

The Art of the Gong in Kundalini Yoga Meditation

Yogi Bhajan, Ph.D.

compiled by

Gurucharan Singh Khalsa, Ph.D.

The Use and Science of the Gong

The most sublime instrument of the Yogi is the Gong. It is a musical instrument, a healing tool for the nervous system and a cauldron in which you can create alchemical blends of qualities that open and develop the Inner Self. Yogi Bhajan has asked that each ashram and yoga center have a gong and play it regularly. He said it would help repair the ravages of drugs in the nervous system. The sound of the gong creates deep relaxation, releases you from the torrent of thoughts and stimulates the glandular system to a higher level of functioning. Each student of kundalini yoga is encouraged to become familiar with the basic idea, use and experience of the gong.

To begin, look at the physical gong. It is a sheet of metal that is pounded into a variety of shapes. The gong is usually round. The surface is flat, but rounded on the circumference. The center of the gong is either flat, in which case it is just called a gong, or it is raised into a small dome, in which case it is called a muffled gong.

The surface of the gong is divided into three regions. Each region produces a different quality of sound when it is played. Each area is also symbolized differently. Think of the gong as the sun. It is a symbol of the spirit. It represents the initial stillness and potential of creation. The sound it issues forth is the first movement of the Infinite. Its vibrations are the life currents of all forms, beings and thoughts that exist or can exist. With a single stroke of the mallet, the gong radiates life across a spectrum of frequencies. With a rhythmical pulse that world is maintained and transformed with indefatigable creativity.

The gong is also a complete representation of the subtle world. The sun, or center, is the fire energy of awareness and consciousness, *purusha*. The region of the *prakasha* is where the mind projects and creates. The outer region of the *prakriti* is the manifestation in the concrete patterns of the body and nature.

The Inner Approach to the Gong

The gong is a sacred threshold. It is a portal that links the finite and the infinite experience of the self. Whenever our intention is to cross that portal, we must consciously link to the chain of being. The Golden Link should be established before playing the first note of the gong. The Golden Link is the connection with the lineage of teachers of higher consciousness. It is the connection to your own neutral mind. It is the connection that automatically arises when you consciously put your ego aside and choose to obey and be commanded by your highest self.

When asked to explain the effects of gong meditation and its uses, Yogi Bhajan responded:

"The gong is very simple. It is an inter-vibratory system. It is the sound of Creativity itself. The gong is nothing more, nothing less. One who plays the gong plays the universe. The gong is not an ordinary thing to play. Out of it came all music, all sounds, and all words. The sound of the gong is the nucleus of the Word.

2 - THE ART OF THE GONG

*Today I played **Har Hari** on the gong. It was perfect. I enjoyed it. It was a multiple projective sound. The way I play it is my pleasure. The gong is not a musical instrument, nor a drum. The gong is God. So it is said; so it is.*

The gong is a beautiful reinforced vibration. It is like a multitude of strings, as if you played with a million strings. The gong is the only tool with which you can produce this combination of space vibrations.” (Women in Training - 1984, 7/5/84)

The master player of the gong links himself and attunes his mind to the power of the original sound current.

The proper way to link the mind and the subtle body to play the gong in kundalini yoga is to give a prayer. The prayer can be done internally or out loud. The prayer has three steps to it. You accomplish each step by reciting a mantra. Each mantra relates to a different level of your being. The three mantras in sequence are:

