

# UC Santa Barbara

## UC Santa Barbara Previously Published Works

**Title**

From Maharaj to Mahan Tantric: The Construction of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6r63q6qn>

**Journal**

Sikh Formations, 8(3)

**Author**

Deslippe, Philip Roland

**Publication Date**

2013-03-14

Peer reviewed

**From Maharaj to Mahan Tantric: The Construction of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga**  
**Philip Deslippe**

**Originally published in:** *Sikh Formations* (Volume 08: Issue 03, December 2012, pages 369-387) as part of a special issue titled *The 3HO Sikh Community*.

**Available at:**

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17448727.2012.745303#.UfrTDW3N5Nd>

**Author Contact:**

Philip Deslippe, Religious Studies Department, University of California Santa Barbara, 4001 HSSB, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-9670.

Email: [pdeslippe@umail.ucsb.edu](mailto:pdeslippe@umail.ucsb.edu)

**Abstract:**

This article will detail the influences upon and construction of Kundalini Yoga as introduced, taught and propagated in the West by Yogi Bhajan (1929-2004), by delving into the lost history of the practice's earliest years through previously neglected sources such as its documentation in rare early texts and interviews with early students and associates. As opposed to the official history of Kundalini Yoga that claims it as an ancient and secret tradition prior to Yogi Bhajan's open teaching of it, this article argues that it was a bricolage created by Yogi Bhajan himself and derived from two main figures: a hatha yoga teacher named Swami Dharendra Brahmachari (1924-1994) and the Sikh sant Maharaj Virsa Singh (1934-2007). It is the aim of this article to provide clear evidence as to what Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga is and what it is comprised of, put forward the historical and cultural context in which it was developed and presented by Yogi Bhajan, and ultimately offer possible conclusions that could be drawn from this revised understanding.(1)

**Keywords:** Kundalini Yoga, Yogi Bhajan, 3HO, Sikhism, New Religious Movements

**Introduction:**

On October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2004 the man born as Harbhajan Singh Puri and popularly known as Yogi Bhajan died of complications from heart failure at his home in Espanola, New Mexico. The obituary that ran in the New York Times a few days later called him the "Boss of Worlds Spiritual and Capitalistic," a fitting title for someone who in the course of three and a half decades had built up numerous large businesses, counted politicians and dignitaries as close friends, and was held as spiritual leader. Despite its size or its many facets, Yogi Bhajan's legacy and empire was decidedly built upon the practice of Kundalini Yoga. Wherever his students located themselves, as primarily Sikhs, employees of the businesses, healers, yoga teachers, yoga practitioners, or a combination thereof, virtually every single person was introduced to Yogi Bhajan and his Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization (3HO) through the practice of Kundalini Yoga.

Previously untaught to the public and presented as distinct from other forms of *hatha* yoga being taught, Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga was a vigorous and intense combination of postures or *asana*, rhythmic movement, chanting, meditation, and intense breathing exercises or *pranayama*. Within the framework of an ancient, sacred, and [369] previously secret yogic tradition that uniquely claimed ties to Sikhism and its ten human Gurus, Kundalini Yoga offered its practitioners powerful experiences and a lifestyle that went well beyond yoga and meditation to encompass everything from diet and sleep to dress and relationships.(2)(3) If it is difficult to conceive of Yogi Bhajan's legacy without Kundalini Yoga, then it is just as easy to see how many of its practitioners placed it at the very center of their lives.

A few months after newspapers and wire services ran their obituaries of Yogi Bhajan, *Aquarian Times*, the official magazine of 3HO, ran an obituary of their own in the form of a tribute issue to honor their spiritual guide. Nestled between the personal memories, tales from 3HO's early years, and dozens of old photographs, was an article written by Shanti Kaur Khalsa, one of Yogi Bhajan's senior students, titled "My Teacher's Teacher"(Khalsa 2005). Crafting a smooth narrative from fragments of Yogi Bhajan's lectures that had been retold and passed on by his students for decades, Shanti Kaur's piece told of Yogi Bhajan's training in Kundalini Yoga from his teacher Sant Hazara Singh. While just a young boy, the privileged and spirited Yogi Bhajan was sent to study under his teacher, a Sikh sant and mystic who had memorized the 1430-page Siri Guru Granth Sahib and was a master of the martial art of Gatka, White Tantric Yoga, and Kundalini Yoga. Sant Hazara Singh was a strict disciplinarian and brutally demanding, often putting his young student through exhaustive trials and yogic training that molded his character. At the age of sixteen, and just before Partition would tear India apart, Sant Hazara Singh declared Yogi Bhajan a master of Kundalini Yoga, ended his own role as his teacher, and told him that the two were never to see each other again.

For students of Yogi Bhajan the history of Sant Hazara Singh is more than a matter of simple genealogy or lineage. Yogi Bhajan taught that that in Kundalini Yoga the link that stretched back to antiquity from student to teacher formed the "Golden Chain." Every time Kundalini Yoga is practiced, whether privately or in a public class, the mantra "Ong Namo Guru Dev Namo" is intoned three times to "tune in" to this Golden Chain and to be guided and protected by it (Khalsa 1996, 14). Sant Hazara Singh is the only tangible person offered that precedes Yogi Bhajan in the lineage of Kundalini Yoga. The idea of The Golden Chain also helps to bolster the accepted belief in 3HO that Kundalini Yoga was an ancient practice that was forced into secrecy for centuries until Yogi Bhajan taught it openly in the West. The secrecy explains why nothing predating Yogi Bhajan seems to mention the specific details of Kundalini Yoga's practice in the same context, while The Golden Chain of masters and their students explains how such a practice could be passed down and remain intact until the late-1960s.

But when the Golden Chain of Kundalini Yoga is investigated rather than invoked, it unravels. Within the first two years of 3HO is a hidden and vigorously revised history that stands in stark contrast to the accepted understanding of what Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga is and where it originated. A three-month trip Yogi Bhajan took to India with eighty-four of his students in December 1970 can be seen as the dramatic, demarcating pivot that ended the initial

understanding of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga and birthed its current, popularly understood mythology. Instead of a single unaltered lineage, there lies a progression of forgotten and abandoned teachers, figures invented and introduced, and a process of narration and mythologizing born out of cultural context, temporal events, and pragmatic necessity.[370]

### **The Sant and The Swami**

When Yogi Bhajan first began teaching his Kundalini Yoga in Los Angeles, he did not mention Sant Hazara Singh as his teacher and guide, rather he deferred to a Sikh sant named Virsa Singh. Born in present-day Pakistan about eight years after Yogi Bhajan, Virsa Singh moved with his family to the Indian-controlled section of the Punjab during the Partition of 1947. Soon after the move and near the age of ten, the young Virsa Singh became quiet and introspective, detaching from worldly life and meditating for twelve hours a day. He then had a vision of Baba Siri Chand, the son of the Guru Nanak, who appeared to him in physical form. Baba Siri Chand instructed the young Virsa Singh to repeat the *Naam* of *Ek Onkar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru*, and later, Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh also appeared to Virsa Singh (Fisher 1992, ch. 20). Virsa Singh became itinerant and miracles and healings were done through him. As the renown of his spiritual power spread he was referred to as "Maharaj." By the late-1960s, Maharaj Virsa Singh was living in New Delhi at 9 Teen Murti Street, a house given to his student and member of Parliament, Nirlep Kaur, and by 1968 a farm and spiritual center to be known as Gobind Sadan was being constructed on the outskirts of the city, inspired by the models of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh and with the Siri Guru Granth Sahib at its center.

