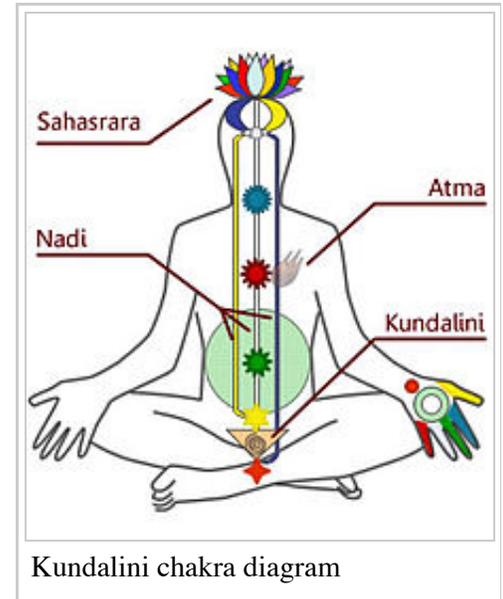


Kundalini

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Kundalini (Sanskrit *kuṇḍalinī*, कुण्डलिनी, [ⓘ] pronunciation , "coiled one"), in the concept of Dharma, is a form of primal energy, or *shakti*, located at the base of the spine. Different spiritual traditions teach methods of "awakening" kundalini for the purpose of reaching spiritual enlightenment are there.^[1] Kundalini is described as lying "coiled" at the base of the spine, represented as either a goddess or sleeping serpent waiting to be awakened. In modern commentaries, Kundalini has been called an unconscious, instinctive or libidinal force,^{[2][3][4]} or "mother energy or intelligence of complete maturation".^[5]

Kundalini awakening is said to result in deep meditation, enlightenment and bliss.^[6] This awakening involves the Kundalini physically moving up the central channel to reach within the Sahasrara Chakra at the top of the head. Many systems of yoga focus on the awakening of Kundalini through meditation, pranayama breathing, the practice of asana and chanting of mantras.^[6] In physical terms, one commonly reports the Kundalini experience to be a feeling of electric current running along the spine.^{[7][8][9]}



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Etymology

The concept of Kundalini is mentioned in the Upanishads (9th century BCE - 3rd century BCE).^[10] The Sanskrit adjective *kuṇḍalin* means "circular, annular". It does occur as a noun for "snake" (in the sense "coiled", as in "forming ringlets") in the 12th-century *Rajatarangini* chronicle (I.2). *Kuṇḍa*, a noun with the meaning "bowl, water-pot" is found as the name of a Naga in Mahabharata 1.4828. The 8th-century *Tantrasadbhava Tantra* uses the term *kundalī* ("ring, bracelet; coil (of a rope)").^{[11]:230}

The use of *kuṇḍalī* as a name for Goddess Durga who is a form of Shakti appears often in Tantrism and Shaktism from as early as the 11th century, in the *Śaradatilaka*.^[12] It is adopted as *kuṇḍalīnī* as a technical term into Hatha yoga in the 15th century and becomes widely used in the Yoga Upanishads by the 16th century. Eknath Easwaran has paraphrased the term as "the coiled power," a force which ordinarily rests at the base of the spine, described as being "coiled there like a serpent".^[13] The phrase *serpent power* was coined by Sir John Woodroffe, who published his translation of two 16th-century treatises on *laya yoga* (Kundalini yoga) in 1919 under this title.

Descriptions

Numerous accounts describe the experience of Kundalini awakening. When awakened, Kundalini is said to rise up from the muladhara chakra through the central nadi, called *sushumna*, inside or alongside the spine and reaching the top of the head. The progress of Kundalini through the different chakras leads to different levels of awakening and mystical experience, until Kundalini finally reaches the top of the head, Sahasrara or crown chakra, producing an extremely profound transformation of consciousness.^{[7]:5-6}

Physical effects are believed to be a sign of Kundalini awakening by some,^[14] but described as unwanted side effects pointing to a problem rather than progress by others.^[15] The following are either common signs of an awakened Kundalini or symptoms of a problem associated with an awakening Kundalini (commonly referred to as Kundalini syndrome):