Ad Gurey Nameh - I bow/invoke the teacher who exists at the beginning

Jugad Gurey Nameh - I bow to the teacher who teaches through all times

Sat Gurey Nameh - I bow to the teacher who teaches from the truth

Siri Guru Dev A Nameh - I bow to the unseen subtle teacher of all

Ong Namō - I bow to the infinite creator of all

Guru Dev Namō - I bow to the divine subtle teacher who guides my soul

Ad Such - The truth that existed before beginnings

Jugad Such - The truth that exists through all time and circumstances

Haibhee Such - The truth that exists at this moment

Nanak Hosee Bhee Such - That truth which Nanak's mind sees will ever be true

The first mantra is called a **Mangalacharan Mantra**. This means it is a celebration of the qualities of God. It is an acknowledgment of gratitude and happiness. It invokes the mind to bow before the teacher and to accept the world as a teaching and a blessing. It relates to the daily experience of living on the earth. It is a witness to the joys and sorrows, the successes and failures, the births and deaths that make up the richness of our personal encounter of life. It celebrates that vastness and asks to be taught and guided with each sensation, challenge and moment. The first mantra gives you peace and centeredness. It is a **Bhakti Mantra** - a mental projection of devotion and acceptance of the gift of life and an appreciation of this moment of opportunity where you may play the gong.

The second mantra is the connecting **Adi Mantra**. This invokes a linkage to the lineage of teachers of all times. It establishes a link to the feminine manifesting energy of the world. In the Indian symbolism it relates to the energies of the Goddess Saraswati who rules music and feminine expressiveness. It is this energy which must be invoked to become a channel for the experience of the gong. It gives you subtlety. It is a **Shakti Mantra** - a mental projection that creates the power to manifest what you love.

The third mantra is the initiating **Bija Mantra** - a mental projection that takes you into the subtlest of the creative realms of Being. It comes from the first line of Japji by Guru Nanak. It is a direct kundalini mantra. It raises the kundalini energy and brings the focus of the mind into the ether. It brings you into the place where sound and energy are as compact as a seed - a *bija*. This is the realm of the element of ether.

The first mantra starts at the earth within the realms of ordinary experience. The third takes you to the threshold of the realm of being itself. If you recite these mantras as prayers, with devotion and willingness to put your own ego aside, then you are lifted to the point of Infinity. That is the place from which to play the gong. Let yourself be an instrument for the flow of consciousness. Blend yourself into the energy and qualities of the sound of the gong. In this state the gong becomes a divine instrument. You will avoid the common problems of the ego that seeks loudness and recognition, or that becomes tired or bored, or which seeks cleverness and performance. From the position of Infinity you can serve the consciousness in all the students for whom you play the gong. You can act from duty and from the ecstasy of the sound current of the gong.

The mechanical and reactive nature of ordinary awareness is our normal condition. The wheel in the diagram represents it. The task of self-initiation is to awaken the consciousness from that "normal condition". You must become neutral, unattached, receptive and spontaneous. The spiral represents your final awareness. It signifies the energy, motion and aliveness of the enlightened mind. When you play the gong the tool of enlightenment is initially the attitude of *seva* - doing a service without boundary, limit or self-concern. The mantras project you into that internal position. Then the impact of the sound of the gong consolidates and expands that initial state.

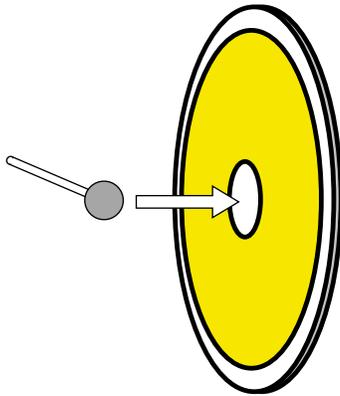
The Stroke of the Mallet

You play the gong by striking it with a padded mallet. The mallet is either very light or it is heavy with an iron inner core. You strike the gong at various percussion points and with different rhythms to create selective effects. The first thing you must master is the basic stroke of the mallet on the surface of the gong.

Most students make the mistake of striking the gong directly with a hit of the mallet. What is required is a glancing blow. If you strike the metal in the central sun region and repeatedly bash it backwards, the sound will be diffuse, noisy and non-rhythmic. The traditional teachers of this art call this type of stroking a "curse against Grace". It is the sign of the prostitution of higher consciousness and a sign of low sensitivity.

