



The Mysterious Kundalini

"She lies dormant in the Muladhara Chakra in the form of a serpentine power or coiled up energy known as Kundalini Shakti. She is at the centre of the life of the universe. She is the primal force of life that underlies all existence. She vitalises the body through Her energy. She is the energy in the sun, the fragrance in the flowers, the beauty in the landscape, the Gayatri or the Blessed Mother in the Vedas, She is the colour in the rainbow, intelligence in the mind, devotion in worship." (Swami Sivananda Sarasvati as quoted

by Swami Sivananda Radha, 1992, p.25.)

The kundalini has been little understood in the West where it is sometimes referred to as the Holy Ghost. In Eastern philosophy the kundalini is thought of as a serpent lying coiled at the base of the spine. At the appropriate time in a person's evolution, the kundalini is aroused from its slumber to commence a complete transformation of the physical, emotional and psychological aspects of a person's being. Until recently a person exhibiting kundalini symptoms was likely to be misdiagnosed as having a physical or mental illness. Even today it could well be that as many as 20% of patients in psychiatric hospitals are experiencing spiritual emergency rather than mental illness. An active kundalini is likely to be behind many of these.

Purpose of the Kundalini

It is considered by many that at the soul level we have divine consciousness, but this has yet to be realised in form through our personalities. Before this can take place our personalities need to be refined as suitable "vehicles" for soul consciousness. The final transformation is carried out by the kundalini which has lain dormant until the appropriate time for this purpose. It is incredible to think that each and every human has this potential within. Human evolution may not be an accident of evolution as Darwin would have it. The very fact that the kundalini lies dormant within each of us awaiting the right time to carry out its transformation indicates a divine plan for each and every one of us, regardless of race or creed.

One theory for future human evolution is that at present most of us live in ego consciousness which is related to an awareness of self within form. It is our purpose to attain soul consciousness which is related to a Self awareness within Spirit. As we become more soul conscious we become embodiments of divinity. It is the purpose of the kundalini to bring about the necessary transformation required for this jump in awareness. This shift in awareness is known as Self-realisation and has been attained by a small proportion of individuals at the pinnacle of human evolution. Many of whom have been the forerunners of some of the world's religions.

What is the Kundalini?

Gopi Krishna believed the kundalini to be a superphysical substance like the mind but having a tangible organic medium through which it acts on the nervous system effecting a gradual change or transmutation until it is totally receptive to higher energies. He believed that a nectar like substance is extracted by the nerve endings from the surrounding tissues. This substance has the form of a radiation as well as a subtle organic essence. Some of this energy streams into the reproductive organs stimulating them into extra activity. In men semen is produced in increasing abundance which rises in a tiny stream up the spine to the brain providing sustenance for the brain cells which have been stimulated into great activity. In women the fuel is provided by sexual energy and the secretions involved in sexual arousal. It is the energy used for sexual pleasure and reproduction which is used to nourish and transform the inner self.

This physical link between sexual and spiritual experience is not to be underestimated, it provides the link between science and religion and will bring forth a major change in Western psychology. The raising up of sexual energy into spiritual energy is the basis behind most spiritual disciplines.

Kundalini and Spirituality

Unfortunately, there is a common belief that if one can arouse the kundalini through various techniques it will lead to increased spirituality. Premature arousal can cause the kundalini to burn and destroy etheric webs within the etheric body, a subtle equivalent of the physical body, leading to insanity or even death. These webs are protective and are found between the chakras. They naturally dissolve as one becomes soul infused. The experiences of Gopi Krishna and Swami Muktananda, for example, show that even when kundalini arousal has been activated at the right time, incredible suffering can result in which the person is sure, on occasions, that he or she is dying. In reality it is the ego consciousness which is dying as it is replaced by soul consciousness. When aroused at the right time one can rest assured that no matter how difficult the process is, the kundalini is being guided by spiritual will and consequently one does not receive more than one can handle.

Many accounts of profound kundalini awakening indicate these continual fluctuation from moments of utter despair and thoughts of imminent death, to moments of bliss and connection with the soul. This is a process which can last for years and is very individual to the person concerned. In some cases it passes without much trauma, a lot depends on how ready the person is for a transformative process which will dig to the very depths of their being. The conflict only ends when the personality has completely surrendered and has become a true instrument of the soul.

When the energies involved in the rising of the kundalini cause overwhelming symptoms it is known as a spiritual emergency. Spiritual emergency can exhibit the symptoms of psychosis or schizophrenia at varying degrees of intensity, but rather than being a mental illness it is a crisis of spiritual transformation. Caution is needed, therefore, to distinguish between spiritual emergency and mental illness. During a spiritual emergency unconscious material with strong emotional charge emerges into consciousness. This has powerful, spontaneous healing potential and needs to be supported. The person needs to realise the healing nature of the crisis and be encouraged to allow the process to unfold and to co-operate with it. The spiritual energy is trying to work through and transform the personality.