- Involuntary jerks, tremors, shaking, itching, tingling, and crawling sensations, especially in the arms and legs
- Energy rushes or feelings of electricity circulating the body
- Intense heat (sweating) or cold, especially as energy is experienced passing through the chakras
- Spontaneous pranayama, asanas, mudras and bandhas
- Visions or sounds at times associated with a particular chakra
- Diminished or conversely extreme sexual desire sometimes leading to a state of constant or whole-body orgasm
- Emotional upheavals or surfacing of unwanted and repressed feelings or thoughts with certain repressed emotions becoming dominant in the conscious mind for short or long periods of time.^[16]
- Headache, migraine, or pressure inside the skull
- Increased blood pressure and irregular heartbeat
- Emotional numbness
- Antisocial tendencies
- Mood swings with periods of depression or mania
- Pains in different areas of the body, especially back and neck
- Sensitivity to light, sound, and touch
- Trance-like and altered states of consciousness
- Disrupted sleep pattern (periods of insomnia or oversleeping)

- Loss of appetite or overeating
- Bliss, feelings of infinite love and universal connectivity, transcendent awareness

Reports about the Sahaja Yoga technique of Kundalini awakening state that the practice can result in a cool breeze felt on the fingertips as well as on the fontanel bone area.^{[17][18]} One study has measured a drop in temperature on the palms of the hands resulting from this technique.^[14]

In his article on Kundalini in the *Yoga Journal*, David Eastman narrates two personal experiences. One man said he felt an activity at the base of his spine starting to flow so he relaxed and allowed it to happen. A feeling of surging energy began traveling up his back, at each chakra he felt an orgasmic electric feeling like every nerve trunk on his spine beginning to fire. A second man describes a similar experience but accompanied by a wave of euphoria and happiness softly permeating his being. He described the surging energy as being like electricity but hot, traveling from the base of his spine to the top of his head. He said the more he analyzed the experience, the less it occurred.^[16]

In his book, *Building a Noble World*, Shiv R. Jhavar describes his **Kundalini awakening** experience at Muktananda's public program at Lake Point Tower in Chicago on September 16, 1974 as follows:

“Baba [Swami Muktananda] had just begun delivering his discourse with his opening statement: ‘Today’s subject is meditation. The crux of the question is: What do we meditate upon?’ Continuing his talk, Baba said: ‘Kundalini starts dancing when one repeats Om Namah Shivaya.’ Hearing this, I mentally repeated the mantra, I noticed that my breathing was getting heavier. Suddenly, I felt a great impact of a rising force within me. The intensity of this rising kundalini force was so tremendous that my body lifted up a little and fell flat into the aisle; my eyeglasses flew off. As I lay there with my eyes closed, I could see a continuous fountain of dazzling white lights erupting within me. In brilliance, these lights were brighter than the sun but possessed no heat at all. I was experiencing the thought-free state of "I am," realizing that "I" have always been, and will continue to be, eternal. I was fully conscious and completely aware while I was experiencing the pure "I am," a state of supreme bliss. Outwardly, at that precise moment, Baba delightfully shouted from his platform...’mene kuch nahi kiya; kisiko shakti ne pakda (I didn’t do anything. The Energy has caught someone.)’ Baba noticed that the dramatic awakening of kundalini in me frightened some people in the audience. Therefore, he said, ‘Do not be frightened. Sometimes kundalini gets awakened in this way, depending upon a person’s type.’^[19]

Kundalini experiences

Invoking Kundalini experiences

Kundalini can be awakened by *shaktipat*—spiritual transmission by a Guru or teacher—or by spiritual practices such as yoga or meditation.

There are two broad approaches to Kundalini awakening: active and passive. The *active approach* involves systematic physical exercises and techniques of concentration, visualization, pranayama (breath practice) and meditation under the guidance of a competent teacher. These techniques come from any of the four main branches of yoga, and some forms of yoga, such as Kriya yoga, Kundalini yoga and Sahaja yoga emphasize Kundalini techniques.

