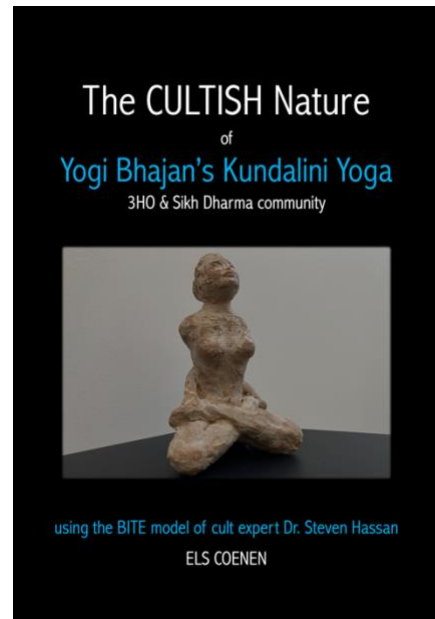


A teaser for the [forthcoming](#) book

The paragraph below is part of

Chapter 3 – Yogi Bhajan’s Teachings Today



## A Scientist’s Point of View

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

In February 2021, I participated in a workshop he hosted on scientific research on yoga and meditation.<sup>1</sup> I was eager to learn how a scientist would interpret Bhajan’s teachings. During the Q&A session, someone asked to what extent Yogi Bhajan’s kriyas produce the results they promise in their titles<sup>2</sup>. He said (I repeat his words as I remember them):

*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.”*

Let’s say that he took ‘the safe road’. Another person asked to elaborate on the scientific research on *Kirtan Kriya*.<sup>3</sup> It had shown a positive impact on people with dementia: ‘statistically significant reductions in depression and anxiety and improvements in perceived self-efficacy.’

In this 2013 pilot study by the Psychology Department of the University of California, people who had been practicing Kirtan Kriya for 12 minutes daily for 8 weeks showed significantly lower levels of depressive symptoms and greater improvement in mental health and cognitive functioning compared with a group who practiced relaxation instead.

To understand Dr. Sat Bir Singh’s answer, you need to know how Kirtan Kriya goes:

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<sup>1</sup> The online workshop was organized by the Kundalini Research Institute, and the theme was the Understanding of Biomedical Science Behind Yoga and Kundalini Yoga Research.

<sup>2</sup> Yogi Bhajan’s kriyas have promising names, such as "Kriya to become strong as steel," "Kriya to boost your immune system," "Kriya to free your energy and defeat depression," "Kriya to make you enchantingly beautiful," "Kriya to open the heart center," and "Kriya to relieve inner anger."

<sup>3</sup> 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, [Link](#).

- . The mantra *Saa-Taa-Naa-Maa* is chanted.
- . On *Saa*, your thumb tip touches the tip of your index finger, on *Taa*, it touches 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 return to the whispering and finish chanting out loud again.
- . The eyes are closed and with each syllable, you imagine the sound flowing in through the top of your head and out the middle of your forehead.



Here is what the neuroscientist said about the research (I repeat his words as I remember them):

*We know that the results of the tests were positive at various levels. We do not know the contribution of each component to the result. The effect of the mudra (the finger-touching pattern), the mantra, the sitting posture, and 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. 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, solid scientific evidence confirms that meditation and exercise are good for your physical and mental well-being. Let's keep it that way.*

Regarding the use of the mantra 'Sa Ta Na Ma' in many of Bhajan's kriyas and meditations, there is a remark from Dr. Trilochan Singh, a Sikh scholar that is worthwhile mentioning here.

*Dr. Trilochan Singh noted with dismay how Bhajan had so much impact on his followers despite having so little knowledge of the holy book [of the Sikhs]. One of the examples he used to substantiate his claims was the mantra Sa Ta Na Ma, frequently part of Bhajan's Kundalini Yoga sets or meditations. Bhajan taught that each syllable had its own meaning: Sa – infinity, Ta – life, Na – death, and Ma – rebirth. Trilochan commented, "In the dictionary of no Indian language can one find the meaning of these syllables, Sa-Ta-Na-Ma, as Infinity-life-death-rebirth. Yogi Bhajan has specially invented it for his American followers and wonder of wonders, they believe him and are prepared to believe any other balderdash in the name of unknown mysteries of Kundalini Yoga."<sup>4</sup>*

Kirtan Kriya is mentioned on the Alzheimer Research & Prevention Foundation (ARPF) website.<sup>5</sup> This tax-exempt foundation in Tucson, Arizona, is run by Dr. Dharma Singh Khalsa, MD. The site mentions he is the founding president and medical director (and the only paid member of the foundation as we'll see below).<sup>6</sup>

His bio can be consulted on the International Association of Yoga Therapists website.<sup>7</sup> It does not mention that he was a long-time student of Yogi Bhajan and published books on using Kundalini Yoga for healing (without mentioning 'as taught by Yogi Bhajan'). Did he remove all references to Yogi Bhajan since the massive allegations came to the surface? I don't know. What I do know is

<sup>4</sup> Under the Yoga Mat, Chapter "Yogi Bhajan and His Yoga", Section "The Conquest of the West; Devotion and Hostility", page 39.