Yogi Bhajan was living in New Delhi at this time, but it was his wife, born Inderjit Kaur Uppal and popularly known today as Bibi Ji, who was the initial devotee of Maharaj Virsa Singh. A student of Maharaj Virsa Singh was told by Maharaj himself how Bibi Ji would carry bricks and dirt on her head to help the construction at Gobind Sadan, and before there were buildings on the land, would sleep on the ground after a day of service there.(4) It was Bibi Ji who told Yogi Bhajan to go to Maharaj Virsa Singh and receive darshan from him (Khalsa 1970b, 2). In time, Yogi Bhajan himself would bring others to Maharaj Virsa Singh, including Major Sahib, the man who gave Gobind Sadan its name (Singh 2010). During his first years in the United States Yogi Bhajan would often repeat a story of how he would visit Maharaj Virsa Singh after he finished his day's work as a customs officer at Delhi's Palam airport. Still in his uniform, Yogi Bhajan would dutifully clean the toilets at Gobind Sadan until one day Maharaj Virsa Singh was emotionally touched by his student's devotion and then physically touched Yogi Bhajan at his third-eye point between his eyebrows, inducing an ecstatic and enlightening state of "cosmic consciousness." This story was written up, printed, and offered as one of the few pieces of 3HO literature available to students and guests in the early days in Los Angeles.(5)(6)

While there is no secondary confirmation of Yogi Bhajan's story of being touched on the forehead and becoming enlightened, Maharaj Virsa Singh himself stated that he gave Yogi Bhajan the *Naam* of *Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru* in 1968, something that Yogi Bhajan himself recounted in an early lecture he gave in Los Angeles and was often repeated within 3HO (Yogi Bhajan 1969; Anonymous 1970a). According to devotees of Maharaj Virsa Singh, the *Naam* of *Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru* can be traced back at to Guru Gobind Singh and a

*Janamsakhi* from Bhai Ram Koer, a Sikh from the Court of the Tenth Guru (Singh 2008, 115). Maharaj Virsa Singh would give *Naam* openly and publically, often to large crowds of people, but at times he would give it directly to individuals. Outwardly, the process of giving *Naam* is simple: the Master recites the mantra [371] *Ek Ong Kar- Sat Nam- Siri Wahe Guru*, to the student in three parts, the student repeats each section back to the Master in turn, and the whole mantra is repeated back and forth in this way for three rounds. Inwardly, the giving of *Naam* is described as a much deeper and powerful mystical experience. A former student of Yogi Bhajan who went on to study with Maharaj Virsa Singh after Yogi Bhajan's death, Bhai Himat Singh, described the experience of receiving *Naam* from Maharaj Virsa Singh as something encompassing blessing and a transmission of spiritual power. Just before Bhai Himat Singh was given *Naam*, Maharaj Virsa Singh told him, "I am going to give you the same *Naam* I gave your teacher before he went to America!" (B.H. Singh 2009). It was the chanting of this *Naam of Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru* that was at the center of the practice of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga during its first two years, and constantly reprinted posters of this mantra would claim that chanting it for two and a half hours a day for forty consecutive days would liberate the practitioner.

Yogi Bhajan also claimed that he was sent to the West by Virsa Singh and that shortly before departing, he was presented with his master's sandals in a ceremony. In his earliest days in the United States, as a matter of deep respect, Yogi Bhajan would place those sandals on his altar, and a photograph of these sandals was included on a brochure printed to promote a celebration of Maharaj Virsa Singh's birthday.(7) Warren Stagg, Yogi Bhajan's second host in Los Angeles after Doctor Amarjit Singh Marwah, remembers that Yogi Bhajan would place sandals on the bed he was given and sleep on the floor.(8) While, again, there is no secondary confirmation of the narrative involving the giving of sandals, the term which Yogi Bhajan repeatedly used to describe Maharaj Virsa Singh was clear: Master (Khalsa 1970a; Yogi Bhajan 1969).

#### **Figure 1 [372]**

Beyond the term "Master," there is a wealth of further evidence documenting the relationship Yogi Bhajan claimed with Virsa Singh. A photograph taken by Lisa Law in 1969 of the New Buffalo Commune in Arroyo Hondo, New Mexico, clearly shows an image of Virsa Singh placed on an altar of one of Yogi Bhajan's students, above a photograph of Yogi Bhajan and below a poster of the "Code Mantra" of *Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru*.(9) The 3HO ashram in Tucson, Arizona was named the "Maharaj Virsa Singh Ashram" in honor of Yogi Bhajan's teacher.(10) One of Yogi Bhajan's senior teachers during this time, "Baba" Don Conreux claimed that in helping 3HO's rapid expansion during its earliest years, he was helping to fulfill "the Hookum (Holy Order) given to him by Yogi Bhajan from Maharaj Ji, to train 108 teachers to open 108 Ashrams" (Khalsa 1970c, 11). The birthday of Maharaj Virsa Singh was celebrated by Yogi Bhajan's students in February of 1970 as a holiday with a week of around-the-clock chanting of *Naam* in two-and-a-half hour shifts leading up to the day itself (Khalsa 1970a, 2).

While chanting the *Naam of Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru* was essential to the students of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga, the physical elements of the practice did not come from

Maharaj Virsa Singh, but rather from a Hindu yogi named Swami Dharendra Brahmachari, five years the elder of Yogi Bhajan. When he was just an adolescent, Dharendra met his guru, Maharishi Kartikeya, in Bihar and began to study yoga and related subjects under him (Bhramachari 1973, xiii). By the time he was in his forties, Swami Dharendra Brahmachari was a teacher in his own right and based out of his Vishwayatan Yogashram in New Delhi. In addition to growing acclaim, he counted Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi among his students. It was at this center in the early 1960s where Yogi Bhajan began to study with Swami Dharendra Brahmachari. The former director of the ashram, Mrs. Vanmala Vachani, described Yogi Bhajan as a frequent visitor to Dharendra's classes, but not a very close student or acolyte.(11)

While Swami Dharendra Brahmachari was viewed as a teacher of hatha yoga, the essence of his teaching was *Sūkṣma Vyāyāma*, described as “a subtle practice aiming at cleansing the nervous-, nadi-, and glandular-systems in order to achieve higher awareness in the body.”(12) It is within the *Sūkṣma Vyāyāma* and Swami Dharendra's unique teachings that the defining physical characteristics of Yogi Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga can be found.(13) The most significant of the numerous similarities between the two include: the use of the rapid diaphragmic breath through the nose known as *Bhastrikā Prāṇāyāma* (renamed as “Breath of Fire” by Yogi Bhajan) while holding postures, the frequent use of the posture *Uttānapādāsana* in which the buttocks rest on the floor and the head and feet are raised off the ground (renamed by Yogi Bhajan as “Stretch Pose”), the holding of postures for extended periods of time which Dharendra would teach “to enter a state of trance and meditation,” and the retention of the breath and the application of internal bodily locks known as *bandhas* at the conclusion of an exercise or pose.(14)

## Figure 2

Dharendra's *Sūkṣma Vyāyāma* was also the source for several of the unusual and numerous rhythmic, callisthenic “back and forth” exercises Yogi Bhajan taught as Kundalini Yoga including: turning the head left and right, rotating the head and neck in circles, extending the arms straight out in front of the body in punching, jerky motions, rotating the arms in circles forward and backwards, standing and stretching the arms up and back while stretching the body backwards and inhaling (renamed by Yogi Bhajan as “Miracle Bend”), alternately kicking the buttocks with the heels of the feet to stimulate the kundalini energy, and squats with the arms extended straight out in front of the body (renamed by Yogi Bhajan as “Crow Squats”).(15)[373]

The influence of Swami Dharendra Brahmachari was not only absorbed through Yogi Bhajan's time at the Vishwayatan Ashram, it was also taken literally by the book. The two English-language titles of Swami Dharendra's teachings were included in the bibliography of a 2003 book of photographs and poetry dedicated to Yogi Bhajan's hatha yoga practice and claimed expertise in the late 1960s (Khalsa 2003, 204). In 1975, the 3HO magazine *K.R.I. Journal of Science & Consciousness* published their special Summer Solstice issue which would later be reprinted as an instructional manual titled *Kundalini Yoga for Intermediate Practitioners*. Both printings included a section written by Gurucharan Singh Khalsa, a student of Yogi Bhajan and director of the Kundalini Research Institute, titled “The Navel Point” that was a crude and

unaccredited reworking of the chapter “*Nabhi Cakra*” from Dhirendra’s earlier work *Yogic Sūkṣma Vyāyāma*. The 3HO publications included a four-part “Navel Adjustment Kriya” that was presumably offered as a Kundalini Yoga exercise, but was taken directly and in the same sequence as Dhirendra’s four-step “Self-Treatment of the Navel” exercises.(16)