The *passive approach* is instead a path of surrender where one lets go of all the impediments to the awakening rather than trying to actively awaken Kundalini. A chief part of the passive approach is shaktipat where one individual's Kundalini is awakened by another who already has the experience. Shaktipat only raises Kundalini temporarily but gives the student an experience to use as a basis.^[16]

Hatha yoga

According to the hatha yoga text, the *Goraksasataka*, or "Hundred Verses of Goraksa", certain hatha yoga practices including mula bandha, uddiyana bandha, jalandhara bandha and kumbhaka can awaken Kundalini.^[20] Another hathayoga text, the *Khecarīvidyā*, states that kechari mudra enables one to raise Kundalini and access various stores of amrita in the head, which subsequently flood the body.^[21]

Shaktipat

The spiritual teacher Meher Baba emphasized the need for a master when actively trying to awaken Kundalini:

Kundalini is a latent power in the higher body. When awakened it pierces through six chakras or functional centres and activates them. Without a master, awakening of the kundalini cannot take any one very far on the Path; and such indiscriminate or premature awakening is fraught with dangers of self-deception as well as misuse of powers. The kundalini enables man consciously to cross the lower planes and it ultimately merges into the universal cosmic power of which it is a part, and which also is at times described as kundalini ... The important point is that the awakened kundalini is helpful only up to a certain degree, after which it cannot ensure further progress. It cannot dispense with the need for the grace of a Perfect Master.^[22]

Kundalini awakening while prepared or unprepared

The experience of Kundalini awakening can happen when one is either prepared or unprepared.^[16]

Preparedness

According to Hindu tradition, in order to be able to integrate this spiritual energy, a period of careful purification and strengthening of the body and nervous system is usually required beforehand.^[15] Yoga and Tantra propose that Kundalini can be awakened by a guru (teacher), but body and spirit must be prepared by yogic austerities such as pranayama, or breath control, physical exercises, visualization, and chanting. Patañjali emphasised a firm ethical and moral foundation to ensure the aspirant is comfortable with a reasonable degree of discipline and has a serious intention to awaken their full potential. The student is advised to follow the path in an openhearted manner.^[16]

Traditionally people would visit ashrams in India to awaken their dormant kundalini energy. Typical activities would include regular meditation, mantra chanting, spiritual studies as well as a physical asana practice such as kundalini yoga. However, kundalini is now widely known outside of the Hindu religion and many cultures

globally have created their own ways to awaken the kundalini energy within people. Without explanation, an increasingly large percentage of people are experiencing kundalini energy awakenings spontaneously which means, it is not vital to follow a distinct set of instructions or rules in order to awaken the energy.^[23]

Unpreparedness

Kundalini can also awaken spontaneously, for no obvious reason or triggered by intense personal experiences such as accidents, near death experiences, childbirth, emotional trauma, extreme mental stress, and so on. Some sources attribute spontaneous awakenings to the "grace of God", or possibly to spiritual practice in past lives.^[16]

A spontaneous awakening in one who is unprepared or without the assistance of a good teacher can result in an experience which has been termed as "Kundalini crisis", "spiritual emergency" or "Kundalini syndrome". The symptoms are said to resemble those of Kundalini awakening but are experienced as unpleasant, overwhelming or out of control. Unpleasant side effects are also said to occur when the practitioner has not approached Kundalini with due respect and in a narrow egotistical manner. Kundalini has been described as a highly creative intelligence which dwarfs our own. Kundalini awakening therefore requires surrender; it is not an energy which can be manipulated by the ego.^[16]

Some writers use the term "Kundalini syndrome" to refer to physical or psychological problems arising from experiences traditionally associated with Kundalini awakening.^[24]

Religious interpretations

Indian interpretations

Kundalini is considered to occur in the chakra and nadis of the subtle body. Each chakra is said to contain special characteristics^[25] and with proper training, moving Kundalini through these chakras can help express or open these characteristics.

Kundalini is described as a sleeping, dormant potential force in the human organism.^[26] It is one of the components of an esoteric description of the "subtle body", which consists of nadis (energy channels), chakras (psychic centres), prana (subtle energy), and bindu (drops of essence).

