

THERE ARE CHALLENGES IN TEACHING KUNDALINI YOGA, and we know how to prepare for them through daily *sadhana* and lifestyle choices. There are also many practical challenges in finding a teaching niche, creating or adapting the environment in which we teach, and in handling unusual problems in classes.

### Teaching in Specialized Settings

#### Finding Our Teaching Niche

How can we tailor a class for different groups of people? The IKYTA directory lists specialties of many teachers—contact them for information about teaching materials that may have already been created, or specialty courses that may be offered. You can search the online KRI Certified List of Kundalini Yoga Teachers to find out who is teaching in any specialty at [www.kundaliniyoga.org](http://www.kundaliniyoga.org). You can put in the word “seniors,” or “women’s” or “pre-natal” or “childrens,” etc. to find out who is teaching what.

People with specialties can also form study groups to exchange experiences and develop teaching materials. There is much material from Humanology as taught by Yogi Bhajan that fits into yoga classes for special interest groups such as addiction recovery groups, corporate groups, and healthcare groups. Following are some examples and general tips for approaching teaching in these specialized areas.

#### Teaching the Adult Population—

##### Community & Fitness Centers, and Academic Institutions

These are great places to begin teaching. Many people will go to an institution they know and trust, but they might not go to a course advertised in *New Age* magazines or health journals. Also you will meet a great variety of people with interesting backgrounds and fitness levels. And you can begin to create a mailing list for future use.

- ▶ There are many recreation places in cities, and the staff are always looking for new and innovative programs. At the same time, they are looking for trends that will be popular, that will fill up the spaces in their facilities all day and evening most days of the week.
- ▶ Yoga classes do well on Monday to Thursday evenings. Other forms of yoga may be occupying these evenings, but situations change quickly, and after you have started teaching, you may be able to switch to a more favorable time. Depending on location, it may take a while to establish a class at other times of the day, unless you teach where there is daycare or a seniors population.
- ▶ These institutions generally look for six to ten week sessions

of an hour to an hour and a half. You can also try one day or half-day workshops on the weekends.

- ▶ It is best to link your sessions closely to the advertising they do in the community—often a recreation guide is mailed out three or four times a year.
- ▶ Methods of payment vary.

*Suggestions:*

- ▶ Visit several facilities and to assess if they suit your needs.
- ▶ Check out the classrooms and see if the environment will work.
- ▶ Approach management in places that are a good fit. You can make contact by phone, letter, fax, e-mail, or cold call. Approach with a cover letter addressed specifically to one contact person, a proposal, and a resume. A business card and brochure can be helpful but are not essential.
- ▶ Beginning Kundalini Yoga and Meditation are excellent courses to propose initially.
- ▶ Yoga for Seniors works well in some centers, though they may be looking for volunteers. If you stay with one institution, you can build up more advanced or specialized series later.

#### Pre-natal Yoga

The energy of a pregnancy yoga class is different from the energy in other Kundalini Yoga classes. The pregnant woman has a Navel Center that is very open, and she is extremely sensitive. Generally the classes are more supportive and gentler, so as to provide a support system for the pregnant woman who is undergoing constant changes. Women are encouraged to be easy on themselves during pregnancy. Remember that even the limitations for doing yoga while pregnant are written for yogis! You may make adjustments if the pregnant woman has never done any exercise. Make sure she gets permission from her doctor.

- ▶ It is very appropriate to teach techniques of relaxation, breathing, meditation, and gentle yoga.
- ▶ Always remind the pregnant student to listen to her body and to rest when necessary, even if the exercise is not finished. She should not exercise to the point of exhaustion.

The following exercises should not be done during pregnancy after the 120th day, or if a woman has any medical complications:

- ▶ Refrain from exercises which apply pressure to the abdominal area. (i.e. Bow Pose, etc.)
- ▶ Refrain from exercises and *pranayam* that over-stimulate.
- ▶ No Breath of Fire. Yogi Bhajan has stated that light Breath of Fire in the first 3 months is permissible if health permits. She should check with her doctor.

