

Kundalini

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We have seen already that the human organism contains many mysteries, unknown and invisible to ordinary sight.

There is yet more !

The bodies of Man contain many different energies - we know of the electrical energy which flows along the nerves and carries messages between cells in the brain, for example; and we have learned how energies of a very different kind flow through the Force Centres or Chackras.

There are many others. One of the most well known is the KUNDALINI or Serpent Fire. Its name comes from the Sanscrit 'Kundalin', an adjective meaning 'coiled'. The name refers to the fact that this energy travels in a spiral path, and also to the fact that in most people the Kundalini energy is latent or asleep and is said to be 'coiled up' - like a sleeping snake.

What is the Kundalini ?

It is said by the texts to be a very basic energy and is described as the fire or force which animates matter itself (6) and hence, poetically, as the 'World Mother' (7).

In Man the Kundalini is said to be coiled or asleep in the Root or Muladhara Chakra at the base of the spine. An ancient Hindu text called the Satchakra Nirupana describes it as :

"...luminous as lightning, shining in the hollow of this lotus like a chain of brilliant lights " (8)

She (Kundalini is usually referred to as 'she', the basic female energy or Shakti) is asleep but ~~not~~ not altogether inactive, for Kundalini is present within the body, providing the force which maintains our body temperature at 98.4 degrees. Her normal function within the human being is the vitalisation of the body (9), allowing it to perform its normal functions. She can be recognised as the tingly sensations we feel when we bang our elbow and the whole arm becomes numb.

These are very mild expressions of the Kundalini. When fully awakened, it becomes an incredibly powerful force, capable of bringing about great changes within a person, as we shall see.

The awakening of the Serpent Fire has been described many times in the ancient books: it is said to uncoil itself and rush up a special channel in the spine, towards the brain. On reaching the top of the head, it is experienced as white or multicoloured light, bringing a deep sense of bliss and the possibility of psychic powers.

Awakening the Kundalini Sakti is the aim of the Indian system of Kundalini Yoga

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which usually requires many years of austere self-discipline to accomplish. The Yogi must live a very pure and simple life, eating the correct foods and spending many hours each day practising the necessary disciplines. These usually include breathing exercises, or 'Pranayama', and visualisation techniques involving the Chakras; a very determined and long continued effort of will is required, frequently lasting as long as 15 years, during which period the yogi must be absolutely dedicated to his efforts - a very severe lifestyle !

The awakening Kundalini uncoils and travels up through a channel or 'Nadi' in the etheric body, called the Sushumna.

(Just as the physical body has nerves, so in the etheric body there are subtle channels, the Nadis, whose name comes from the Sanscrit root 'Nad', meaning motion or vibration. The Sushumna is actually a three-fold channel, and is situated in the etheric body in a position exactly corresponding to the centre of the spine).

As it rises through the Sushumna it reaches each of the Chakras which lie along the spine in turn. As it reaches each one, it awakens or vitalises it, bringing it into the state of heightened activity we have already described. Thus the powers and potentials latent in each Chakra become manifested, and the Yogi gains many psychic powers.

This process of raising the Kundalini through the centres is one of extreme difficulty, requiring the utmost concentration and will-power. Frequently the Kundalini may fall again or take the wrong path through the Chakras. According to Leadbeater, it must take a very specific path, and this path may vary for different races and types of people.

Herein lies the awful danger of arousing this powerful energy prematurely. Before arousing the Kundalini, the Yogi must have developed the personal qualities necessary to control it - such as great self-control, moral purity, and endurance. If this power is unleashed and gets out of control, the consequences for the poor Yogi are horrific.

For instance, the correct path for the Kundalini is upwards, but it can on occasions turn downwards and inwards, activating other centres in the lower abdomen which influence the sexual desires. The aspirant then becomes obsessed by terrible desires he cannot control, and falls victim to Satyrism. He may find himself compelled to perform acts of an awful nature, while he looks on in horror. This is why the Satchakra Nirupana says:

" She gives liberation to the wise, but bondage to fools" (8)

Parallel to the Sushumna and on either side to it, are two more Nadis, known as the Ida (the 'lunar Nadi') and the Pingala (the 'solar Nadi'). Should the

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Kundalini be raised accidentally through either of these Nadis, the Yogi experiences the most dreadful agonies. The energy tears through the subtle bodies causing permanent damage. The flesh becomes cold to the touch, while the person feels he is being consumed by a raging inner fire. Such unfortunates have been known to plunge themselves into rivers in vain attempts to quench the burning sensations. The only hope is that the Kundalini may subside back to its source in the muladhara centre; or else that the Yogi may succeed in redirecting its course.

A fascinating personal account of such an experience can be found in Gopi Krishnas book Kundalini, the Evolutionary Energy in Man. His Kundalini became, as occasionally but rarely happens, aroused spontaneously. He describes the experience in this way:

"....the sensation again ext ended upwards, growing in intensity.... Suddenly, with a roar like that of a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal chord. The illumination grew brighter and brighter, the roaring louder.... it is impossible to describe the experience accurately. I felt the consciousness that was myself growing wider, surrounded by waves of light....I was no longer myself, or to be more accurate, no longer as I knew myself to be, a small point of awareness confined in a body, but was instead a vast circle of consciousness.... in a state of exaltation impossible to describe." (10)

However, after this initial experience subsided, he found himself depressed and melancholy. He experienced the Kundalini as an 'infernal flame' which caused him intense agonies. He could scarcely eat or sleep, and over a period of months was driven to the verge of lunacy. Finally, he realised that the Sakti had been raised through the wrong channel, the Pingala, instead of the Sushumna. In frantic desperation, he summoned his final resources and succeeded in redirecting the energy:

"There was a sound like a nerve thread snapping and instantaneously, a sivery streak passed zigzag through the spinal chord, exactly like the sinuous movement of a white serpent in rapid flight, pouring an effulgent cascading shower of brilliant vital energy into my brain, filling my head with a blissfull lustre in place of the flame that had been tormenting me..." (11)

Gopi Krishna's story gives some insight into the dangers of Kundalini Yoga, which all writers on the subject have been very careful to point out. It should never ever be practised without the guidance of a fully competent teacher. If this Yoga is so dangerous, why is it practised, what are thought to be its benefits and what are its limitations ?

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On reaching and awakening the Crown Centre, the Kundalini Sakti is said by tradition to unite with Shiva, the Hindu god who represents the male aspect of consciousness, and who is said to dwell in this Centre. Shiva and Sakti are often represented as male and female deities and statues show them in close embrace. They are symbols for the masculine and feminine energies present in nature and their union is said by many to constitute the state of final fulfilment or Enlightenment for a human being. It is this union which the Kundalini Yogi seeks and which is thought to be found in raising the Sakti to the Crown Centre.

But could this really be considered the final attainment for a human being, does it really give us knowledge of our true selves ?

We have seen how man consists of many subtle bodies and that in fact the real inner man or true self is beyond any of these, and is the owner, so to speak, of them all. The bodies are simply vehicles for the expression of our true nature.

So any event, however profound, which takes place within our bodies, physical or subtle, does not really give us knowledge of our true being. The Kundalini experience, therefore, while giving a certain expansion of awareness, cannot be referred to as Enlightenment or Liberation.

What do we mean by Liberation ?

Well, this will be explained more fully in the (last module of the course) but for now we can say that our true nature is beyond even the very subtle limitations of our higher bodies - it is limitless and completely free. Liberation is the direct experience of the limitless nature of our being, of our own infinity. This state of being has nothing to do with bodies, Chakras, or energies, as these are all limited things.