Kundalini is described as being coiled up at the base of the spine. The description of the location can vary slightly, from the rectum to the navel.^{[11]:229-231} Kundalini is said to reside in the triangular shaped sacrum bone in three and a half coils.^[17]

Kundalini has been described as "a residual power of pure desire" by Nirmala Srivastava^[17] and "a huge volume of energy" that is latent within a person by Jaggi Vasudev.^[27]

Ramana Maharshi mentioned that Kundalini is nothing but the natural energy of the Self, where Self is the universal consciousness (Paramatma) present in every being, and that the individual mind of thoughts cloaks this natural energy from unadulterated expression. Advaita teaches self-realization, enlightenment, God-

consciousness, and nirvana. But, initial Kundalini awakening is just the beginning of actual spiritual experience. Self-inquiry meditation is considered a very natural and simple means of reaching this goal.^[28]

Swami Vivekananda described Kundalini briefly in London during his lectures on Raja Yoga as follows:

According to the Yogis, there are two nerve currents in the spinal column, called Pingalâ and Idâ, and a hollow canal called Sushumnâ running through the spinal cord. At the lower end of the hollow canal is what the Yogis call the "Lotus of the Kundalini". They describe it as triangular in form in which, in the symbolical language of the Yogis, there is a power called the Kundalini, coiled up. When that Kundalini awakes, it tries to force a passage through this hollow canal, and as it rises step by step, as it were, layer after layer of the mind becomes open and all the different visions and wonderful powers come to the Yogi. When it reaches the brain, the Yogi is perfectly detached from the body and mind; the soul finds itself free. We know that the spinal cord is composed in a peculiar manner. If we take the figure eight horizontally (∞) there are two parts which are connected in the middle. Suppose you add eight after eight, piled one on top of the other, that will represent the spinal cord. The left is the Ida, the right Pingala, and that hollow canal which runs through the centre of the spinal cord is the Sushumna. Where the spinal cord ends in some of the lumbar vertebrae, a fine fibre issues downwards, and the canal runs up even within that fibre, only much finer. The canal is closed at the lower end, which is situated near what is called the sacral plexus, which, according to modern physiology, is triangular in form. The different plexuses that have their centres in the spinal canal can very well stand for the different "lotuses" of the Yogi.

When Kundalini Shakti is conceived as a goddess, then, when it rises to the head, it unites itself with the Supreme Being (Lord Shiva). Then the aspirant becomes engrossed in deep meditation and infinite bliss. Paramahansa Yogananda in his book *God Talks With Arjuna: The Bhagavad Gita* states:

At the command of the yogi in deep meditation, this creative force turns inward and flows back to its source in the thousand-petaled lotus, revealing the resplendent inner world of the divine forces and consciousness of the soul and Spirit. Yoga refers to this power flowing from the coccyx to Spirit as the awakened kundalini.

Paramahansa Yogananda also states:

The yogi reverses the searchlights of intelligence, mind and life force inward through a secret astral passage, the coiled way of the kundalini in the coccygeal plexus, and upward through the sacral, the lumbar, and the higher dorsal, cervical, and medullary plexuses, and the spiritual eye at the point between the eyebrows, to reveal finally the soul's presence in the highest center (sahasrara) in the brain.^{[29]:18, 1093}

Western interest

Sir John Woodroffe (pen name Arthur Avalon) was one of the first to bring the notion of Kundalini to the West. As High Court Judge in Calcutta, he became interested in Shaktism and Hindu Tantra. His translation of and commentary on two key texts was published as *The Serpent Power*. Woodroffe rendered Kundalini as "Serpent Power" for lack of a better term in the English language but "kundala" in Sanskrit means "coiled".^{[29]:1}

Western awareness of the idea of kundalini was strengthened by the Theosophical Society and interest by the psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875–1961).^[30]

Jung's seminar on Kundalini yoga, presented to the Psychological Club in Zurich in 1932, has been widely regarded as a milestone in the psychological understanding of Eastern thought. Kundalini yoga presented Jung with a model for the development of higher consciousness, and he interpreted its symbols in terms of the process of individuation.^[31]

The founder of the Aetherius Society George King describes the concept of Kundalini throughout his works and claimed to have experienced this energy many times throughout his life while in a "positive samadhic yogic trance state".^[32]