- ▶ No *mulbandh*.
- ▶ No leg lifts (except while lying on the side).
- ▶ The pulse should not go above 140 beats per minute.
- ▶ No inverted postures (i.e. shoulder stand).
- ▶ No Sat Kriya.
- ▶ Caution the pregnant student about lying on the back after approximately the fourth to sixth month. After that, lying on the back is uncomfortable and can be dangerous for the mother since the weight of the baby unfavorably stresses the mother's blood pressure. Let the mother decide what feels good for her. Suggest she relax on her side and avoid postures on the back after this time.
- ▶ This is not a time to be told to keep up or exercise harder.
- ▶ Pregnant women should not take cold showers.
- ▶ Women should not do Venus Kriyas at all during pregnancy.

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In a Pregnancy Yoga class, a Kundalini Yoga teacher can explain that each woman has the power to bring a child into the world who is a saint, a hero, or a giver. It is your role to help mothers-to-be understand the strength of their projection in instilling values in their children, which can help change the destiny of the Earth.

- ▶ Meditations that help to strengthen the woman's ability to instill values are often incorporated into each class.
- ▶ Discuss pregnancy, and the importance of meditation, especially after the 120th day when the soul arrives.
- ▶ Give special attention to the adverse effects of smoking, alcohol and drugs and the importance of good diet and nutrition.

*Walking Meditation during pregnancy:* It is best to limit physical exercise during pregnancy. Instead, emphasize meditation and chanting, and regular walking or breathwalking with a slow, steady breath pattern.

Yogi Bhajan also recommends *cham japa*, a walking meditation, for couples. The couple walks with hands held, chanting *Sat Nam* with the left step, *Wahe Guru* with the right step.

### Post-Natal Yoga

- ▶ Exercises include gradual strengthening of abdominals, Kegel muscle exercises (especially if she had a C-section), and Kundalini Yoga *kriyas* done less intensely than in a regular yoga class.
- ▶ Teach the importance of restoring the Navel Point using common sense. This strengthening of her identity allows the mother to help the child develop his or her identity.

- ▶ Teach how to breathe diaphragmatically, since many mothers have never taken yoga before their pre- or post-natal classes.
- ▶ In post-natal yoga talk about the child being within the aura of the mother for the first 40 days.
- ▶ Emphasize how the family revolves around the mother, and that self-care and support are essential.
- ▶ Mention the significance of the baby's first three years and when to begin yoga for the mother and the baby.

### Teaching Children

- ▶ Yoga for children is age-specific—very young children can start doing yoga in classes designed for Moms and tots. Even 2- and 3-year olds can be taught yoga. Classes can be designed for pre-school (ages 4-6), primary (ages 6-8), junior (ages 9-11), intermediate (ages 12-14). All have varying developmental issues such as: attention span; ability to be quiet; need for snacks (watch for food allergies); and tendency to go to the bathroom. So extra class assistance may be required.
- ▶ Invoke the child's imagination through stories, songs, poems, activities, and games. Create an imaginary environment—they can pretend they are animals or imaginary creatures in some exercises.
- ▶ Don't be concerned about following a fixed routine (a *kriya*, or set).
- ▶ The length of class time spent in actual yoga varies (15-30 minutes), also the length of: warm-ups (3-5 breaths per pose or exercise), yogic exercises (20-90 seconds), and rest in between. Times should be dependent on attention span.
- ▶ Sometimes special games are helpful such as doing yoga in pairs, or having an animal puppet wake them up after relaxation.
- ▶ Children can begin a light Breath of Fire at age 5.
- ▶ Reduce the time in *pranayam* and be creative to keep the child's interest.
- ▶ Creativity and visualization help during relaxation (1-5 minutes). Meditation is also short, especially at first (1-5 minutes).
- ▶ Be firm when you need to be, and in disciplining, focus on the behavior and not the child.
- ▶ Yoga for children can take place in scouts or guides, preschools, public or private elementary schools, during church Sunday school, community centers, in the home or just about anyplace that children gather.

*Resources:* Shakta Kaur Khalsa, *Fly Like a Butterfly*. Baba Hari Dass, *A Child's Garden Yoga*.