

# KUNDALINI YOGA

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*Spiritual Emergency* is one book that seeks to help people integrate pathological occult experience as a positive form of spiritual “emergence.” It was edited by Stan and Christina Grof, who say “Kundalini awakening is becoming one of their most frequently encountered forms of spiritual emergency.”<sup>1</sup> They noted that an analysis of the last 501 calls and 117 letters to their Menlo Park, California, office of SEN “revealed that a ‘typical caller’ was a forty-year-old female (69 percent) experiencing some form of kundalini awakening (24 percent).”<sup>2</sup>

In Hindu mythology and occult anatomy, the goddess Kundalini is thought of as a female serpent lying dormant at the base of the spine. Arthur Avalon comments that “kundalini is the Divine Cosmic Energy in bodies.”<sup>3</sup> She represents the female half of the divine polarity in man. While lying at the base of the spine, she is separated from Shiva, her divine “lover” and masculine counterpart, who resides in the brain. When aroused by yoga practices, she uncoils, travels up the spine toward her lover, opening the alleged psychic centers called *chakras* in the process. When the crown or top *chakra* is reached, the union of Shiva/Shakti occurs, supposedly leading the practitioner to divine enlightenment and union with Brahman. “Traditionally she is known as Durga the creatrix, Chandi the fierce and bloodthirsty, and Kali the destroyer. She is also Bhajangi the serpent. As Chandi or Kali she has a garland of skulls around her neck and drinks human blood.”<sup>4</sup>

Kundalini arousal is not, as commonly thought, restricted to *hatha* yoga practice. Even yoga authorities have said that all yoga is ultimately kundalini yoga and that yoga is meaningless without it. This is why Hans Rieker concludes, “Kundalini [is] the mainstay of *all* yoga practices.”<sup>5</sup>

Kundalini arousal or its equivalent is found not only in yoga; it is also encountered in scores of the new religions, many occult practices, and in some practices of New Age medicine. Indeed, we have found no less than 15 different New Age health techniques in which proponents claim that their methods may arouse kundalini.

In our study of 70 new religions, we found kundalini arousal, or something similar, in roughly 50 percent of them, particularly the mystical, New Age, occult religions.<sup>6</sup> For example, Hindu and Buddhist gurus, who account for scores of the new religions, are typically possessed by spirits. They often describe themselves in that manner, although they refer to it as a “divinizing”—not a demonizing—process. But when describing their spirit, or energy, possession, it is often directly linked to kundalini activity. This includes the experiences of Muktananda, Rajneesh, Rudrananda, Gopi Krishna, Ramakrishna, Sri Aurobindo, Vivekananda, Da Free John, and many others.<sup>7</sup> Whether it is called “supramental consciousness,” “god-possession,” “divine companionship,” or some other euphemism, the reality is the same. Consciousness researcher John White concludes:

**Although the word kundalini comes from the yogic tradition, nearly all the world’s major religions, spiritual paths, and genuine occult traditions see something akin to the kundalini experience as having significance in “divinizing” a person. The word itself may not appear in the traditions, but the concept is there nevertheless, wearing a different name yet recognizable as a key to attaining godlike stature.<sup>8</sup>**

Thus, whether in the Eastern guru’s transmission of occult power termed *shaktipat*,

classical shamanism, kundalini, or similar phenomena in other traditions, one is dealing with basic occult energy. In the case of Muktananda, Bubba (Da) Free John, and other gurus, it may or may not be directly attributed to the spirits, but the spiritistic associations and manifestations are so pervasive one would be hard-pressed to deny them.

