

## SIGN LANGUAGE

Kundalini yoga uses *mudras*, or hand gestures, to focus your energy. Each one is said to promote different qualities and benefits.

Kundalini yoga gives professional opera singer Kathryn McCusker a greater sense of connectedness through both mind and body.

# Rediscovering Kundalini

*This ancient practice can help to relieve stress, calm the mind and energise the body with a sense of spirituality, says Kathryn McCusker*

*Photography: Jules Selmes*

**K**undalini. This ancient Sanskrit term may conjure up all kinds of images and ideas for you. Mysticism, secrecy, ritual, perhaps even the attainment of bliss or enlightenment.

But what exactly is Kundalini yoga? It has been misunderstood for decades in the West, but recently increasing numbers of people have been discovering the benefits of the tradition. Kundalini emerged from the meditative practices of ancient Hindu India, possibly as long as 4,000 years ago, and it incorporates a focus on the chakras, movement, breathing exercises and chanting. Today, people from all cultures, backgrounds and beliefs are using it as a tool to relieve stress, calm the mind, energise the body, and ultimately to connect with a profound and transforming spirituality.

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. I discovered yoga early on 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. Burnt out after a hectic schedule of singing and touring, I headed to a yoga retreat in Chichén Itzá, Mexico. Intrigued by a 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 realised 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.

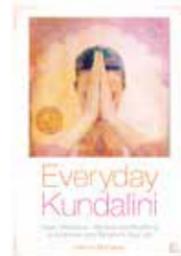
Ancient texts describe Kundalini as a female energy, called Shakti, and explain how this energy, or power consciousness, can rise through the body to unite with pure consciousness in the form of the male Hindu supreme deity, Shiva. In many ways Kundalini yoga can be seen as the uniting of the dualities present in all of us – positive and negative, active and passive, male and female. The word Kundalini itself literally means ‘the coil in the hair of the beloved’, and symbolises 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 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. The awakening of this energy comes through a meditation that combines techniques such as focused breathing, *mudras* (hand gestures) and mantras (sacred sounds). 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 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 new, 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 positive and the negative in us.

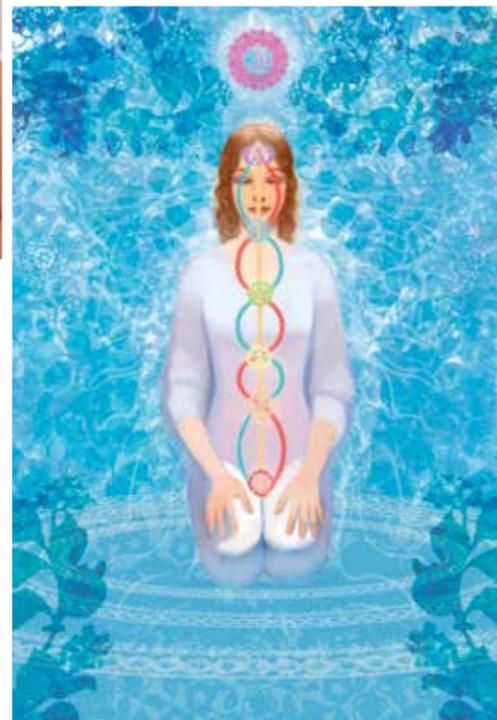
It is an extraordinarily powerful practice that we can all integrate into our everyday lives. Even if you have only a short amount of time to practise, one Kundalini meditation can bring about real transformation. Look to the next page to find a Kundalini meditation for creativity that I like to do when I need inspiration. ☺



This is an edited extract from *Everyday Kundalini: Yoga, Meditation, Mantras and Breathing to Empower and Transform Your Life* by Kathryn McCusker (Watkins, £14.99)



Clockwise: Kathryn practises Kundalini as part of a yoga sequence; Kundalini hand gestures; the practice focuses on the chakras, or energy centres.



## Kundalini creativity

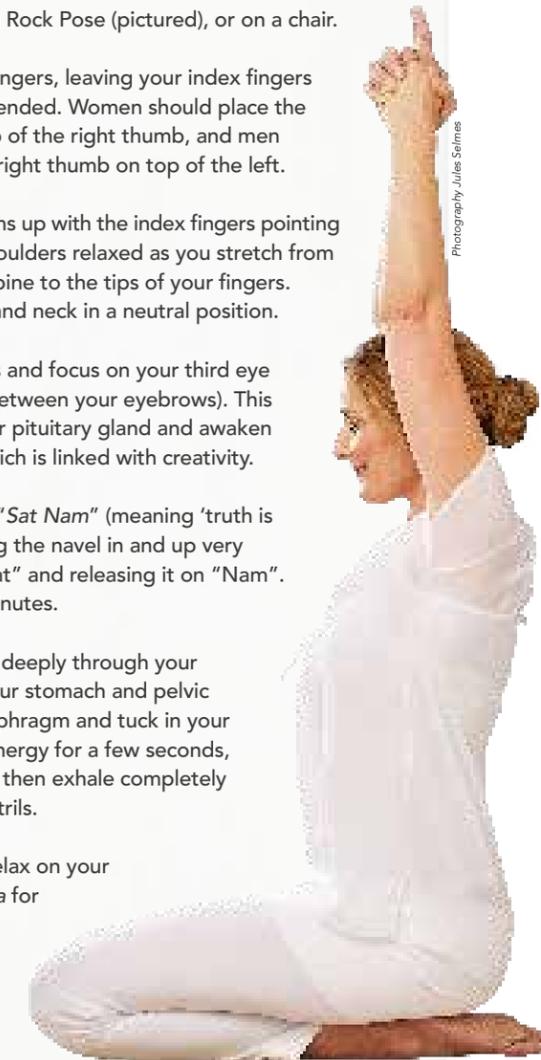
THIS MEDITATION, KNOWN AS SAT KRIYA, IS GREAT FOR WHENEVER YOU’RE FEELING BLOCKED CREATIVELY AND LACKING IN INSPIRATION

- \* Sit in a kneeling Rock Pose (pictured), or on a chair.
- \* Interlock your fingers, leaving your index fingers together and extended. Women should place the left thumb on top of the right thumb, and men should place the right thumb on top of the left.
- \* Stretch your arms up with the index fingers pointing up. Keep your shoulders relaxed as you stretch from the base of the spine to the tips of your fingers. Keep your head and neck in a neutral position.
- \* Close your eyes and focus on your third eye (just above and between your eyebrows). This will stimulate your pituitary gland and awaken your intuition, which is linked with creativity.
- \* Begin to chant “Sat Nam” (meaning ‘truth is my name’), pulling the navel in and up very powerfully on “Sat” and releasing it on “Nam”. Continue for 3 minutes.

\* To finish, inhale deeply through your nostrils, pull in your stomach and pelvic floor, lift your diaphragm and tuck in your chin. Focus the energy for a few seconds, looking upwards, then exhale completely through your nostrils.

\* Lie down and relax on your back in *Shavasana* for twice as long as your meditation. Let go, so the energy can circulate through your body.

Caution: Do not practise this meditation if you are pregnant or menstruating heavily.



Photography: Jules Selmes