

## KUNDALINI YOGA

Although Tantric literature has gained popularity throughout the world, Kundalini Yoga remains one of the most mysterious subjects within Hinduism. Perhaps this is because it is one of the most radical forms of worship in Hinduism, and to work with Kundalini is to work with the occult.

Kundalini is the name of the serpent energy that Tantric physiological models say is located in the base of the human body. When utilized properly, one can use this energy to achieve *moksa* and reach levels of indescribable bliss. However, teachers of this approach warn that it is a grave mistake to attempt to reach these goals without proper guidance, as this may lead to complete moral and spiritual degeneration (Kapoor et al 1074).

Kundalini is envisioned as a serpent that lies dormant in most people throughout their lives, idly coiled around herself three and a half times. The serpent occupies a point in the body lying two fingers above the rectum and two below the generative organs, the location of *muladhara* plexus. (Kapoor et al 1074). However, it is important to note that the serpent lies not in the physical body, but rather in what is known as the “subtle body.” She, for Kundalini is also considered to be a goddess, rests there before being awakened, and scholars differ in their opinions on where she ends up after her awakening. Some say that after reaching the highest point in the body, she stays there permanently, although others argue that she returns to her base at the *muladhara* plexus (Kapoor et al 1074).

The female nature of the serpent is important, as Kundalini is regarded as Sakti manifested as the serpent energy. Kundalini at the *muladhara* is regarded by Tantrics as the whole primordial Sakti (Woodroffe 306). Sakti is the female principle, perceived as primordial force, a causal matrix which spews out matter and endows it with forms, colours, and other

attributes, called *prakṛti* (Fic 28-9). Sakti is said to both create and obscure the material universe, also known as *maya* (Fic 29).

The process to *mokṣa* through Kundalini begins with consultation with a *guru* who has been through the process before. With an understanding of the aspirant's mental and intellectual capabilities, the *guru* should be able to tell from experience whether it is possible for him or her to succeed in this task (Woodroffe 25). It is said that for every thousand individuals who embark on this path, only one will succeed (Woodroffe 26).

Before being able to understand the process of awakening Kundalini, though, one must understand the concept of the *cakras*. At various locations of the subtle body, there are six centres of operation, each depicted as a lotus flower with a different number of petals. These centres are: *muladhara*, as mentioned above; *svadisthana*, located around the generative organs; *manipura*, around the navel region; *anahata*, the region around the heart; *visuddha*, the region connecting the spinal cord and lower portion of the *medulla oblongata*; and *ajna*, located between the eyebrows (Bhattacharyya 144). Above all of these lies the *sahasrara*, known as the *cakracita*, or "beyond *cakra*" (Thakur 106). This lies on the top of the cerebral part of the brain. Each *cakra* and *cakracita* is depicted as a lotus flower with a different number of petals. The numbers are, respectively, four, six, ten, twelve, sixteen, two, and the *sahasrara* having 1000 (Thakur 106). The total of the number of petals (excluding the *sahasrara*) is 50 – the number of characters in the Sanskrit alphabet. It is said that Sakti creates the world by singing her song using all 50 characters, and after propagating the world, rests in the individual's *muladhara cakra* (Stutley 260).

Another important concept in this yoga is the *asana*. Simply put, *asana* means position or posture. However, there is much more to it than that. 84 *asanas* are mentioned in various works,

but there are believed to be 8 400 000, of which only 84 are known to human beings (Stutley 21). One important idea is that it is essential in *asanas* is that all extremities of the limbs must be pressed together to keep an uninterrupted flow of life energy by ensuring the energy radiated by nerves in fingers and toes is kept in a closed circuit and not wasted (Stutley 21).

One last concept important to understanding the awakening process is *prana*. *Prana* is the “vital energy” that is all around us and in the air we breathe. *Prana* in the body of the individual is just part of the “Universal Breath” (Woodroffe 199). The *yogi* aspiring to awaken Kundalini must grab hold of *prana* in the process.

To utilize the energy of Kundalini, one must get her to pierce all six *cakras* and rest above them at the *sahasrara*. This is to be done through a complex process, focusing mainly on meditation under the supervision of a *guru*. There is no simple, generally accepted set of rules for the process of awakening the energy, but all processes tend to be very similar. One method suggests that the *yogi* should fill the body with *prana* by breathing in slowly, and eventually hold the breath. Then, he or she should relax to lower the heart rate, move the *prana* downwards, contract the anus and direct *prana* through a semicircular motion, left to right around the *muladhara*, all while slowly saying a secret *bija-mantra*. Doing this will warm up and stir Kundalini (Kapoor et al 1074).

Another process is much simpler, but the *yogi* must have a higher level of expertise to do it. The *yogi* is to take up a specific *asana* as assigned by a *guru*. The breath is to be held by curling the tongue to the back of the throat, and then the sexual energy is to be aroused. This alone is enough to awaken Kundalini, since the sexual energy dwells near the *muladhara cakra* (Stutley 156).

To try and hasten the process, some *tantric* schools incorporate sexual practices with some *asanas* to achieve simultaneous immobility of breath, thought, and semen (Stutley 156).