According to King,

It should always be remembered that despite appearances to the contrary, the complete control of Kundalini through the spinal column is man's only reason for being on Earth, for when this is accomplished, the lessons in this classroom and the mystical examination is passed.^[33]

In his lecture entitled *The Psychic Centers – Their Significance and Development* he describes the theory behind the raising of Kundalini and how this might be done safely in the context of a balanced life devoted to selfless service.^[34]

Sri Aurobindo was the other great authority scholar on Kundalini parallel to Woodroffe, with a somewhat different viewpoint, according to Mary Scott (who is herself a latter-day scholar on Kundalini and its physical basis) and was a member of the Theosophical Society.^[35]

Another populariser of the concept of Kundalini among Western readers was Gopi Krishna.^[36] According to one writer his writings influenced Western interest in Kundalini yoga.^[37]

In the early 1930s two Italian scholars, Tommaso Palamidessi and Julius Evola, published several books with the intent of re-interpreting alchemy with reference to yoga.^[38] Those works influenced modern interpretations of Alchemy as a mystical science. In those works, Kundalini is called an "Igneous Power" or "Serpentine Fire".

Other well-known spiritual teachers who have made use of the idea of Kundalini include Aleister Crowley, Albert Rudolph (Rudi), Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh (Osho), George Gurdjieff, Paramahansa Yogananda, Sivananda Radha Saraswati who produced an English language guide of Kundalini yoga methods, Muktananda, Bhagawan Nityananda, Yogi Bhajan, Nirmala Srivastava, Samael Aun Weor.

New Age

Kundalini references may be found in a number of New Age presentations, and is a word that has been adopted by many new religious movements.^[39]

Medical explanations

According to Carl Jung "... the concept of Kundalini has for us only one use, that is, to describe our own experiences with the unconscious ..."^[40] Jung used the Kundalini system symbolically as one means of understanding the dynamic movement between conscious and unconscious processes. He cautioned that all forms of yoga, when used by Westerners, can be attempts at domination of the body and unconscious through the ideal of ascending into higher chakras.^[31]

Recently, there has been a growing interest within the medical community to study the physiological effects of meditation, and some of these studies have applied the discipline of Kundalini yoga to their clinical settings.^{[41][42]}

The popularization of eastern spiritual practices has been associated with psychological problems in the west. Psychiatric literature notes that "since the influx of eastern spiritual practices and the rising popularity of meditation starting in the 1960s, many people have experienced a variety of psychological difficulties, either while engaged in intensive spiritual practice or spontaneously".^[43] Among the psychological difficulties associated with intensive spiritual practice we find "Kundalini awakening", "a complex physio-psychospiritual transformative process described in the yogic tradition".^[43] Researchers in the fields of Transpersonal psychology,^[44] and Near-death studies^[45] have described a complex pattern of sensory, motor, mental and affective symptoms associated with the concept of Kundalini, sometimes called the Kundalini syndrome.^[46]

The differentiation between spiritual emergency associated with Kundalini awakening may be viewed as an acute psychotic episode by psychiatrists who are not conversant with the culture. The biological changes of increased P300 amplitudes that occurs with certain yogic practices may lead to acute psychosis. Biological alterations by Yogic techniques may be used to warn people against such reactions.^[47]

Epileptic patients have described epileptic seizures which parallel kundalini experiences:

Then one day i started feeling a bit unwell like a strange pain that started in my lower back and made its way across my body - i thought wind perhaps, ha,ha. Then it went to my heart area, it was more like a dull ache and a throbbing, i was thinking all sorts - aneurism or something but knowing i tend to have an over active imagination i put it down to indigestion. The feeling went to my throat like my throat was getting tighter and then to my temples. This was accompanied by a high pitch frequency noise like tinnitus i suppose - but would increase and decrease in intensity. The feeling left my temples and i was now feeling pressure forming on the top of my head. It felt like literally the very top of my head was on fire.

Some modern experimental research seeks to establish links between Kundalini practice and the ideas of Wilhelm Reich and his followers.^[48]

See also

- Temporal lobe epilepsy
- Mystical experience

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External links

- Kundalini (https://www.dmoz.org/Society/Religion_and_Spirituality/Yoga/Paths/Karma/Tantra/Kundalini) at DMOZ

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