

# YOGA

The upcoming Kundalini Teacher Training at 7 Centers Yoga Arts in February is one place in the United States where these more traditional practices are being taught.

The training is a month-long intensive, where students agree to abstain from sex, all drugs (including caffeine and aspirin), and basically live in an ashram-inspired environment, with little contact with the outside world. Because of the advanced nature of the practices involved, 7 Centers is only accepting students who meet certain criteria, such as previous completion of a 200-hour yoga teacher training, or recommendation from a Kundalini instructor.

7 Centers Yoga Arts offers daily classes in both Bhajan's style of Kundalini and traditional Hatha Yoga. Check their website [www.7centers.com](http://www.7centers.com) for a current schedule, or call 928-203-4400 for details.

**Rachel Hollingsworth completed the Hatha Yoga Teacher Training at 7 Centers Yoga Arts in 2006 and has taught yoga for the past four years in the US and abroad. Rachel's teaching experience includes a variety of settings, such as colleges and private homes in this country & Micronesia, and at 7 Centers Yoga Arts.**

## The Secret is Out A Look Into Kundalini Yoga

Rachel Hollingsworth

While the ancient Indian practice of yoga continues to gain popularity throughout the world, even avid Hatha Yoga practitioners in the West tend to know very little about Kundalini Yoga. The somewhat mysterious veil surrounding Kundalini Yoga practice is, perhaps, not so surprising, given that it has only been taught publicly since 1968.

Both Hatha Yoga and Kundalini Yoga emerged from India as components of spiritual practice, however, the evolution of these two distinct styles of yoga in the West is vastly different. Hatha Yoga has spawned many branches, and has so many students that virtually every style of yoga well-known in the West today has its roots in Hatha. The many styles include Ashtanga, Bikram, Iyengar, Power, Jivamukti, Yin, and Flow Yoga among others. What unites these various styles is an emphasis on asana, or the physical exercises of yoga, which can build physical fitness, strength, flexibility, and help to reduce stress, thus improving overall physical health as well as mental outlook.

"Kundalini is a style of yoga that is clearly presented as a spiritual practice," says Ruth Hartung, Director of 7 Centers Yoga Arts in Sedona, and long-time Kundalini Yoga practitioner and teacher. Rather than focusing on the health of the physical body, Kundalini's focus is on subtle energy channels and chakras. Nearly all Kundalini classes in the West follow the 3HO (Healthy, Happy, Holy Organization) style, and include chanting mantras about the divine in Gurmukhi (a language spoken in Northern India and Pakistan), moving the body's subtle energy through breathing techniques, meditation, and physical movements.

3HO was founded by Yogi Bhajan (1929-2004), a Sikh who first visited the United States – Los Angeles – in 1968. Embroiled as the country was in various social movements and drug culture among the youth, Bhajan decided that the West needed a health-based yogic practice that would reveal the joy and light he believed was inherent in each person. He broke Sikh tradition and began teaching Kundalini Yoga, mostly to youth of the 60s and others who, while exploring psychedelics had become addicted to drugs. Bhajan helped many people break their dependence or addiction because the practices he taught helped people have "natural highs" without any drugs.

"Even in one's first Kundalini Yoga class, one can experience the activation of the third eye – which we associate with psychic abilities and our intuition. The combination of the signature breath of fire with the movements first activate the energy field and in turn, the chakras," Hartung says. This is also accompanied by an endorphin release and often by unusual visual experiences, such as seeing vibrant colors, recalling past memories vividly, or having spontaneous past-life regression. This is probably why Bhajan was almost immediately embraced by the so-called "flower children."

Once in America, Bhajan formed the American Sikh community, a uniquely Western interpretation of Sikhism, in which Kundalini Yoga is spiritual ritual – similar to a church or temple service. In traditional Indian society, Sikhs made up the warrior class – due to their comparatively large size (Bhajan was 6 foot 3). This background is responsible for the emphasis on strength and stamina in the physical practices of Kundalini Yoga, rather than the flexibility found in Hatha Yoga.