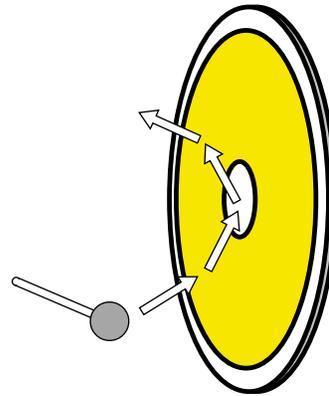
How to Strike the Gong

Wrong Method



A Direct "Hit"
Scatters Energy
An Offence & Curse

Correct Method



Semi-circular Pass
Collects & Directs
Gives Grace & Energy

The only place direct pounding was ever used in connection with the gong was in the Kings' courts. A large gong was used to declare emergency conditions. The sound was so disturbing they developed the muffled gong that has the raised dome at the center. The sound was meant to alarm you. If the regular gong is played with a strong direct strike, the sound scatters your energy. You can feel upset and drained rather than challenged or elevated. That is inconvenient in the context of kingly emergencies as well as a class in meditation.

The best stroke of the mallet is a semi-circular one that strikes the surface of the gong at an angle. Direct the stroke upward or downward. The size of the arc can be large or small. That depends on the effect you want to create. If you watch an expert gong player, it may appear that after several large swings of the mallet, they then strike it directly. Actually the "direct" strike is straight on with a very small twist in the wrist that induces a small arc at the moment of impact.

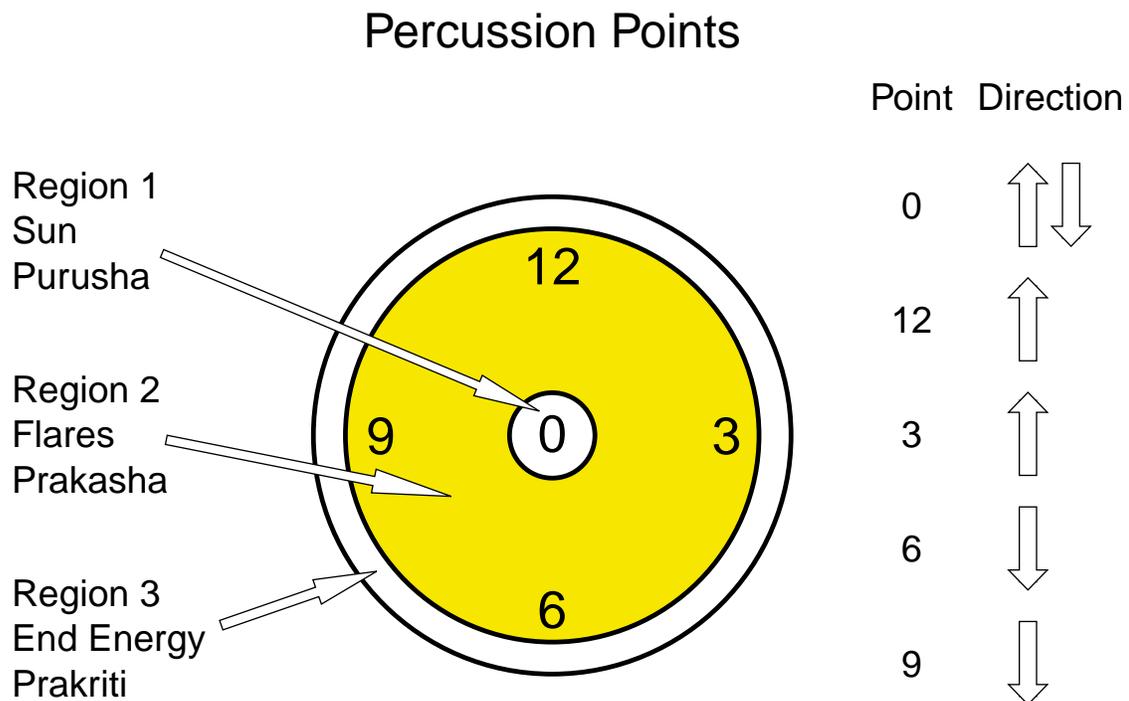
When the mallet is used with the proper stroke the sound of the gong builds and reverberates with harmonies and pulses which are indescribable. The range of frequencies stimulates all the nerve endings, large and small alike. A well-stroked gong will collect and direct you.