<sup>5</sup> Alzheimer's Research & Prevention Foundation – 'Practice the 12-minute Yoga meditation exercise. - <https://alzheimersprevention.org/research/kirtan-kriya-yoga-exercise/>

<sup>6</sup> Nonprofit Explorer website search on ARPF, [Link](#).

<sup>7</sup> The International Association of Yog Therapists, [Dr. Dharma S. Khalsa's bio](#).

that he was still speaking highly of Bhajan in 2017 when he was interviewed about the scientific research on Kirtan Kriya. He made the following remarkable statement.

*... Yeah, it changes the DNA. If you want to look at it from a very ancient perspective, the gurus said by chanting this mantra, you affect the nucleus of your being.*<sup>8</sup>

It is a pity he did not share where he got this information from. Dr. Dharma Singh was a co-author of the scientific study on Kirtan Kriya mentioned above, which was led by Dr. Helen Lavretsky, a professor of psychiatry.

In May 2023, I watched a 2013 YouTube in which Dr. Lavretsky talked about this research. She said that Kirtan Kriya had been practiced for thousands of years and repeated the made-up meaning of the mantra Sa Ta Na Ma. I contacted her to see if, in the meantime, she had discovered these things did not add up. She told me that she no longer studied Kundalini Yoga and was aware of what had come to the surface since 2020. She confirmed that all this did not change the result of the study, showing that meditation had a positive effect. I agreed.

Looking up the Alzheimer Research and Prevention Foundation on the ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer website reveals that in 2023,

- the income came from: contributions of \$414,347, Program Services of \$84,316, Investments Income of \$67,302, adding up to a revenue of \$575,965, and,
- the expenses went to: a compensation for Dr. Dharma S.Khalsa of \$300,000, and other salaries and wages \$67,604.<sup>9</sup>

The five other people mentioned as key employees were not compensated according to the given data.

With its grandiose-sounding name, the ARPF and its flashy website give the impression something huge is behind it. But, in fact, it is a tax-exempt non-profit that pays a generous contribution to one man. That's it.

The person who provided me with this information (who prefers to stay anonymous) pointed out:

*This is not to diminish what they might be doing to help people with Alzheimer's, but this is a typical Yogi Bhajan strategy: Give it a big-sounding name and fake it. Many people will not look into the details and think that their declarations are coming from the Alzheimer's Association.*

The Illinois-based Alzheimer's Association had a 2023 revenue of 412 million dollars, paying a staff of ten people with high degrees.<sup>10</sup>

Back to Kirtan Kriya: the information on the ARPF website reads:

*Kirtan Kriya (which is pronounced KEER-tun KREE-a) is a type of meditation from the Kundalini yoga tradition, **which has been practiced for thousands of years.** [1]*

*Clinical research has shown that practicing Kirtan Kriya for just 12 minutes a day can improve cognition and activate parts of the brain that are central to memory. **Replacing the Kirtan Kriya sounds with other sounds or replacing the meditation as a whole with other relaxing tasks has not been shown to be effective.** [2]*

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<sup>8</sup> Quote from an interview by Dr. Arjan Khalsa with Dr. Dharma Singh Khalsa (minute 08:45), "Kirtan Kriya – History, Research, and Benefits." May 9, 2017, [Link](#).

<sup>9</sup> ProPublica – Nonprofit Explorer, Arizona, Alzheimer's Research and Prevention Foundation, [Link](#)

<sup>10</sup> ProPublica – Nonprofit Explorer, Illinois, Alzheimer's Disease And Related Disorders Association Inc., [Link](#)

***The Alzheimer's Research and Prevention Foundation believes that the various parts of Kirtan Kriya are each vital to the whole and recommends practicing it in the traditional way to fully reap the benefits of the exercise. [3] That said, other methods of reducing stress, like deep breathing, listening to music, and other types of meditation, may be beneficial to your health.***

About the indications in bold:

**[1]** Dr. Dharma S. Khalsa should know better, right? Why keep this lie going?

**[2]** The healthy reasoning of Dr. Sat Bir Singh is turned around here in a deceiving way, right?

**[3]** They 'believe' the mudra, the mantra, the position, and the mental focus are vital. Based on what? Why do they try to put Kirtan Kriya on a pedestal? Why not just say that this research proves that meditation is good for you? In fact, any meditation done in a safe context is good.

In the long list of Kirtan Kriya research articles mentioned on the site, many appear to be funded by the foundation of Dr. Dharma S. Khalsa.<sup>11</sup>

It is disappointing that scientists involved with Bhajan's teachings do not help to point out the truth behind Bhajan's teachings. Is it not their responsibility?

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<sup>11</sup> List of research articles linked to Kirtan Kriya on the site of the Alzheimer's Research and Prevention Foundation, [link](#).