### **The Construction of Kundalini Yoga**

When placed alongside the teachings of Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari and Maharaj Virsa Singh, it becomes strikingly apparent that at least in its earliest years, Yogi Bhajan’s Kundalini Yoga was not a distinct practice, but essentially a combination of yogic mechanics learned from the former and the Sikh-derived mantras and chanting from the latter. Sometimes these two practices would be juxtaposed, and Kundalini Yoga students would chant *Naam* immediately following a yoga set. They were also frequently intertwined, and rhythmic yogic exercises were coordinated with mantras such as “*Sat Nam*” and “*Wahe Guru*,” and the chanting of “*Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam Siri Wha Guru*” was done with deep breathing and the application of internal body locks known as *bandhas*. Yogi Bhajan himself acknowledged this coalescence in an early lecture, saying

There are two ways to find the Divine. One way is that you open the solar plexus and charge your solar centers. You get direct with the Divine. The other method is [374] that you concentrate and meditate and get this sound (*Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam Siri Wha Guru*) in you, and it directly charges your solar centers and in this method you get the Divine light to you.

(Yogi Bhajan 1972, 7)

While this *mélange* was presented as a seamless form to students of his Kundalini Yoga, Yogi Bhajan was radically combining two disparate practices and making significant modifications to each. Maharaj Virsa Singh did not believe in yoga as a spiritual path, and his followers at Gobind Sadan did not practice any form of physical yoga. Yogi Bhajan’s references to Maharaj Virsa Singh as the inspiration under which he learned “*Nam Yoga, Laya Yoga, and Mantra Yoga*,” were rhetorical, trying to include Maharaj Virsa Singh within his system by way of a very broad definition of the word “*yoga*” which itself was never used at Gobind Sadan (Khalsa 1970b, 2).(17) Similarly, Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari’s teaching of yoga and *Sūkṣma Vyāyāma* was done firmly within the context of the *Yamas* and *Niyamas*, or the codes of conduct found within the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, particularly complete sexual continence and a strict interpretation of *Mitahara* or diet that would have forbid the “*trinity roots*” or garlic, onions, and ginger that Yogi Bhajan promoted to his students. In the process of combining the teachings of Maharaj Virsa Singh and Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari, Yogi Bhajan also made his Kundalini Yoga more palatable and appealing to his young audience in the United States.

While Kundalini Yoga comingled elements from both Maharaj Virsa Singh and Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari, each these two figures were represented in distinctive ways that point towards a conscious and deliberate construction by Yogi Bhajan of himself as a leader and Kundalini Yoga as a distinct practice. For Yogi Bhajan’s initial students, Maharaj Virsa Singh was openly acknowledged as the teacher of Yogi Bhajan and a powerful, mythologized touchstone for their practice. Many early students, unaware of one another, echo the claim that the early years of

3HO were “all about Virsa Singh.”(18) In stark contrast, these same students knew little about Swami Dharendra Brahmachari, hearing about him as an associate of Yogi Bhajan or the head of a yoga center Yogi Bhajan taught at, if at all. To an outside audience, it was just the opposite. Yogi Bhajan’s connection to Maharaj Virsa Singh was never mentioned to the press or public, while he constantly used the professional credential of being of Swami Dharendra’s “House of Yoga of Vishwayatan Ashram” and pointed out its two most famous pupils, Indira Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru.

The reasons for claiming Swami Dharendra Brahmachari publically and Maharaj Virsa Singh privately make sense in the context of the time. The respectable and professional credential of the former would make Yogi Bhajan look more serious and noteworthy for newspaper readers and the general public. For his young students, most of whom were primed on the lore of Carlos Castaneda, Paramahansa Yogananda’s *Autobiography of a Yogi*, and tales of Zen masters, a teacher who was a student of a great teacher had a stronger claim to spiritual knowledge and power than an “orphaned” or “self-realized” teacher without a pedigree that pointed to an established lineage or antiquity. Yogi Bhajan would paradoxically be more significant as the student of a great master than as the head of his own singular and contemporarily constructed practice.

But lineage was a double-edged sword. Most spiritual teachers who came to the United States from the East in the late-1960s had received their position after the passing of their own teacher, and mundanely speaking, risked none of what they built in the [375] West by praising their forbearers. As attested to by the students of Baba Ram Das who went to India to find his teacher Neem Karoli Baba, or the readers of Carlos Castaneda’s works who ventured into the Mexican desert to find his alleged and elusive Yaqui guide Don Juan, a living teacher of a teacher who was even remotely accessible could prove to be a legitimate rival. Yogi Bhajan was in the awkward position of having not one, but two of his teachers alive, well, and available to his own students. Additionally, there were serious disconnects between what he taught his students and what his claimed teachers taught. This tension would grow within the rapid expansion of Yogi Bhajan’s first two years as a teacher in the West, and would foster a radical shift in how he portrayed himself and his students understood him in the wake of a catastrophic and dynamic three-month trip Yogi Bhajan took with his students to India in late-1970 and early-1971.

### **The Raising of Kundalini Yoga and the India Trip of 1970-71**

The late-Sixties were an incredible boom time for Eastern spiritual teachers in the West. For someone like Yogi Bhajan, charismatic, physically imposing, and offering the secrets of the mythical and dangerous kundalini energy, Los Angeles in 1969 was the right place at the right time. While Yogi Bhajan’s initial plans in America were to sell items to Hippies as part of an import/export business (fitting for a customs officer), he quickly made yoga his business.(19) There seemed to be no limits to his growth among Hippies as a teacher in his own right, and with an almost franchise-like pattern, Yogi Bhajan offered an accelerated teacher training program consisting of only a few weeks, and then quickly dispatched his newly minted teachers

across the country to open satellite 3HO ashrams. Soon, there were Kundalini Yoga teachers in a rapidly expanding list of college towns and major cities.

In this atmosphere of seemingly limitless possibilities for a yoga teacher, Yogi Bhajan's view of himself and role as a teacher began to quickly shift. As the year 1970 unfolded, Yogi Bhajan began to modify his previous claims and distanced himself from Maharaj Virsa Singh in three main ways: the reverence of Maharaj Virsa Singh was diluted as he became the most important teacher within an ever-expanding list of teachers Yogi Bhajan claimed, the figure of Guru Ram Das, the fourth Sikh Guru, was introduced as Yogi Bhajan's "personal Guru," and Yogi Bhajan himself was increasingly placed in the role once reserved for Maharaj Virsa Singh, often in the same terms.

In July of 1970, *Beads of Truth* published a one-page article titled "Who Is Yogi Bhajan?" which reads as part biography and part resume, with a lengthy list of the teachers that Yogi Bhajan studied with. This article, nearly a year and a half after Yogi Bhajan began to teach Kundalini Yoga in the United States, appears to be the first mention in print of the figure of Sant Hazara Singh, who in two brief lines is mentioned as the teacher of "Kundalini Yoga and other various yogas." The list continued with Yogi Bhajan's grandfather Bhai Fatha Singh, Sant Ranjit Singh who taught "universal spirituality" and comparative religions, Swami Devmurti under who Yogi Bhajan obtained "mastery of Hatha Yoga and Raja Yoga," Acharya Narinder Dev of Yoga Smitri in New Delhi who taught Yogi Bhajan hatha yoga and "the impact and balance of the nervous system," the Sivananda Ashram in Rishikesh where Yogi Bhajan "was able to drink deep and fill his mind and heart with the Sanatana Dharma," and Swami Dharendra Brahmachari [376] who taught "Yoga Therapy" and at whose ashram Yogi Bhajan claimed to be "Senior Professor of Yoga."(20)

The early account Yogi Bhajan offered of washing the bathrooms for Maharaj Virsa Singh was changed to him "finishing his duties at the airport" and going "directly to the famous Golden Temple at Amritsar where his wife would bring food and with the children, join him for dinner, before he started his daily routine of scrubbing the floor of the temple" (Khalsa 1970b).(21) While Maharaj Virsa Singh was still revered as "Master," he was viewed more as a capstone to Yogi Bhajan's lifetime of spiritual searching, which was curiously a process of searching that now had mastery of Kundalini Yoga at its mid-point.