If you want to increase the loudness of the sound, simply time the stroke to hit the gong as it comes toward you. To lessen the loudness, time the stroke to hit the gong as it moves away from you. Use timing and rhythm to vary the loudness and timbre of the sound.

Percussion Target Points

Although the gong can be struck anywhere on its surface to produce a sound, there are special points where the percussion is singularly effective and points where the percussion is diffusive and draining. Each of these points is played with a preferred direction to the stroke. The diagram summarizes this distribution of points. The arrows indicate the direction of the mallet's stroke. The numbers in the diagram are "clock positions." The number "3" is placed where three o'clock would be on a clock. The direction of the stroke for this point is in an arc from down to up.

The sound of the sun area is very powerful. If you strike it properly, the mind can not listen to it for longer than 3 to 90 seconds without conceding defeat. Your mind is normally filled with a strong current of reactive thoughts and impressions. The sound of the gong from the sun area zeroes that flow and calls the mind to alert. Symbolically this action is the action of pure spirit over the realm of the mind. But spirit or consciousness is always more powerful by nature than the mind or awareness. As Yogi Bhajan put it: "The existence psyche has no power before the pulse of the sun."



The center of the gong represents the fiery ball of the Sun, the center of spirit, the source of all heat and life. Outside this area there is a lighter band. The second region is the realm of solar flares, of the projection of the essence. The third region is the outer band that goes to the border. The three regions have pure energy, flare energy and end energy.

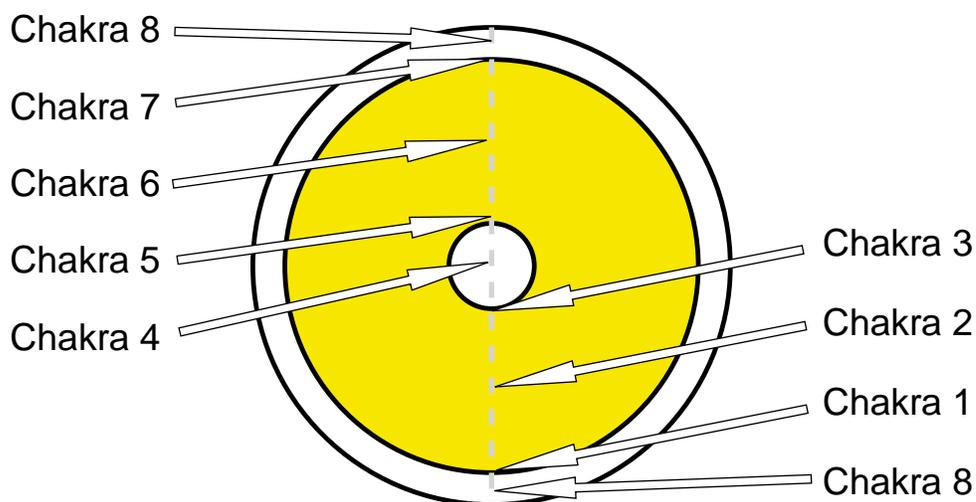
This area can be played upward or downward to full effect. But the sun area must never be struck in the center. Instead hit the sun area just inside the boundary of its zone. Start to play from the edges of the sun.

Playing point 6 will induce earthiness. Playing point 12 will create a sense of loftiness. Playing the sun region will create vastness and a sense of power. Points 3 and 9 will create imagination and projection.

The Gong and the Chakras

The sound of the gong projects to all the chakras and can be used as a powerful instrument to open and balance them. It can also enliven and integrate the 10 bodies of the aura. Certain areas on the gong relate to different chakras. The relationship of the points to each other as well as the type of sound produced by rhythmically striking that area determine the impact of these points. The points played in combination create an impact that is like the complex patterns of a many faceted orchestra. The diagram below summarizes the relationship of the chakras to the basic percussion points.

Chakra Percussion Points



The gong is a complete image of the subtle world.
This chart shows the points on the gong that relate to each chakra.