Once she is awakened, Kundalini can be directed up the central column through nerves that lie in the subtle body. These nerves are known as *nadi*, and conduct *prana* through the body (Woodroffe 109). There is no confirmed number of *nadis* since the *Bhuta-Suddhi Tantra* speaks of 72 000, the *Prapancasara* of 300 000, and the *Siva-Samhita* of 350 000, but the most commonly agreed upon number is 72 000 (Woodroffe 110). There are fourteen main *nadis*, but in Kundalini Yoga, only three are really emphasized: *ida*, *pingala*, and *susumna*. *Ida* and *pingala* meander upwards through the body transporting *prana*, and *susumna* goes straight up the body and is the channel through which Kundalini flows. All three of these *nadis* meet at the *cakras* as they travel upwards through the body (Woodroffe 151). *Ida* is a white, feminine nerve beginning on the left side of the spinal cord and ending in the left nostril and is a symbol of the moon (Bhattacharyya 70). *Pingala*, on the other hand, begins on the right side of the spinal cord and ends in the right nostril. It symbolizes the waking state and leads individuals to violent actions (Bhattacharyya 123).

As Kundalini moves upward through the *susumna*, it opens up a myriad of *nadi* at every *cakra* it pierces for *prana* to flow through. It starts with the *muladhara cakra*, which is inverted prior to Kundalini's awakening and turns upright after. The *cakra* is the location of the *prthvi-tattva*, meaning element of solidity, and is the grossest form of manifest energy (Thakur 159). The second *cakra* is the *svadisthana cakra*, which translates to "own abode of Sakti" (Woodroffe 118). The next *cakra* up, the *manipura cakra*, also known as the jewel city, is so called because the lotus is said to be as lustrous as a gem (Woodroffe 119). This *cakra* is the location of the *teja-tattva*, meaning element of heat (Thakur 159). When Kundalini reaches the *anahata cakra*,

the *yogi* can supposedly hear the *anahata-sabda*, or the “sound which comes without the striking of any two things together” (Woodroffe 120). The *visuddha cakra* is the location where the biological self is purified by a vision of the true self, or *atman* (Thakur 160). Finally Kundalini reaches the *ajna cakra*, which provides the *yogi* with supernatural powers, or *siddhi* (Woodroffe 127). Finally the serpent reaches her ultimate destination: the *sahasrara*, the location where the serpent causes the *yogi* to reach *moksa*.

Physical effects also take place at each of the *cakras* once they are pierced by the serpent. These effects are called *nimitta*, meaning, literally, “signs” (Kapoor et al 1074). These signs are profuse sweating, an increase in body temperature, and a stinging sensation (Kapoor et al 1074). Some *yogis* say that as the energy moves up, all the *cakras* below return to a cold temperature, even described as “corpse-like” (Stutley 158).

Once piercing all six *cakras* (this is known as the *sat-cakra-bheda*), the Kundalini energy reaches the *sahasrara*, her ultimate destination. It is said that on the center of the *sahasrara* lotus shines the full moon, within which rests a triangle of lightning containing the most secret *bindu*. All gods worship this hidden *bindu* and it is said to be the basis of *moksa* (Thakur 160-61). Some *yogis* maintain, however, that after reaching the *sahasrara*, the energy returns to the *muladhara* (Fig 34). Some also say that Kundalini needs to pierce only three *cakras*, the *muladhara*, *anahata*, and *ajna*, to reach the *sahasrara* (Kapoor et al 1074). There are many different descriptions of the events that take place once Kundalini reaches the *sahasrara*. Some describe it as a very simple experience, whereby the *yogi* reaches a full understanding of the self, then returns to his or her normal life and repeats the procedure often to maintain control of the energy (Fig 36). Others describe a much more complex occurrence starting with the *yogi* perceiving the “inner sounds” – sounds that start like a roaring ocean, becoming progressively quieter until they

are like a bee, and finally the *nada*, or “unmanifested” sound (Kapoor et al 1074). Often, the *yogi* is said to see a *taraka*; that is, a small, intensely bright light resting between and in front of the eyebrows (Bharati 265).

Although the entire process of using Kundalini to achieve *moksa* in this lifetime may seem relatively simple and straightforward, the *yoga* is not something to be toyed around with. Less documented than the theory and practice of this *yoga* are the potential negative consequences. Two of the main fears are that increased energy in the lower region will cause an insatiable sexual desire, and that awakening Kundalini will lead to moral and mental instability (White et al 460). The latter fear may become a reality for someone who suddenly awakens Kundalini, due to the increase in energy flow in the nervous system (White et al 198). Often, individuals who have improperly awakened Kundalini report symptoms such as short or long-term disorientation, severe anxiety, and a general mental incapacity (White et al 205-6).

It is important to keep these ideas in mind when considering Kundalini Yoga as a means to *moksa*, but they should not be discouraging as it is still a fascinating subject. Therefore, although the serpent energy is to be revered, with caution, a thorough knowledge of the subject, and the guidance of a *guru*, one can certainly consider the path of Kundalini for their own liberation.

## REFERENCES AND FURTHER RECOMMENDED READING

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Tantra  
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## **Noteworthy Websites Related to the Topic**

[http://www.sivanandadlshq.org/download/kundalini.htm#\\_VPID\\_59](http://www.sivanandadlshq.org/download/kundalini.htm#_VPID_59)

<http://www.yoga-age.com/modern/kun1.html>

[http://www.religionfacts.com/hinduism/practices/kundalini\\_yoga.htm](http://www.religionfacts.com/hinduism/practices/kundalini_yoga.htm)

<http://www.sivanandadlshq.org/download/kundalini.htm>

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