

Scientific Research

Dr Sat Bir Singh is a neuroscientist. He is an Associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School. Since many years he studies the effects of yoga and meditation on health. He is the director of yoga research at Yoga Alliance. That is the largest network of yoga teachers with over 90,000 members. He is also the research director of the Kundalini Research Institute, KRI in short.

In February 2021 he hosted a workshop¹ on scientific research carried out on yoga and meditation. During the Q&A session, he was asked to what extent Yogi Bhajan's kriyas produce the results they promise in their titles. He said:

If I were to teach them, I would not mention those names to the students.
My recommendation is to teach the kriyas without giving too much explanation.
Just allow people to experience what the exercises bring to them.
If you want to mention the name of the kriya, you could say something like: *Yogi Bhajan said that this kriya is good for the heart.*

Someone asked him to elaborate on the scientific research that was done on *Kirtan Kriya*. The positive health effects of this popular kriya were measured in a scientific context². The study revealed *statistically significant reductions in depression and anxiety and improvements in perceived self-efficacy*. The website of the Alzheimer Research & Prevention Foundation³ says that practising Kirtan Kriya for just 12 minutes a day has been shown to reduce stress levels and increase activity in areas of the brain that are central to memory.

Kirtan Kriya goes like this: The mantra *Saa-Taa-Naa-Maa* is chanted while the tip of your thumb alternately touches each fingertip.

On *Saa*, your thumb tip touches the tip of your index finger,
on *Taa*, the tip of your middle finger,
on *Naa*, the tip of your ring finger and
on *Maa*, the tip of your pinkie.

The chanting starts in a normal voice for a fixed number of minutes, three for example. Then you whisper for the same period.

Then the practice continues in silence for double the amount of time.

Then you come back to the whispering, and you finish with chanting out loud again.

Exact instructions and accompanying music can easily be found on the Internet.

¹ The workshop was organized by the Kundalini Research Institute and the theme was: the Understanding of Biomedical Science Behind Yoga and Kundalini Yoga Research.

² National Library of Medicine – Int J Geriatr Psychiatry - Jan 28, 2013 – H. Lavretsky et al. – A pilot study of yogic meditation for family dementia caregivers with depressive symptoms: effects on mental health, cognition, and telomerase activity.

³ Alzheimer's Research & Prevention Foundation – 'Practice the 12-minute Yoga meditation exercise. - <https://alzheimersprevention.org/research/kirtan-kriya-yoga-exercise/>

This is what Dr Sat Bir Singh said about the scientific research:

We know that the results of the tests were positive at various levels. What we do not know is the contribution of each individual component to the result. The effect of the mudra (the finger touching pattern), the mantra, the sitting posture, the voice changing from loud, to whispering, to quiet, and back again. They were not measured separately. Nor do we know the effect of timing is.

Are the results similar if *Kirtan Kriya* is done while chanting *Do-Re-Mi-Fa* or *La-la-la-la* instead of *Saa-Taa-Naa-Maa*?

Or if you waved your hands instead of touching your fingertips one by one with your thumb?

Such experiments did not happen and probably never will. And that is just as well.

Scientific budgets should be spent more wisely.

Today there is solid scientific evidence to confirm that meditation and exercise are good for both your physical and mental well-being.

Let's keep it that way.