Kundalini and Hatha also differ in their more traditional Indian forms. For example, "hatha yoga" is generally translated to mean "union of the sun and moon," which speaks to the goal of uniting all dualities in the psyche of the student, revealing the oneness yogis speak of as the true nature of the universe. "Kundalini Yoga," on the other hand, translates as "union with divine energy." Kundalini is most often described as a coiled snake, which lies sleeping at the base of the subtle body (the base of the spine), ready to strike upwards. This is not meant literally, of course, but describes the potential to "wake up" the dormant parts of the human brain, and live life within "the full realization of our own divine nature," Hartung says.

As this "atomic energy" moves up the spine from its base, each chakra that is awakened stimulates a certain portion of the brain, manifesting qualities that are typically assigned to superheroes or science fiction, such as clairvoyance, levitation, or clairaudience. In yogic philosophy it is believed that every human being carries the potential for these supernormal or divine "powers" in the dormant seed state and that the activation and awakening of the kundalini is what releases this. This may be the origin of the most-common fear and myth associated with Kundalini Yoga – that it will bring about Kundalini awakening, and is therefore dangerous.

In fact, Bhajan's style of yoga is designed only to strengthen and prepare the body for Kundalini awakening, so the practices are considered very safe. He felt that an actual awakening should only be attempted in an ashram environment, where all food intake and other aspects of daily routine are overseen by the teacher. In other words, techniques for Kundalini awakening are not part of any of the 200+ sets Bhajan's students now teach.

There is a big difference between chakra activation, which is a common occurrence in Kundalini Yoga practices, and an actual Kundalini awakening in a chakra. According to Hartung, who has over 17 years of experience as a Kundalini Yoga teacher, the difference between these two experiences is extreme. As part of a regular Kundalini practice, people can experience "deeply spiritual openings and poetic blissful experiences," she says. A Kundalini awakening, however, makes it "impossible to look at things in the same way ever again, because it so profoundly changes the way you experience reality. It is accompanied by physical changes, sensitivities in the body and nervous system and a movement from 'intellectual knowledge' to real wisdom".



# FITNESS

## Tough Times = a Tougher You!

Kim Hollenback

In these troubled times of economic hardship, sky-high gas prices, new leaders and the possibility of staying in the work force for longer than we originally thought, the importance of maintaining good health is higher than ever before. Diseases such as diabetes, heart disease & cancer are on the rise. Overbooked schedules lend themselves to fast food and skipped workouts, and doing things for ourselves tends to get pushed to the bottom of the to-do list. However, if we don't take care of ourselves, our life force and our vitality, we won't be able to take care of anything or anyone. We need stamina and strength for the tough times that we are experiencing. Taking care of our health has become an even bigger priority than ever before.

It's time to re-commit to taking care of our bodies this season. Not just the usual New Year's resolution to get in shape, but a real change in body awareness. Attention must be paid to how we are "fueling the machine" and how we can add physical activity to our routines. I could write pages and pages of "how to get in shape" but you already know what to do. You know what foods are good for you and which ones aren't. You know what kind of fitness activities you prefer and which people you enjoy doing them with. The challenge now, as it always has been, is getting the motivation to do it.

I'm going to make it easy for you— make up your mind and just do it! I know it sounds cliché but it's true. Decide on the activities and then put them on your calendar or in your day planner and then stick to it. If you had a lunch scheduled with a friend, and something came up, most likely you would keep your appointment with your friend and find a better time to tend to the other matter. Treat your date with yourself as you would any other date or appointment. Plan it, dress for it, reschedule anything else around it, and just do it. Remember, the to-do list is never finished. There will always be more to do, but wouldn't you rather be stronger while you tackle them?

