knowledge comes from the Tantras, a collection of Sanskrit texts probably written down in the 8th century CE although based on earlier oral traditions dating back to the 5th century. The Tantras were believed to have been revealed by the gods Shiva and Vishnu, and by the Great Goddess, Devi, and transmitted to the world by human sages.

Tantrism seems to have originated in Kashmir and Nepal, but religions throughout India absorbed many of its elements. A key aspect is the belief that the human body is divine and contains within it the hierarchy of the cosmos. This means that through rituals and practice everyone has the potential to achieve spiritual liberation. One Tantric text, the *Ratnasara*, states: “He who realizes the truth of the body can then come to know the truth of the universe.”

The Tantric texts all have a common structure of ritual to be observed. This involves purifying the body, creating a divine self through the chanting of sacred sounds or mantras, internal visualization of a type of worship, and external forms of worship such as the use of mudras (hand gestures) and meditating with sacred images such as yantras (visual representations of chakras) and mandalas. The Tantric texts hold that we can all attain bliss through undertaking a spiritual journey, the journey of Kundalini through the body.

It is said that Tantric wisdom can only be passed on by a guru properly initiated into the tradition. The lineage of Kundalini yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan can be traced back to around 1900 BCE and King Janaka of Mithila, a region now part of Nepal. Originally passed down through the line of kings, this tradition was then passed in the 16th century to Guru Ram Das, the fourth of the 10 Sikh Gurus, who was regarded by Yogi Bhajan as his teacher. When practising the teachings of Yogi Bhajan, we tune in with the Adi Mantra (see pages 58–9) which links us to this Golden Chain of teachers.

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