One of the significant features of the gong is the interactive nature of the sounds it produces. The gong produces a note projected against a background spectrum of notes. Each note interacts with the background. They alter each other. This creates a complex, non-linear pattern that interweaves the sense of the whole with the sense of the part. You can feel this in your body when you listen to the gong. The entire body vibrates and changes as specific areas of the body are pressed and stimulated by the waves of the gong. Whatever the relationship was between your body parts and the whole of the body, it is challenged and transformed by a good gong session. The chakras usually act in concert, functioning in pairs and trios not alone and singular. The gong helps the chakras to interrelate and coordinate. They are freed from emotional patterns that lessen their fluidity and responsiveness.

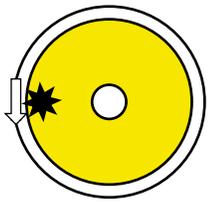
Sequence and Rhythm of the Strokes

There are unlimited sequences and rhythms to play on the gong. They are as varied as music and imagination. One of the best ways to learn is to watch and listen to the videotapes of Yogi Bhanjan when he uses the gong in meditation classes.

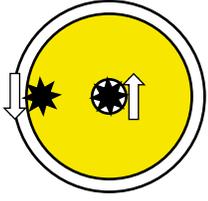
The diagram on the next page is an example of a sequence demonstrated by Yogi Bhanjan in a gong class. The gong sequence begins with a baseline built up by percussion at the 9 o'clock point. This is intensified with a rapid 1 to 3 beat combination between the 9 and left side of the sun region. The heart is expanded and the entire mind feels elevated. Then the energy is distributed throughout the body with a rotation between points 9, 6, 3, and 12. Then the energy is concentrated through the heart center. Then the 0 position is played at an increased 3 1/2 rhythm. This builds the sun and Kundalini energy strongly. Loudness increases along with the feeling of inner energy and fullness. Then the sequence rotates the points again to distribute and balance the energy. The 6 o'clock position is played with a consistent down-stroke to concretize and contain the sense of mental energy. And lastly resting the padded mallet at the center of the sun region stills the gong. In a class, the students would sit and meditate silently after this sequence. They would become mindful. The mind's state is changed and is exceptionally clear.

The diagram shows a yogi sitting in easy pose with the hands over the knees. The rhythm of the beat changes the area of impact of the sound on the body. The lower region is affected more by the slow beat. The higher centers are affected more by the fast beat.

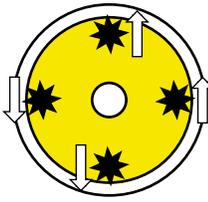
As you play the gong you guide the experience of the listener through various blends of these qualities. Like an artist, you can color the composition in innumerable hues and shades. The sequence described in the diagram above will clear the mind, give you energy and allow you to relax from worry. It also strengthens the immune system.



Begin at Point 9
Duration: Thirty Seconds



Move between Points 9 and 0
Three beats at position 9
then one beat at position 0
Duration: One minute



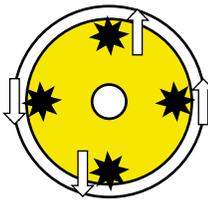
Rotate over the four
Points 9 > 6 > 3 > 12
One beat on each point
Duration: Two minutes



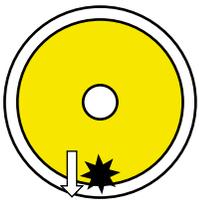
Alternate between the top
and bottom of Point 0.
One beat at each point.
Duration: Two minutes



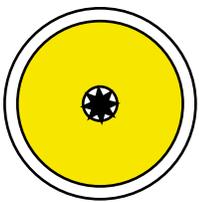
Faster, steady beat at
bottom of Point 0
Duration: One minute



Rotate over the four
Points 9 > 6 > 3 > 12
One beat on each point.
Duration: One minute