In the spring of 1970 photographs began to be sold of Yogi Bhajan, clad in all white, seated in full-lotus with his palms together at his chest, staring deeply into the camera lens (3HO 1970).(22) Around the same time, an enthusiastic Kundalini Yoga student encouraged readers of *Beads of Truth* to "meditate on your Guru's picture, see through his eyes," and another student who taught Kundalini Yoga in Memphis remembers being told to bow before the picture of Yogi Bhajan and seek guidance from him before teaching each class (Anonymous 1970a).(23) By the summer of 1970 Yogi Bhajan was regularly flanked in print by the titles "spiritual guiding force of 3HO" and "Master of Kundalini Yoga." The sandals of Maharaj Virsa Singh no longer had their place on Yogi Bhajan's bed; in both a literal and symbolic sense, that space was now his.(24)

In the last few days of 1970 Yogi Bhanan took a group of approximately eighty students for a three-month spiritual pilgrimage to India. Yogi Bhanan told a reporter shortly before the trip that the group was on a fact-finding mission in India to research how to best get the youth of America off drugs via yoga (Claiborne 1970). For those within 3HO, the point of the trip was to visit and stay at Gobind Sadan, "home of Yogi Bhanan's beloved master, Maharaj Virsa Singh Ji" (Khalsa 1970c, 11). Yogi Bhanan told Jim Baker, one of his senior students in Los Angeles, to come on the trip for the purpose of getting the blessing of his teacher (Aquarian 2007, 46).

The trip would end up radically shifting its focus and on the group's return three-months later Maharaj Virsa Singh would be *persona non grata*, the figures of Sant Hazara Singh and Guru Ram Das would become central, and Yogi Bhanan would audaciously claim titles of Sikh administrative authority over half of the globe and Tantric mastership. In light of his growing following and shifting view of his role as a leader, even if Yogi Bhanan did in fact leave India in the fall of 1968 as a devout student of Maharaj Virsa Singh, then it is doubtful that he returned to India two years later as one, given the shift in the portrayal of himself and Maharaj Virsa Singh.(25) It is also doubtful that he would not have foreseen a conflict with the major differences in what he was teaching his students and what Maharaj Virsa Singh was teaching at Gobind Sadan. If Yogi Bhanan was not intentionally looking for a break from his master, then it was a development he would have welcomed.

Almost immediately upon arrival, the jetlagged group was welcomed by Indira Gandhi at the gardens of the prime minister's palace, where one of Yogi Bhanan's students, Andrew Ungerleider, demonstrated hatha yoga postures for her and Swami Dharendra Brahmachari. Indira Gandhi, moved by the interest the young Americans had in India, spoke to the group, and then they all held hands and chanted "Om" together.(26)(27) The group then went outside the city to Gobind Sadan, but in less than [377] a week, Yogi Bhanan dramatically broke from Maharaj Virsa Singh and the group quickly left Gobind Sadan and relocated to a mango farm. One American student remembers the group being suddenly told that Virsa Singh was not Yogi Bhanan's teacher and that the departure was political, with Maharaj Virsa Singh wanting Yogi Bhanan to support someone politically, although it is hard to imagine Yogi Bhanan, a mid-level customs officer over two years removed from India, having any amount of political influence worth fighting over in the elections that were taking place at the time.(28)

Yogi Bhanan would later claim that he left because Maharaj Virsa Singh wanted to be recognized as Yogi Bhanan's teacher, which seems strange since Yogi Bhanan claimed as much time and time again. Yogi Bhanan insisted in later retellings that the fourth Sikh Guru, Guru Ram Das, was his true teacher. According to Yogi Bhanan, Maharaj Virsa Singh asked if in keeping with having a guru, if Guru Ram Das gave Yogi Bhanan a mantra, and the next morning during his personal meditation, Guru Ram Das tangibly appeared in front of Yogi Bhanan and gave him the mantra "Guru Guru Wahe Guru Guru Ram Das Guru."(29) The story was frequently repeated by Yogi Bhanan over the years and seemed to serve several ongoing purposes simultaneously: solidify the claim of Guru Ram Das as Yogi Bhanan's personal Guru, position Guru Ram Das as the patron saint of 3HO, further link Yogi Bhanan and Kundalini Yoga to the Sikh tradition, and put distance

between Yogi Bhanan and his previously claimed devotion to Maharaj Virsa Singh (Yogi Bhanan 1987, 1990b, 1995).

Those who were closest to Yogi Bhanan and Maharaj Virsa Singh recount much more material and directly embarrassing reasons for the former breaking from the latter. Early devotees of Maharaj Virsa Singh recall him telling the group of students in front of Yogi Bhanan that he never taught anyone yoga and that yoga had nothing to do with Sikhism. Rather, for Maharaj Virsa Singh, Gobind Sadan and its inspiration from Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh was the model for the spiritual path: hard work, remembrance of God, taking money from no one, and sharing with others in need. Yogi Bhanan's secretary during the trip, Premka Kaur, said "he had to be in a lineage... he couldn't let someone else have it anyway because he would lose that control." (30) Another person present recalled Yogi Bhanan wanting a type of territorial agreement in which Yogi Bhanan would "keep" his students and Gobind Sadan would become a type of "3HO East." (31) Yogi Bhanan's proposal was laughed at by Maharaj Virsa Singh and with self-induced pressure, Yogi Bhanan left soon after in a huff. (32)

Keeping the mango farm as a base, the trip dramatically shifted and despite no previous mentioned intention of Sikhism being a focus on the trip, day after day the group went to one Gudwara after another. Students were dressed in white Punjabi clothes, performed basic kirtan, and were told to not mention yoga. One participant remembers being told, "If Indian Sikhs ask you anything about what you're doing, just say '*Naam Japo*.'" (33) The idea of American "Gora Sikhs" was unimaginable in the Punjab, and Yogi Bhanan's students drew large crowds where they went. The buzz around the group grew and in early March they were hosted at the Golden Temple in Amritsar where Yogi Bhanan presented himself as a Sikh missionary and was feted. Some members of the group were married and others took Amrit, although it is doubtful that they knew the details or larger implications of what they were doing. One recalls that they were told what to do and how to carry themselves. "Basically none of us knew what we were even doing... we were just silent pawns in however we wanted to be portrayed... just following the instructions of (Yogi Bhanan)." (34) In a bizarre crescendo, the India trip [378] ended with Yogi Bhanan being arrested on charges of defrauding a man named Amarjit Singh for 10,000 rupees, quickly being bailed out, and then fleeing the country with his students after being nearly stopped at the airport (Sharma 1971; Anonymous 1971). (35)(36)(37)

### **Sant Hazara Singh and the Title of Mahan Tantric**

In the spring of 1971, shortly after returning from the India trip, Yogi Bhanan announced to his students after his morning meditation that he had been passed the mantle of "Mahan Tantric." According to Yogi Bhanan, there was only a single Mahan Tantric on the earth at any time, and his earlier pride meant that the title was previously passed to another student of Sant Hazara Singh, the Tibetan Lama Lilan Po, before coming to him (Gurutej S. Khalsa 1995, 15). As understood in 3HO, it is only under the watch of the singular Mahan Tantric that White Tantric Yoga can be done, a non-sexual form of yoga in which his students would sit in rows facing each other in male/female pairs, staring into one another's eyes, and under the supervision of the Mahan Tantric, perform exercises lasting up to an hour or more. (38) Both the timing and the title were curious, since at the very least, Tantric courses were taught in both Los Angeles and