*Kim Hollenback owns Solid Rock Fitness, a one-on-one fitness studio in Sedona, AZ and she teaches aerobics at the Hilton Spa. Kim has been helping people achieve improved health, vitality & quality of life for 25 years. She can be reached at 928.301.0209 and after the New Year look for her new website at [solidrockfitness.com](http://solidrockfitness.com).*

## The Pilates Roll-Up

Lisa Beckstead

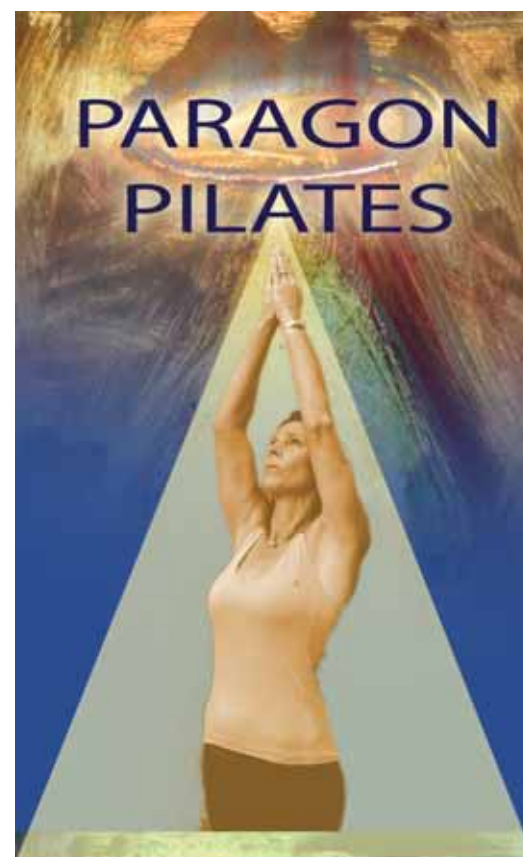
One of the best Pilates exercises is the Roll-Up. It utilizes all of the Pilates principles: engagement of core muscles, proper form and alignment, articulation or movement of the spine, and most important, effective breathing principles to create the movement. Compared to the sit-up, the Roll-Up works muscles deeper in the body and together during all phases of the movement. The best thing is that once properly instructed, this exercise can be done in your home, a hotel room, or anytime you can't get to the gym.

To begin, lie on your back with a straight spine, arms extended overhead, legs together with feet flexed. Visualize your spine lengthening from the top of your head through the soles of your feet. Inhale to prepare, while scooping and lifting your abdominals, pulling them back against your spine. Slowly and purposefully exhale as you draw your arms down in line with your shoulders, chin reaches toward your chest, shoulder blades draw together and down to stabilize them on the back. Continue to hollow through the abdominals as you peel your spine off the mat, feeling each vertebra as it lifts off, coming to a sitting position.

Draw your arms in front of you as you continue to scoop the abdominals back against your spine. Reach forward, staying lifted through the top of your spine, like you are reaching for a ball. Inhale into the side and back of your ribs fully as you begin to roll down, continuing to scoop the abdominals, then exhale as you place each vertebra down, visualizing space and length, arms drawing back overhead. When the back of your hips connect on the mat, feel your pelvis slide underneath you, stretching the hips and low back, then return to a neutral spine with your tailbone lengthened on the mat.

To modify the Roll-Up, you may bend your legs and reach with your arms behind your knees as you roll up and down. You may also have someone hold your feet or place your feet under a stationary object. To challenge the Roll-Up, place your hands behind your head, elbows in line with your ears as you roll up. Remember to keep your abdominal scoop in all phases of the exercise.

*Lisa Becksted is the owner of Paragon Pilates and a certified Pilates instructor and personal trainer. 480.580.1503 or at [www.paragonpilatesaz.com](http://www.paragonpilatesaz.com)*



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Lisa Becksted of Paragon Pilates is a Pilates Method certified instructor as well as a certified Personal Trainer.

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