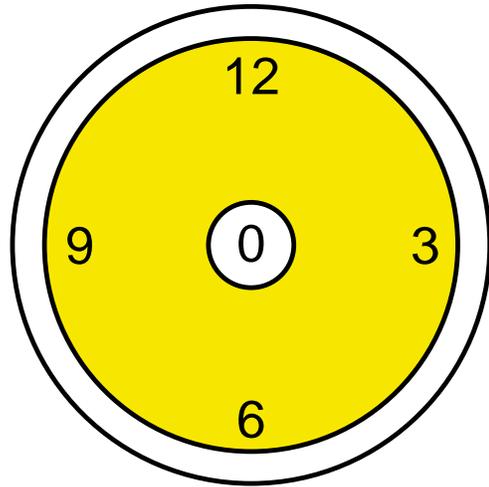


Steady beat at Point 6
Duration: One minute



Hold mallet still on
center to finish

Sample Gong Sequence play by Yogi Bhajan

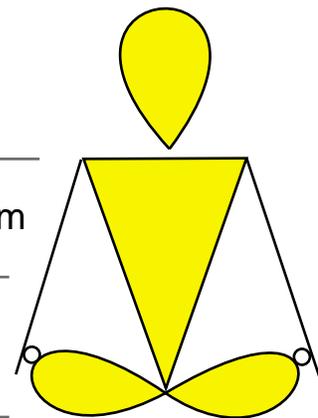


Chakra Area and Rhythm of Beat

3 1/2 - Fast

2 1/2 - Medium

1 1/2 - Slow



The Learning Curve

Even an excellent student of the gong will progress through the stages of the learning curve. Those five stages are called *saram pad*, *karam pad*, *shakti pad*, *sehej pad* and *sat pad*.

In *saram pad* you are attracted to the use of the gong and you learn basic rules that are clear to follow. This initiates you and prevents gross mistakes. The points given earlier of 0, 12, 3, 6, and 9 are classical gong percussion points. At first it is good to experiment just with these. Let each gong playing session go from 3 minutes to a maximum of 6 minutes. This will prevent fatigue and build the strength of the muscles.

In *karam pad* you begin to learn from the many hours of practice. You play the gong under many situations. The audience varies. You will sense things that are not easily written. You switch points as the low versus high pitch ratio switches and the feeling of rotation and projection increases in the upper body. It is like learning to ride a bike and tell the difference between leaning into a curve and falling from lack of surface friction. In this stage many hours of practice and listening to tapes of Yogi Bhajan playing the gong will guide your reflexes.

In *shakti pad* you begin to sense when to bend the rules. You play more points and the sequences seem to come from the spontaneous situation. It is very important at this stage to stay emotionally and mentally in the elevated place you are guided to by the initial mantras. It is easy for the ego to feel pleased with increased skill. This attachment and attention to the pleasure of the skill itself will distract you from paying attention to the impact on the class. In this stage you will learn from student's energy changes and from the challenges of a good teacher.

In *sehej pad* you will learn patterns of sequences and respond to the circumstances and students almost automatically. You will focus on the goal and the state and not on the techniques themselves. This state is only achieved through extensive practice and a willingness to become an instrument of the higher mind.

Sat pad is a stage of merger and mastery given by grace and much service done in humility. The final stage is never attained by effort, but by a new perspective that comes through the free grace of the higher self.

To begin with, start as a novice. Follow the clear rules and be patient. Allow your sensitivity to grow and to mold to the task of the gong. Do not try to force the gong to serve your purpose. Diligence and willingness to receive negative as well as positive feedback will guide you to become an excellent practitioner of this ancient technique.

Emotional Transformations during Gong Meditation

The gong impacts the body and its meridians. It releases blocks, reduces tension and stimulates circulation. The result of this is a reorganization of the emotional energy and feelings that are tied into the body structure.

We hold attitudes toward our bodies and ourselves. These attitudes are recorded by habitual body postures. If the energy changes or the posture changes, there is often an intense useful emotional flow in the body. During a gong meditation or during the relaxation afterwards some people may cry, feel weightless or laugh uncontrollably. Relax. The release of feelings is a normal process in Gong meditation. Play a meditation tape and give the person some water, a tissue and a little conversation.

The gong changes the feelings that are blocked by cutting the thoughts that sustain and recreate the feelings. As a person comes back to normal, they notice a great difference between their current bodily feelings and the ones they are used to. This can be frightening, arousing, exciting or delightful. That will depend on the individual.