Arizona in the Fall of 1970, well before the title of Mahan Tantric was bestowed, and early teachers of Kundalini Yoga also taught classes of the same type of yoga before they were told it “took too much energy out of Yogi Bhajan” (Schneider 2003, 71).(39)

The discrepancies make sense in light of the historical housecleaning that was quickly done in early-1971 in the wake of Yogi Bhajan’s break from Virsa Singh. Maharaj Virsa Singh was struck from the record within 3HO, as were the minor living teachers that were listed in the July 1970 “Who Is Yogi Bhajan?” article in *Beads of Truth*. If Maharaj Virsa Singh was referred to, it was never by name and always as a type of boogey-man who in numerous recountings challenged Yogi Bhajan, tried to keep Yogi Bhajan’s students from becoming Sikhs, and was covertly responsible for any dissonance between Western and Punjabi Sikhs (S.K. Khalsa 2010). From the first India trip onwards, all of the influences that Yogi Bhajan claimed and placed with the lineage of Kundalini and White Tantric Yoga, became inaccessible: from Sant Hazara Singh to the Tibetan Lama Lilan Po to the Sikh Gurus themselves. As the former executive secretary of 3HO has described it, “All of Yogi Bhajan’s claims about lineage or teachers were not able to be substantiated since all teachers that he referred to were (conveniently) expired.”(40)

Guru Ram Das and the figure of Sant Hazara Singh took center stage, and any deference or mythologizing given to Maharaj Virsa Singh was now cast onto them or to Yogi Bhajan himself.

The original story of Yogi Bhajan cleaning toilets for Maharaj Virsa Singh, which was turned into washing the floors at the Golden Temple after work, was again recast into part of Yogi Bhajan’s claimed narrative of studying under Sant Hazara Singh (Yogi Bhajan 1996a, 1999). The description of the Mahan Tantric, a unique title held by only one person on earth at a time, echoed Yogi Bhajan’s previous description of Maharaj Virsa Singh as “the master of the time.” Yogi Bhajan’s dress of flowing all-white clothing and the even way he sat bore a striking resemblance to how Maharaj Virsa Singh [379] carried himself.(41) The *Naam* that Yogi Bhajan said he received from his former master was now referred to in 3HO publications as “our *Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru*” (Khalsa 1971a). In October of 1971, 3HO began the practice of celebrating the birthday of Guru Ram Das, and soon that annual celebration would revolve around chanting the *shabad Dhan Dhan Ram Das Guru* for two and a half hours just as *Ek Ong Kar Sat Nam Siri Wahe Guru* was chanted to honor Maharaj Virsa Singh on his birthday (Khalsa 1971b).

While the figure of Sant Hazara Singh became central, when all of Yogi Bhajan’s claims about him are brought together, it seems highly improbable that if such a figure existed that he would not have been documented elsewhere.(42) In addition to being a master of Sikh martial arts, Kundalini Yoga, White Tantric Yoga, and someone who had memorized the entire Siri Guru Granth Sahib, Yogi Bhajan claimed that his Sant Hazara Singh organized an armed defense of the city of Anandpur during Partition, remained ageless and had over 250 students including the Tibetan Lama Lilan Po who would have been remarkably studying under a Sikh teacher in the Punjab at a time when Tibet was closed off (Khalsa 1979, 29; Yogi Bhajan 1983, 1996b). The man Yogi Bhajan appointed as his biographer, Guru Fatha Singh Khalsa, has by his own admission never found outside information on the figure of Sant Hazara Singh.(43)

Beyond the late introduction of Sant Hazara Singh and the convenient timing of his elevated importance, perhaps the strongest evidence against his existence comes from Yogi Bhajan himself. The accepted narrative within 3HO, taken from Yogi Bhajan directly, is that he trained under Sant Hazara Singh from the age of seven until sixteen and a half, when he was declared a Master by his teacher (Yogi Bhajan 1990a).(44) However, on numerous occasions during his first years in the West, Yogi Bhajan himself dated the beginning of his yogic study to a time *after* he would later claim to have finished his studies under Sant Hazara Singh. Yogi Bhajan initially told reporters that he had been studying yoga “since he was eighteen” and in interviews in both 1968 and 1969, he claimed to have studied for twenty-two years, and in 1970 that number was adjusted to twenty-three years, which at 1946 and 1947, would have made him either seventeen or eighteen years old when he began to study yoga (Hampton 1968; Altschul 1969; Anonymous 1970b; Gray 1970). An early article by the “mother of 3HO” Shakti Parwha Kaur also describes Yogi Bhajan’s meeting with Virsa Singh as the apex of the former’s “22 years search for Truth,” once again placing the beginning of Yogi Bhajan’s spiritual quest at a post-Partition time following his claimed completion of studies under Sant Hazara Singh (S.P.K. Khalsa 1970b, 2).

With decades to solidify, this shift has become the accepted standard within 3HO today, where nearly all practitioners know of the claimed connections the practice has with Sant Hazara Singh and Guru Ram Das, but hardly anyone is aware of Maharaj Virsa Singh or Swami Dharendra Brahmachari.

### **Conclusion**

When viewed openly, the early history of 3HO is remarkable in the extent that it was so thoroughly revised and replaced as the organization aged, with a figure so initially revered as Maharaj Virsa Singh eliminated and a theoretically essential figure as Sant Hazara Singh introduced only after a year and a half of going unnoted. One explanation [381] of the successful revision of Kundalini Yoga’s history is simply timing. Since these changes occurred in the first two years, there was less of a past to revise, and the passing of time helped to further solidify the new narrative as many of the earliest people in 3HO cycled out of the group. In later years, many students who joined after the first two years were recognized as “old-timers” with decades of experience, and their understanding was given merit even though they were ignorant of 3HO’s earliest and most formative years that often contradicted its later understanding of itself.

The most significant aspect of the hidden history of Yogi Bhajan’s Kundalini Yoga, is the central epistemological problem at the foundation of 3HO’s understanding of Kundalini Yoga and its own lineage. Like a small restaurant that places mirrors on opposing walls to create the appearance of depth, it is from the singular person of Yogi Bhajan that all information about the lineage and practice of his Kundalini Yoga originates. From the lectures of Yogi Bhajan and notes taken in his classes came the instruction manuals, books, and 3HO periodicals such as *Beads of Truth* and the later *Aquarian Times* that elucidated the practice of Kundalini Yoga. In time, despite contradictions within Yogi Bhajan’s statements and a lack of supporting evidence

from secondary sources, outside writers and scholars relied on 3HO's own materials to describe the composition and lineage of Kundalini Yoga to wider audiences, creating a long and citable bibliography that seems to verify the claims made about the practice.

Yogi Bhajan was free to revise the understanding his students had of Kundalini Yoga, its origins, and his own personal lineage, since like many other charismatic leaders within New Religious Movements, his word was accepted *prima facie* by his followers without any need for outside confirmation. While Yogi Bhajan himself can be seen as the primary editor of the understanding of his Kundalini Yoga and its claimed lineage, this filtering was reinforced by figures close to him who wrote and edited 3HO's periodicals and literature. By eliminating certain events and quotes and emphasizing others, they often revised history and gave a more consistent form to the narratives within 3HO. Shakti Parwha Kaur would say in late-1972, despite everything she wrote in *Beads of Truth* about Maharaj Virsa Singh in 1970, that when she first met Yogi Bhajan "he had placed his total faith, his total dependence" on Guru Ram Das (Khalsa 1972). With more rank-and-file members this process of resolving conflicting and disparate information could be more subtle, even to the point of being unconscious. An unwitting description of this approach can be seen in Ravi Har Singh, who in describing the process of writing a book based on Yogi Bhajan's "non-linear and multidimensional" lectures recently admitted, "I found that he (Yogi Bhajan) rarely develops a concept completely in one place, at one sitting. Instead he often delivers fragments of concepts across a wide number of lectures. It is up to the researcher to apply a good dose of intuition to bring these fragments together into a coherent whole" (Khalsa 2011).