Kundalini arousal typically results in temporary states of insanity, radical changes in the physical body, and possession by a spirit.<sup>9</sup> In *The Primal Power in Man or the Kundalini Shakti*,<sup>10</sup> Swami Narayananda describes some of the “exciting” possibilities:

**These hot currents that reach the brain center heat the brain, make the mind fickle, bring insomnia, brain disorder, insanity and incurable diseases. For the hot currents keep the mind wide awake and if a person does not know how to check the currents and to bring down the partly risen kundalini shakti to safer centers, one suffers terribly and it may ruin the whole life of a person or lead one to insanity. This is why we see many become insane, many get brain defects, and many others get some incurable diseases after deep sorrow.**<sup>11</sup>

Gopi Krishna, founder of one of the many kundalini research centers throughout the world, records his own experience:

**It was variable for many years, painful, obsessive, even fantasmic. I have passed through almost all the stages of different mediumistic, psychotic, and other types of mind; for some time I was hovering between sanity and insanity.**

**I was writing in many languages, some of which I never knew [the occult ability of automatic writing].**<sup>12</sup>

Krishna believes that most schizophrenics and manic depressives represent “malfunctioning” kundalini energy, thus noting the ease with which it produces mental derangement. When referring to his encounters with individuals who went mad, he says that it is widely known in India that hatha yoga practices can lead to insanity.<sup>13</sup>

**The power, when aroused in a body not attuned to it with the help of various [yoga] disciplines or not genetically mature for it, can lead to awful mental states, to almost every form of mental disorder, from hardly noticeable aberrations to the most horrible forms of insanity, to neurotic and paranoid states, to megalomania....**<sup>14</sup>

In spite of the admitted hazards of kundalini practice, many churchgoers in mainline liberal denominations are seemingly willing to experiment with it. Having received little or no discernment on occult issues from their liberal churches, they may find themselves open to experimentation in practices or traditions that claim to offer spiritual power, enlightenment, and union with “God.” Professing Christian Minerva J. McCleave is familiar with this. She became interested in the occult and, despite God’s warnings against all such involvement (Deuteronomy 18:9-12), she naively trusted that God would protect her from anything evil.<sup>15</sup> After immersing herself in occult literature, she began meditation. The result was kundalini arousal, ten years of serious mental problems, and a thorough conversion to Christian mysticism. In the end, McCleave interpreted her occult kundalini experience as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Her story provides a powerful look at the consequences of occult practice in contemporary American spiritual life:

**I plunged into meditative prayer.... I began to have problems relating to the world around me. I had shifts in consciousness during my non-meditative hours.... I was again bothered with alternating periods of euphoria, anxiety, depression, and, sometimes, despair. I was surprised to find that my peaceful prayer life was often counterbalanced with thoughts of suicide. I could not understand these strange moods.... This activity, added to long periods of prayer, was causing *changes*, painful ones, in my mind and body. The physical, mental, and emotional problems that surfaced were so dramatic that I had to quit working.**

I withdrew from society and had to rely upon my family to care for and support me.... I had begun a long “dark night of the soul,” and it lasted for ten years. My peaceful prayers changed to frantic spiritual cries for help.... Finally, in 1975, when I was thirty-seven years old, I was hospitalized three times in the psychiatric ward of the local hospital.... I could no longer cope with my agitated mind. I was besieged with migraine headaches and no longer had any control over my life.

Reluctantly, I endured eight months of therapy.... On April 6, 1976... I was jarred out of my prayer by what felt like a current of energy that seemed to enter my body through my left foot.... This current was constant for four days and nights. With it there was an increased feeling of great body heat. I felt as though I were burning up from the inside out. Relatives could feel heat emanating from the front and back of my head while their hands were an inch away from me. It was a frightening experience. I knew, intuitively, that I had somehow triggered this current through intense prayer, but I had no knowledge of how to stop it.