Symptoms

Symptoms of kundalini arousal vary immensely ranging through the whole spectrum of physical, emotional, psychological and superconscious experience. When the kundalini is aroused from the base of the spine it ascends, stage by stage, until it reaches the crown chakra. As it rises it is accompanied by various physiological symptoms in the reproductive organs, the nervous system and the brain. Physical symptoms may include an itching, tingling sensation which may start in the feet and slowly progress up to the head and crown centre. Or the sensation may be localised in one or two parts of the body and could last for years. This is likely to be due to the rising bioenergy affecting the nervous system in some way. As the kundalini energy can take months or years to work its way up to the head these physical sensations likewise may be found gradually affecting different parts of the body. Sensations of heat or cold may also be experienced, either being localised in different parts of the body or throughout the body. At night one may wake up sweating all over. Other physical symptoms are dizziness, pressure or pain in the forehead or the top of the head, pressure felt along the spine, there may be a burning sensation in the eyes, diminished vision or blindness, and there may be a pain in the left or right side of the chest resembling a heart attack.

Other symptoms can include spasmodic breathing, lapsing easily into meditation, a feeling of intoxication, an increased pulse rate, nausea, backaches, a pain in the spine, numbness in the hands, arms or feet, electrical sensations in the head or the hearing of deep inner sounds or the sensation of vibrations within the ears.

As the kundalini works its way up the spine the person may also be subjected to a variety of spontaneous bodily movements which are very similar to those practised in various forms of Hatha Yoga (Kriyas), caused by various movements of the kundalini so that the body may be purified. These include involuntary jerks, contractions, especially of the anus, abdomen and throat (chakra locations), involuntary dancing, hopping, spinning, head movements and other sudden movements. It appears that these movements facilitate the kundalini's journey. It is likely that many yogic postures were developed for this purpose. Alternatively, the person may experience the intense

devotion of Bhakti Yoga, the detachment in action of Karma Yoga or the spontaneous knowledge of Jnana Yoga. It is not uncommon for the person to recite mantras, chant, make various animal sounds, compose poetry, all known as Mantra Yoga.

Emotional and psychological effects can resemble psychotic episodes and be very difficult to distinguish from proper psychosis. It is possible that an awakened kundalini, among the various effects it produces, may also trigger any emotional or psychological disturbances that already exist. Various emotions can be experienced such as depression, anxiety, anger, guilt, intense emotional swings, mental confusion and so on. Sometimes these are so bad that the person believes he is dying. Often these stages of intense depression etc. fluctuate between periods of elation and bliss and could consequently be confused with manic depression or bipolar illness except the periods of bliss are far more spiritual and healing than the periods of elation associated with bipolar illness.

Psychic experiences associated with kundalini awakening include pre-cognition, mind reading, ability to leave the body, seeing auras, remembering past lives, channelling and other paranormal experiences. These abilities, though, are considered of secondary importance, dwelling on them as important in themselves will lessen one's ability to gain or maintain higher, more spiritual, experience. Spiritual experiences as such are those more associated with higher levels of consciousness and awareness. The bliss states and expansions of consciousness associated with some kundalini awakenings, either all of a sudden or at the later stages of awakening, produce states of awareness that are so enlightening that they go well beyond the normal levels of consciousness possible even for people that have meditated for many years. Once the kundalini awakening has completed itself the person may find that he or she is in this state of expanded consciousness regularly or even continually.

Therapy

With so many symptoms related to the kundalini it is important to take a balanced approach and to undertake medical tests to exclude a medical condition prior to seeking therapy. Even if medical tests reveal no organic basis to a psychotic condition, as can be found in spiritual emergency, it is still necessary to distinguish between a functional psychosis and spiritual emergency. A spiritual emergency usually shows the person to have been well adjusted prior to the episode, able to consider that what is happening may originate from within the psyche, and to co-operate with appropriate support received.

It is important to allow the kundalini to run its own course and to acknowledge that it is a self-healing process. After a phase of kundalini activity the person is psychologically and spiritually more whole than beforehand. It is important, therefore, that a therapist adjusts to whatever level of experience the person has and uses techniques which can assist the person to flow with the process. In essence, a person undergoing kundalini activity requires understanding and a supportive environment.

The Kundalini and the Mental Health Profession

The American Psychiatric Association's classification system for mental illness, now includes a category for "Religious or Spiritual problems." Although not related to mental illness these problems do need to be distinguished from mental illness and consequently there is a need for mental health professionals to have appropriate training. Having acknowledged that many patients previously diagnosed with mental illness could well have been experiencing a problem related to spiritual emergence now raises the issue of appropriate training for mental health professionals to distinguish between the two. Failure to do so will