Adding another dimension to Yogi Bhajan's role as the filter of knowledge in the earliest years of 3HO were the barriers of language, culture, and personal experience. On the first trip to India none of Yogi Bhajan's students spoke Punjabi or were familiar with Sikh customs, let alone Indian culture at large. While some of Yogi Bhajan's students would describe firsthand his break with Maharaj Virsa Singh or the events at the [382] Golden Temple in 1971, it is doubtful that they themselves understood what was occurring at the time independent of what they were told via Yogi Bhajan. Even a student who was nearby when Guru Ram Das supposedly appeared to Yogi Bhajan on the 1970-71 trip and reverentially verified his story, did not see the fourth Sikh Guru with her own eyes, and could only find proof through her own interpretation of what she saw in Yogi Bhajan and what he related (Khalsa 1978).

A close inspection of the events between 1968 and 1971 suggest that Yogi Bhajan was acutely aware of the ways he was presenting his yoga and often reimagined it to suit his audience: at times for long term goals and at other times to suit immediate needs. The figures of Sant Hazara Singh, and to a lesser extent, Lama Lilan Po, were used to cover for the actual personages and influences of Maharaj Virsa Singh and Swami Dharendra Brahmachari, giving a provenance to Kundalini Yoga that also secured Yogi Bhajan's possession of it. Without the lineage that he claimed and without creating Kundalini Yoga out of whole cloth, Yogi Bhajan is best thought of as neither a lineage holder nor inventor, but a *bricoleur* who brought together elements of different practices and presented them to his students as a distinct entity with a

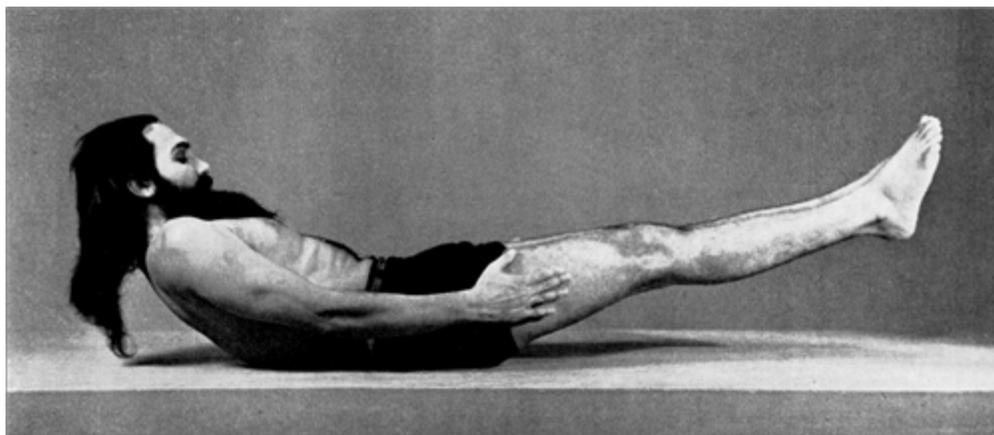
romantic mythology surrounding it. Perhaps this says as much about Yogi Bhajan as it does about the expectations and hopes of those who believed him.

While this paper suggests a radical shift in the accepted understanding of what Kundalini Yoga is and who Yogi Bhajan was, in one sense it also suggests a lateral shift. When the popular mythology of Kundalini Yoga is inspected and dismantled, an ancient lineage of Kundalini Yoga and the figure of Sant Hazara Singh are lost, but we are still left with esoteric yogic practices and a powerful teacher in the Sūkṣma Vyāyāma of Swami Dharendra Brahmachari and the figure of Maharaj Virsa Singh. This provides both a truer sense of Kundalini Yoga and a more realistic explanation of why it works as it does for its practitioners.

Some critics and ex-members of 3HO try to dismiss the practice of Kundalini Yoga entirely, often basing their view on contradictory evidence within Yogi Bhajan's claims or by contrasting the practice with accepted Sikh orthopraxy. But with vast numbers of teachers and students of Kundalini Yoga over the decades, it is unrealistic to think that all of them were deluded, found no benefits through its practice, or did not have profound experiences through it. Kundalini Yoga was often described by Yogi Bhajan and 3HO as "The Yoga of Experience." When viewed critically and historically, perhaps the individual experience of its practitioners, and not the figure of Yogi Bhajan or the mythology of the Golden Chain, is the most honest and fruitful vantage from which to view it.[383]



**Figure 1: Maharaj Virsa Singh standing in the freshly ploughed fields at Gobind Sadan, outside of New Delhi, circa 1971. Image with permission of Gobind Sadan archives.**



**Figure 2: Yogi Bhajan's teacher Swami Dharendra Brahmachari demonstrating the posture *Uttānpādāsana* in the mid-1960s. Image from Plate 59 of the 1970 edition of *Yogāsana Vijñāna: The Science of Yoga*.**

## **Notes:**

(1) Followers of Yogi Bhajan will commonly refer to him by the title “Siri Singh Sahib” as a matter of deference to a title he claims he received in early 1971 at the Golden Temple that made him the Sikh authority of the Western Hemisphere. Critics of Yogi Bhajan will often refer to him by his birth name, Harbhajan Singh Puri, as a way of consciously stripping him of titles they consider fraudulent. He is referred to as “Yogi Bhajan” in this article to primarily reflect the way he was most popularly known and to also stand distinct from both views. The figure of Virsa Singh was referred to as Maharaj in his earlier years and Baba Virsa Singh in his later years. While both “Maharaj” and “Baba” are respectful titles, in this article he will be referred to as Maharaj Virsa Singh, in keeping with references made to him both within 3HO and at Gobind Sadan during the time period focused on. The phrase “Kundalini Yoga” will be capitalized to denote the specific practice that Yogi Bhajan taught and to keep references distinct from other practices that were referred to as kundalini yoga. Finally, the term “3HO” will be used as an umbrella term to encompass the various organizations created by Yogi Bhajan and his followers, since this was the first organization and it, along the variation “3HO Family,” has been used in a similar way within internal literature.

(2) While Kundalini Yoga has simply been described as “ancient” by 3HO for the last several decades, through the 1970s an approximate date of its birth was given by 3HO as 26,000 B.C. See “Yoga: The Origins and Development of Yoga and the Science of Kundalini Yoga as Taught by Yogi Bhajan” by Rama Kirn Singh and Gurucharan Singh Khalsa in *Kundalini Quarterly*, Summer 1976, 2-8, and a mention of Yogi Bhajan in the November 28, 1970 issue of the *Arizona Republic*.

(3) Some of the many instances in which Yogi Bhajan asserted that the historical Sikh Gurus practiced the same Kundalini Yoga that he taught include classes on June 10, 1971 and January 12, 1976, and undated Kundalini Yoga exercises such as “Indra Nittra Meditation” and “Ong In Virasan (For Negativity).” In the summer of 1976, an article was written in *Kundalini Quarterly* by Gurucharan Singh Khalsa and Rama Kirn Singh that claimed that not only did the Sikh Gurus practice Kundalini Yoga, but that very yogic practice predated them and “gave rise to a group of practitioners known as Sikhs.”

(4) Interview with Bhai Himat Singh, telephone, 16 June 2011. Bhai Himat Singh was a practitioner of Kundalini Yoga and a direct student of Yogi Bhajan’s for approximately two decades, beginning in 1983. After Yogi Bhajan’s death, Bhai Himat went to Gobind Sadan where he spent time with Maharaj Virsa Singh and was given Naam by him.