My mind was *hyperhyperactive*.... Physically, I went through a variety of symptoms.... Emotionally, I went up and down the keyboard of euphoria, joy, bewilderment, anxiety, depression, and the familiar despair. I was, at times, deluded and often disoriented. On one occasion, I actually believed I had died. Such peace! I was almost disappointed to realize I hadn't. I was afraid to leave my apartment for fear someone would notice my schizophrenic-like behavior. I gazed into a mirror and observed a “wild” look—the same strange look I had noticed in 1973 after I took a week of biofeedback training.... Despite my discomfort, I believed that what was happening to me was *good*, regardless of contrary appearances. I believed, “All things work together for good to them that love God.” Yet, while trying to adjust to this marvelous energy that was coursing through my mind and body, now intermittently, I exhibited so many psychiatric symptoms that the psychologist could no longer work with me....

Finally, in December 1976, by the grace of God, I was led to an open-minded, tolerant, compassionate, caring Christian psychiatrist, Bill Grimmer—an extraordinary man. He was not *afraid* of the occult. He was not *afraid* of kundalini.... My psychiatrist helped me to remember that I am still a Christian, not a yogi. He encouraged me to continue in my search—to reread the Scriptures and the writing of the mystic—to find the common denominator....

As I reread the Scriptures and the writings of the mystics, I was amazed at the new insights I gained.... The accomplished yogis explained their attainments in terms of kundalini. The Christian mystics, unaware of the Hindu term, described the same phenomenon, but named the animating, motivating spiritual force at work within them as the Holy Spirit.... The Christian experience [of kundalini] is described as the “baptism of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>16</sup>

According to the Bible, however, receiving the Holy Spirit is not about having occult experiences. Unfortunately, many people today not only discount the dangers, they also redefine yoga-induced psychopathology as genuine experience with Jesus Christ and God. Mediumistic healer and chakra/kundalini “energizer” Rosalyn Bruyere comments:

**All the myths about the rising of the kundalini and the accompanying loss of sanity are associated with the inability of an individual to hold awareness on several levels of reality simultaneously. Many of the states which we consider psychotic may in fact be “ecstatic” ....<sup>17</sup>**

#### Notes:

1. Stanislov Grof, Christina Grof (eds.), *Spiritual Emergency*, Los Angeles, CA: J.P. Tarcher,

- 1989, p. 101.
2. Ibid., p. 227.
3. Arthur Avalon [Sir John Woodroffe], *The Serpent Power: The Secrets of Tantric and Shaktic Yoga*, New York: Dover, 1974, p. 1.
4. Gopi Krishna, *The Awakening of Kundalini*, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975, p. 13.
5. Hans Ulrich Rieker, *The Yoga of Light: Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, New York: Seabury Press, 1971, p. 101, emphasis added.
6. John Weldon, *A Critical Encyclopedia of Modern American Sects and Cults*, unpublished. (This manuscript covers 70 groups and is 8,000 pages in length); cf. Robert S. Ellwood, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*.
7. John Weldon, "Eastern Gurus in a Western Milieu: A Critique from the Perspective of Biblical Revelation," Ph.D. dissertation, Pacific College of Graduate Studies, Melbourne, Australia, 1988, pp. 1-2500.
8. John White, "Kundalini and the Occult," in *Kundalini Evolution and Enlightenment*, Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1979, p. 17.
9. Gopi Krishna, *The Awakening*, pp. 140-44, 148.
10. Swami Narayananda, *The Primal Power in Man or the Kundalini Shakti*, Rishikesh, India: Narayananda Universal Yoga Trust, 1970.
11. John White, "Some Possibilities for Further Kundalini Research" in *Kundalini Evolution and Enlightenment*, p. 356.
12. Gopi Krishna, *The Awakening*, p. 124, cf. pp. 14, 33, 37.
13. Ibid., pp. 14, 33, 37.
14. Ibid., p. 14.
15. Mineda J. McCleave, "Christian Mysticism and Kundalini," in John White, *Kundalini Evolution and Enlightenment*, p. 401.
16. Ibid., pp. 403-407.
17. Rosalyn Bruyere, *Wheels of Light: A Study of the Chakras*, Sierra Madre, CA: Bon Productions, 1989, p. 165.