Inform the students, before playing a long deep gong meditation, to listen to the gong by relaxing the muscles and letting the sound of the gong penetrate the body and guide the mind. If they tighten the muscles and try to fight the natural process of change that occurs, they may feel tired or irritated by the gong's strong pulsation.

Visualization during Gong Meditation

Regular practice of gong meditation accelerates the development of intuitive sensitivity and visualization. If the gong is played to adjust the relationship between the pineal and pituitary glands, an adjustment takes place—the psychic functions of the sixth chakra are opened. The visualizations that flood the mind become intuitive and predictive of the surrounding circumstances. This also provides insight into the psychological and health conditions of the meditator.

Certain Kings used the gong to prepare for war. The gong had three functions. The first was to arouse people to prepare for danger. The second was to create rhythm for combatant exercises. The third was to enhance the concentration and visualization of certain adepts to see the future and predict the conditions and troop strengths of the enemy.

The Gong and Nervous System Regeneration

The gong can regenerate the neurons and their interconnections. This set of exercises prepares a student to listen to the gong. It was originally given by Yogi Bajan as part of a program to regenerate the nervous systems of ex-drug users in rehabilitation programs. The set is useful for anyone who needs to resist the ravages of stress. It can be combined with other regular exercises, cleansing nutrition and counseling to form the basis of a program to reverse many drug induced problems.

The set has three parts. The first part prepares the body with vigorous breath control exercises. The second part is the gong meditation. The third part is a complete deep relaxation with a meditation tape.

Part I - Pranayama

- 1) Sit straight. Breathe in through the left nostril and out through the right nostril. Block the right nostril with the thumb of the right hand as you keep the other fingers straight up with the palm facing left. Block the left nostril by bending the index finger of the right hand. Continue with a long deep complete breath for 10 minutes. Then inhale deeply and hold. Apply mulabandha and fix the eyes upward at the brow point. Relax after 30 - 60 seconds.
- 2) Sit straight. Breathe in through the right nostril and out through the left nostril. Block the left nostril with the thumb of the left hand as you keep the other fingers straight up with the palm facing right. Block the right nostril by bending the index finger of the left hand. Continue with a long deep complete breath for 10 minutes. Then inhale deeply and hold. Apply mulabandha and fix the eyes upward at the brow point. Relax after 30 - 60 seconds.
- 3) Sit with a straight spine. Put the palms together at the center of the chest in a prayer pose with the fingers pointing up. Begin a steady powerful Breath of Fire. Continue for 5 minutes. Then inhale, and exhale completely. Hold the breath out as you apply mulabandha and press the palms firmly together. Relax after 10-30 seconds. Repeat the exhale one more time. Relax.
- 4) Sit with a straight spine. Rest both hands over the knees in gyan mudra: thumb tip touches the tip of the index finger. Keep the eyes 1/10th open. Curl the tongue in a "U" shape and extend the tip a little past the lips. Inhale deeply through the tongue. Exhale completely through the nose. Continue for 5 minutes. Then inhale deeply, pull in the tongue and hold the breath for 15 to 60 seconds.
- 5) Sit straight. Place the palms up in the lap with the right hand resting in the left. Touch the thumb tips together. Focus the eyes down past the tip of the nose. Inhale in four equal segments. Mentally repeat the mantra SA TA NA MA with the four strokes of breath. Exhale powerfully in one long stroke through the nose. Mentally place the mantra WHAHEY GURU on the exhale. Continue in a steady pace for 11 minutes. Then inhale deeply and hold briefly as you roll the eyes upward.

Part II Gong Meditation

Lie down on the back. Interlace the fingers of the two hands and rest them palm down over the navel point. Close the eyes and relax every area of the body. Concentrate the mind at the navel point. Listen to the sound of the gong and travel into the sound.

The gong should be played for 45 minutes. Play it slowly switching from a cadence near the sun region of the gong, to a sonorous continuous tone from the 8, 2 and 0 points, to a “sh-h-h-ing” sound from the outer rim. Alternate these sounds with a few minutes each.