(5) Interview with Ron Brent, telephone, 6 January 2011. Brent was an early student of Yogi Bhajan’s in Los Angeles. In late-1970 he left to become a student of Swami Muktananda and travelled to India to spend time with him. By coincidence he was staying at Gobind Sadan when Yogi Bhajan and his students arrived in late-1970. He not only saw the group at Gobind Sadan, but during that time was one of five people in a small meeting between Yogi Bhajan and Maharaj Virsa Singh, and at Maharaj Virsa Singh’s insistence, had the Punjabi conversation translated into English for his comprehension.

(6) Interview with Antion Vic Briggs, telephone, 5 July 2011. Also known as Vikram Singh Khalsa, Briggs was in 3HO for approximately two decades starting in January of 1970, and was a Mukhia Singh Sahib (or senior minister) within the group.

(7) Interview with Antion Vic Briggs, telephone, 5 July 2011.

(8) Interview with Warren Stagg, telephone, 8 June 2011. In the mid-1960s Stagg owned and operated H.E.L.P. on Third and Fairfax, one of the first health food restaurants in the city, which quickly became a meeting place for New Age people, teachers arriving from the East, and “everyone on a health trip.” Stagg described himself during this time as “the guru greeter of Los Angeles.”

(9) Available to view on the online “Communal Living” exhibit on the website of the Smithsonian: <http://americanhistory.si.edu/lisalaw/6.htm#h05>

(10) Interview with Andrew Ungerleider, telephone, 23 June 2011. Ungerleider began practicing Kundalini Yoga in the fall of 1969 in Arizona and then later in the spring of 1970 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He was present on the 1970-71 trip to India and left 3HO in the mid-1970s after 3HO made its turn towards strict discipline and the reorientation towards Sikhism.

(11) Correspondence with Reinhard Gammenthaler, 21 September 2011. Gammenthaler was a close and the final student of Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari. His tutelage is described at length in an interview with Schweizer Yoga-Journal from 2003 that is available at [http://asianyogaholidays.com/interview-gammenthaler-DB\\_en.html](http://asianyogaholidays.com/interview-gammenthaler-DB_en.html).

(12) Correspondence with Reinhard Gammenthaler, 21 September 2011

(13) Descriptions of Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari’s yogic teachings are based on his two books that were translated into English, *Sūkṣma Vyāyāma* (1973 edition) and *Yogāsana Vijñāna* (1970 edition), and correspondence with his student Reinhard Gammenthaler.

(14) Correspondence with Reinhard Gammenthaler, 23 and 21 September 2011

(15) Parallels to these rhythmic exercises can be found in Swami Dhirendra Brahmachari’s *Sūkṣma Vyāyāma* (1973 edition) as exercises #9, 10, 13, 16, 22, 41, and 43.

(16) Compare images #5-10 from *Kundalini Meditation Manual For Intermediate Students* with images #105-108 in *Sūkṣma Vyāyāma* (1973 edition).

(17) If the practice of Naam was common among both students of Yogi Bhajan and Maharaj Virsa Singh, the mechanical and technical practice by the former clearly set it apart from the devotional and emotional practice by the latter.

(18) Interview with Antion Vic Briggs, telephone, 5 July 2011. Interview with Ron Brent, telephone, 6 January 2011.

(19) Interview with Warren Stagg, telephone, 8 June 2011

(20) There is also evidence from a student who spoke at length with Yogi Bhajan for the very logical possibility that Yogi Bhajan’s knowledge of yoga, meditation, and related subjects were not entirely based on these teachers but also heavily supplemented by books and other minor figures. See Harrysingh1 (pseud.), comment on “The Sikh Connection,” *The Wacko World of Yogi Bhajan*, comment posted on February 8, 2005, <http://forums.delphiforums.com/KamallaRose/messages?msg=579.39>.

(21) Considering the 300 miles that separates the airport in New Delhi from the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the possibility of such a commute is extremely unlikely.

(22) This photograph was also sold in a cropped version with only Yogi Bhajan’s face in what seems to be a prototype of the “Tratakam” portrait of him.

(23) Interview with Jim Migdoll, telephone, 7 September 2011. Migdoll was involved in 3HO from early to late-1970, and was sent to Memphis, Tennessee during that time to teach the flagship Kundalini Yoga classes there.

- (24) An account of Yogi Bhajan's sleeping habits was given by early students of his in Florida in their account of an early 1970 visit. See "Early History of the 3HO Foundation According to Hari Singh and Hari Kaur Bird Khalsa," last modified July 19, 2012, <http://www.harisingh.com/3HOHistory.htm>.
- (25) In the commemorative book *The Man Called The Siri Singh Sahib*, the Punjabi-born and London-based journalist Gurucharan Singh Khalsa, described meeting with Yogi Bhajan at Swami Dharendra Brahmachari's Vishwayatan Ashram in early 1968, well before supposedly being told to go to the West by Maharaj Virsa Singh, in which he heard from him that inspired by "some mysterious call from within" he "was planning to leave his job and go to foreign countries as a yoga teacher."
- (26) Interview with Andrew Ungerleider, telephone, 23 June 23 2011.
- (27) A photo of Yogi Bhajan, Indira Gandhi, and Swami Dharendra Brahmachari at this gathering was reprinted in the December 1972 issue of *Beads Of Truth*, page 28.
- (28) Interview with Rahmaneh Meyers, telephone, 18 August 2011. Meyers was involved with 3HO during its earliest years and was a participant on the 1970-71 trip to India.
- (29) The most striking element of Yogi Bhajan's claimed encounter with Guru Ram Das is how closely it paralleled the story that Maharaj Virsa Singh told of receiving Naam from Baba Sri Chand and Guru Nanak, a story that Yogi Bhajan was doubtlessly aware of and his students almost certainly were not.
- (30) Interview with Pamela Dyson, telephone, 23 September 2011. Also known as Premka Kaur Khalsa, Dyson was involved in 3HO from 1969 until 1985 and was the tour secretary for the 1970-71 trip to India. Highly significant in the growth and history of 3HO, Dyson compiled English translations of Sikh sacred writings, wrote numerous articles both for and on behalf of 3HO, and was the editor of *Beads of Truth* for a dozen years, Secretary General of the Sikh Dharma Brotherhood, Vice President and Director of the 3HO Foundation, and a high-ranking minister, with the title of Mukhia Sardarni Sahib.
- (31) Intriguingly, this idea is echoed in the January 1970 issue of *Beads of Truth*, in which Shakti Parwha Kaur hopes to publish an account of the trip in the next issue and refers to Gobind Sadan as "3HO India."
- (32) Interview with Ron Brent, telephone, 6 January 2011.
- (33) Interview with Rahmaneh Meyers, telephone, 18 August 2011.
- (34) Interview with Pamela Dyson, telephone, 23 September 2011.
- (35) Interview with Antion Vic Briggs, telephone, 5 July 2011.
- (36) Later, the blame for the arrest was implicitly laid at the feet of Maharaj Virsa Singh and the debacle was cast as the negative work of "the jealous egos of so-called 'holy' men in India (who) created almost insurmountable barriers to Yogi Bhajan's safe return to America." See Shakti Parwha Kaur, "Guru Ram Das Ji's Birthday Celebration," letter dated September 23, 1971, printed on page 48 in the Autumn 1971 issue of *Beads of Truth*.
- (37) An intriguing possible connection to this event, or perhaps Yogi Bhajan's initial trip West, can be found in Khushwant Singh's 2005 collection of obituaries titled *Death at My Doorstep*, in which he described Yogi Bhajan being confronted at a gathering by the daughter of a man who twenty years earlier loaned Yogi Bhajan Rs. 10,000 "to pay for his air-ticket to Canada... when fleeing from India" (114).

(38) Yogi Bhajan originally taught these White Tantric Yoga classes in person, and later with declining health the courses were done through video tapes and in-person representative “Tantric Facilitators,” a format that continues today, years after Yogi Bhajan’s death.

