

Kriya Yoga: Four Spiritual Masters and a Beginner

Heidi Wyder

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Wyder is always personal, never preachy, in sharing her spiritual quest, allowing twenty-first-century seekers to start their own journeys.

A seminal resource by a dedicated devotee, Heidi Wyder's *Kriya Yoga: Four Spiritual Masters and a Beginner* looks deeply into Kriya Yoga's past even as it builds a bridge to its future. Wyder combines a modern seeker's memoir with a comprehensive history of Kriya Yoga's Indian lineage from the birth of Lahiri Mahasaya in 1828 to the current master, Prakash Shankar Vyas, or Guruji, Wyder's own teacher. The substantial depth of this volume mirrors Wyder's own commitment to a lifelong study of Kriya Yoga and offers beginners a taste of a practice that has previously been available only to direct initiates.

Wyder chronicles her personal quest—after working briefly as a teacher in the 1990s, she embarked on an around-the-world journey that hit an unexpected speed bump in Varanasi, India—alongside the spiritual, family, and community lives of four gurus. While some of the genealogies are a bit dry and challenging to Westerners unfamiliar with names like Lahiri Mahasaya, Tinkori Mahasaya, Satya Charan Lahiri, and Prakash Shankar Vyas, Wyder makes her portraits realistic with rich details about their everyday lives.

The complexity of Wyder's knowledge, informed by long study with Guruji, is impressive. It allows her to take on the voice of Lahiri Mahasaya's wife, for instance, to illuminate the most mundane and most miraculous moments, from washing clothes to witnessing levitation. In this way, Wyder reminds us that Kriya Yoga masters were householders and humble healers rather than the adoration-fueled charismatic leaders we are more familiar with in the West.

Not surprisingly, Wyder was unfamiliar with much of the material here when she first started her spiritual journey, and the memoir portions of the book reflect her innocence, curiosity, and dawning understanding of Kriya Yoga. Wyder takes us along with her through the spiritual valleys (dark days questioning the power of prayer) and transcendent peaks (her long-awaited Kriya Yoga initiation). Whether she's talking about voices, visions, or vegetarianism, however, Wyder is never preachy, always personal. Transitions between the historical sections and Wyder's own experiences can be confusing at first, though she does provide graphical breaks and occasional original song lyrics to mark when the perspective shifts.

With so much knowledge gathered in one place, it might seem a given that *Kriya Yoga* would answer the essential question: What is Kriya Yoga and how do I practice it? There's no single definition offered here, but instead an invitation to twenty-first-century seekers to begin the journey that Wyder has found so fulfilling. *Kriya Yoga* belongs on the bookshelf alongside classics like *Autobiography of a Yogi*, to be delved into again and again as that journey continues.

SHEILA M. TRASK (January 15, 2015)

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