Part III Relaxation

Play a meditation tape of the mulmantra for 10 more minutes. Then rise slowly out of the relaxation. Stretch all the limbs. Rotate the hands and feet. Bring the knees to the chest. Cat stretch. Sit up and take 5 to 10 deep breaths. Then drink two glasses of pure spring water.

The Gong and Projection into Sach Khand

The gong can loosen and reorganize the relationship of the 10 bodies. The 10 bodies are all your vehicles for sensing and functioning in the gross and subtle realms. When the pranic body is strong and the physical body is relaxed, you can travel in the mental body to the neutral realm called Sach Khand—the realm of truth. This is not really a place. It is a frequency. Around that frequency the saints and liberated souls associate. It is a realm of healing, insight, intuition and service. The experience as the bodies adjust to this frequency of energy varies, but often includes a sense of travel and projection.

This set was given by Yogi Bhanjan during 1971 to strengthen the nerves and to give the experience of living in Truth. It consists of two parts. The first part is a series of exercises to stimulate the kundalini energy and to prepare the physical body to let the mental body project. The second part is a gong meditation.

Part 1 Kundalini Kriya

- 1) Lie on the back. Raise both legs 45 degrees from the ground. Begin long deep breathing. Continue for 3 minutes. Inhale and hold briefly.
- 2) Lie on the stomach. Extend the arms forward and join the palms together. Lift the arms and legs up. Arch the back. Breathe long and deep for 3 minutes. Then inhale and exhale completely. Apply mulabandha and hold briefly.
- 3) Sit on the heels in rock pose. Place the palms down on the thighs. Flex the spine forward on the inhale and backwards on the exhale. Continue a steady pace of flexing for 3 minutes. Inhale and hold briefly.

- 4) Cantilever Pose: lie on the back. Raise the legs and the torso up 60 degrees from the ground. Extend the arms parallel to the ground for balance. Do Breath of Fire for 3 minutes.
- 5) Sat Kriya: sit on the heels with the palms together and arms extended up over the head. Chant SAT as you contract the navel point and apply mulabandha. Chant NAM as you relax the pelvis. Continue a steady pace for 3 minutes.
- 6) Sit straight in easy pose. Interlace the fingers in venus lock and rest them in the lap. Breathe long deep and completely for 10 minutes. Inhale and hold 30-60 seconds.
- 7) Sit in easy pose with a straight spine. Put the palms together at the center of the chest. Concentrate at the brow point. Inhale deeply and chant a long SAA-A-A-A-A-T NAM in a ratio of 26:1. Continue for 15 minutes.
- 8) Lie on the back. Raise the right heel 6 inches off the ground and flex the ankle forward and backward rhythmically for 1 1/2 minutes. Then switch to the other leg for the same time. Then leave both legs on the ground. Make fists of both hands along the sides by the hips. Flex the thumbs straight up and back to the fist in a regular pace for 2 minutes.

Part II Meditation

Sit straight in easy pose. Lock the arms in Dhyana Bandha—put both hands in gyan mudra at the sides of the torso with the palms forward at shoulder level and the elbows relaxed next to the sides. Keep the eyelids open 1/10th of the way. Press the eyes up and concentrate at the brow point. Hold the posture very still.

Listen to the gong as if you never heard the sounds before. The gong should be played with a strong carrying overtone for a majority of time. Continue for 15 - 22 minutes.

Conclusion

Yogi Bhajan, Ph.D. learned the art of the gong at the hands of Sant Hazara Singh. He mastered the art of the gong and sound current. He passed on this secret and sacred knowledge to all who will respect the discipline regardless of background or status. A person who can wield the gong perfectly can give you the inner experience of the first sound - the **Adi Naad**. One who perfects and commands that threshold is called an **Adi Nath**.

This summary is a simple but firm foundation to begin the study of the gong and its use in classes of Kundalini Yoga. When you play remember to establish the proper consciousness so you are an instrument of the instrument. Then you are a master who meets the three Lords of the universe and you play the tune of creation. In that place your mind can simplify the complex and command the essential.