(39) Interview with Antion Vic Briggs, telephone, 5 July 2011. Interview with Jack Sokol, telephone, 7 September 2011. Sokol was an early student of Kundalini Yoga and studied under “Baba” Don Conreux at Arizona State University in early 1970 before teaching and going through a ten-day teaching training in Los Angeles in the summer of 1971.

(40) Interview with Pamela Dyson, telephone, 23 September 2011.

(41) Interview with Antion Vic Briggs, telephone, 5 July 2011.

(42) There were notable Hazara Singhs who were outside the timeline Yogi Bhajan gave for his claimed teacher: a Bhai Hazara Singh who was killed in 1921 and made one of the first two martyrs of the Gudwara Reform Movement, and a Baba Hazara Singh Sevawale, who supervised the building of the Gudwara in Taraori, north of Karnal, in 1970. If there was in fact a reality-based source for Yogi Bhajan’s early teacher, the most likely suspect who comes remotely close to the timeline that Yogi Bhajan established for him was a Sant Hazara Singh from the village Chhote Ghuman. According to the author Dr. Kulwant Singh Khokhar, who frequently met with him and mentioned him in the acknowledgements section of his 1999 book *Way of the Saffron Cloud*, this Sant Hazara Singh was an uneducated, retired farmer who lived very modestly and barely spoke, a sharp contrast with the tales Yogi Bhajan told of his Sant Hazara Singh.

(43) Correspondence with Guru Fatha Singh Khalsa, email, 15 June 15, 2011.

(44) This contrasts with the earlier claim in the July 1970 issue of *Beads of Truth* that this mastery was obtained by Yogi Bhajan at the age of eighteen.

### **References:**

3HO (Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization) 1970. Display ad. *Beads of Truth*, March, vol. 1 no. 3. Altschul, Marty. 1969. Tense housewives, businessmen try relaxing Hindu way. *Los Angeles Times*, June 22.

Anonymous. 1970. Guru & mantra yoga. *Beads of Truth*, March vol. 1 no. 2, 1.

Anonymous. 1970. Yogi on yoga. *Santa Fe New Mexican*, March 20.

Anonymous. 1970. Television notice. *Arizona Republic*, November 28.

Anonymous. 1971. Yogi bailed out, flies back to US. *Hindustan Times*, March 20.

Aquarian, Isis [pseud.], ed. 2007. *The Source: The untold story of Father Yod, YaHoWa13 and the Source Family*. Los Angeles: Process Media.

Brahmachari, Swami Dharendra. 1970. *Yogāsana Vijñāna: The science of yoga*. New Delhi: Asia Publishing House.

Brahmachari, Swami Dharendra. 1973 [First English edition published 1965]. *Yoga: Yogic Sūkṣma Vyāyāma*. New Delhi: Indian Book Company.

Claiborne, William L. 1970. Yoga students set India trip for drug study. *The Washington Post*, December 23, B2.

Fisher, Mary Pat. 1992. *Everyday miracles in the House of God: Stories from Gobind Sadan, India*. New Delhi: Gobind Sadan.

Gray, Brett. 1970. World must purify self soon, yoga warns. *Orlando Sentinel*, May 31.

Hampton, Edna. 1968. Yoga’s challenges and promises. *The Globe and Mail*, November 28.

Khalsa, Gurucharan Singh, ed. 1975. Kundalini meditation manual for intermediate students. Pomona, California: Kundalini Research Institute Publications.

Khalsa, Gurucharan Singh, and Rama Kirn Singh. 1976. Yoga: The origins and development of yoga and the science of Kundalini Yoga as taught by Yogi Bhajan. *Kundalini Quarterly*, Summer, 2-8.

Khalsa, Gurutej Singh. 1995. Khalsa is born in the west. In *The history of Sikh Dharma of the Western Hemisphere*. Edited by Shanti Kaur Khalsa, 1-25. Espanola, New Mexico: Sikh Dharma International.

Khalsa, Krishna Kaur. 1978. Guru Guru Wahe Guru Guru Ram Das Guru. *Sikh Dharma Brotherhood*, Winter, 8-9.

Khalsa, Premka Kaur [Pamela Dyson]. 1979. Early history. In *The man called the Siri Singh Sahib*, edited by Premka Kaur Khalsa et al. Los Angeles: Sikh Dharma.

Khalsa, Ravi Har Singh. 2011. Becoming Aquarian: How a book deal changed my sadhana and me. 3HO Foundation Kundalini Yoga News. Posted July 21.  
<http://www.3ho.org/ecommunity/2011/07/becoming-aquarian-how-a-book-deal-changed-my-sadhana-and-me-2/>

Khalsa, Shakti Parwha Kaur. 1970. High times. *Beads of Truth*, March, vol. 1 no. 2.

Khalsa, Shakti Parwha Kaur. 1970. Who is Yogi Bhajan? *Beads of Truth*, July, 2.

Khalsa, Shakti Parwha Kaur. 1970. High times. *Beads of Truth*, September.

Khalsa, Shakti Parwha Kaur. 1971. High times. *Beads of Truth*, Autumn.

Khalsa, Shakti Parwha Kaur. 1971. Guru Ram Das Ji's birthday celebration. *Beads of Truth*, Autumn, 48.

Khalsa, Shakti Parwha Kaur. 1972. Lecture at Grace of God Course in Tucson, Arizona, November 10.

Khalsa, Shakti Parwha Kaur. 1996. *Kundalini yoga: The flow of eternal power*. New York: Perigee.

Khalsa, Shakti Parwha Kaur. 2003. *Kundalini postures and poetry*. New York: Perigee.

Khalsa, Shanti Kaur. 2005. My teacher's teacher. *Aquarian Times*, Winter, 38-41.

Khalsa, Shanti Kaur. 2010. Lecture at Gudwara in Espanola, New Mexico, August 7.

Schneider, Carrie. 2003. Krishna Kaur. In *American yoga: The paths and practices of America's greatest yoga masters*. Edited by Carrie Schneider, 68-75. New York: Sterling.

Sharma, Suresh. 1971. Warrant issued against Yogi. *Hindustan Times*, March 19.

Singh, Bhai Himat. 2009. A brief biography of Bhai Himat. Posted December 10.  
<http://www.bhaihimat.com/bio1.htm>

Singh, Bhai Kirpal [AKA Major Sahib]. 2010. Major Sahib's own story. Gobind Sadan USA. Accessed December 11. <http://www.gobindsadan.org/usa-website/41-gobind-sadan-institute/scholars/131-bhai-kirpal-singh.html>

Singh, Ralph. 2008. *A path to follow: Reflections of a student at Gobind Sadan*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.

Yogi Bhajan [pseud.]. 1969. Class lecture in Los Angeles, February 8. [Reprinted in *Beads of Truth* vol.1 no. 7]

Yogi Bhajan [pseud.]. 1972. Mantra: From lectures by Yogi Bhajan. *Beads of Truth*, Summer, 7.

Yogi Bhajan [pseud.]. 1983. Ishnaan, The science of hydrotherapy. Class lecture at unknown location.

Yogi Bhanan [pseud.]. 1987. Class lecture at Ladies' Camp in Espanola, New Mexico, July 31.

Yogi Bhanan [pseud.]. 1990. What it means to be a teacher. Class lecture in Los Angeles, March 23.

Yogi Bhanan [pseud.]. 1990. The meaning of dharma. Class lecture in Los Angeles, April 8.

Yogi Bhanan [pseud.]. 1995. Addresses the healers. Lecture to Khalsa Chiropractic Association, August 2.

Yogi Bhanan [pseud.]. 1996. What is happiness? Class lecture at Master's Touch course in Espanola, New Mexico, July 20.

Yogi Bhanan [pseud.]. 1996. The golden rules of a teacher. Class lecture at Master's Touch course in Espanola, New Mexico. July 22.

Yogi Bhanan [pseud.]. 1999. The experience of your self. Class lecture in Johannesburg, South Africa, December 12.