

KUNDALINI AND THE AWAKENING OF SPIRIT

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To be published in Issue 67 of WellBeing magazine,
due for release in March 1997. Used with permission.

**As humanity accelerates towards the millennium,
more and more people are reporting spiritual
experiences and opening into awareness that
physical reality is only a fraction of all that is.**

How does spiritual emergence begin?

No one knows for certain just what kick starts the unfolding of spiritual potential. For some, spiritual emergence is a gentle and integrated process which develops as a natural consequence of many years dedicated to service and prayer or meditation under the guidance of a teacher or guru. Others may experience a more abrupt awakening, possible due to practices which awaken transformative energy before the person has done the necessary groundwork.

It is thought that practices such as yoga, bioenergetics, polarity work or breathwork cause the awakening of Kundalini energy which heralds the transformation of spiritual potential. Kundalini is the Hindu word for the sacred, transformative energy that awakens consciousness. According to esoteric literature, this energy has been coiled at the base of the spine in a latent form since birth, awaiting the stimulus to unfold its potential.

As this energy becomes active, it is usually sensed as a vibrational or energetic force in the body, together with a strong sense of spirit. Its movement may be experienced as a rushing, outpouring, a steady streaming up the spine, or a slowly coiling spiral motion.

Another common catalyst seems to be intense physical or emotional distress. As people confront the limits of their endurance and come face to face with death, they will often move into non ordinary or transpersonal states of consciousness. Thus experiences with natural disasters, near death experiences, or life transitions such as pregnancy, midlife or separation, may be emotionally tense situations which can lead to spiritual awakening.

Regardless of the specifics of each individual's experience, the Kundalini awakening heralds a great period of change in a person's life.

What is spiritual emergency?

When spiritual seekers or even those who do not consider themselves to be on a spiritual path find themselves experiencing levels of awareness or energy transformation that they are unable to handle or for which they have no reference, then the result can be a state of emergency. In this state, a person feels highly vulnerable and oversensitive to incoming stimuli. Typically they feel overwhelmed, fragmented, fearful, confused and disoriented. With their absorption in inner processes, they may not be able to look after even basic self care.

All these situations can be bewildering and frightening, and at these times these people need support and reassurance as they undergo their transformations. The spiritual emergency network in the US seeks to network people and provide information to facilitate a more gentle emergence of spiritual potentials. The network is intended to put people in touch with others who have undergone similar experiences, or with counsellors who are aware of spiritual dimensions of reality.

THE SYMPTOMS OF KUNDALINI AWAKENING

While the awakening Kundalini may be a dramatic experience, the resultant shift in consciousness may be accompanied by years of physical and psychological upheavals. The process of Kundalini awakening can vary greatly from person to person. Some have intense physical symptoms, while others experience mainly emotional or psychological symptoms. It is as if the new energy invites a spring cleaning throughout the entire system, with unresolved physical or emotional conditions coming up for resolution and release. The life transforming changes which accompany a Kundalini awakening cover the entire physiological, emotional, mental and spiritual spectrum.

Greenwell (1990) has noted seven categories of symptoms which have been observed during Kundalini awakening.

1. Pranic movements or kriyas

Prana is the Hindu word for vital energy. Thus as intense energy moves through the body and clears out physiological blocks, a person may experience intense involuntary, jerking movements of the body, including shaking, vibrations, spasm and contraction. As deeply held armouring and blockages to the smooth flow of energy are released, the person may re-access memories and emotions associated with past trauma and injury.

2. Yogic Phenomena

Some people find themselves performing yogic postures or hand mudra gestures which they have never learned or could not do in a normal state of consciousness. Similarly, they may produce Sanskrit words or sounds, or have an awareness of inner music or sound, mantras or tones. Unusual breathing patterns may appear with either very rapid or slow, shallow breathing. Some people may not breathe at all for extended periods.

3. Physiological Symptoms

A Kundalini awakening often generates unusual physiological activity as intense movement of energy

releases toxins in the body. Symptoms include apparent heart problems, pains in head and spine, gastrointestinal disturbances and nervous problems. Internal sensations have been reported as sensations of burning, oversensitivity to sensory input, hyperactivity or lethargy, great variations in sexual desire and even spontaneous orgasm. Symptoms can be erratic, coming and going without provocation, but are generally unresponsive to medical treatment.

4. Psychological Upheaval

Spiritual awakening offers a direct challenge to the primacy of ego consciousness and the myth of separation. It brings with it a challenge to move beyond the unconscious responses ruled by drives and instincts and remove ego consciousness from the centre stage of the psyche. It comes as no surprise that such a challenge produces a period of confusion and unbalance. People find themselves beset by inexplicable emotional states as they move to clear out unresolved issues. The emotional roller coaster may swing from feelings of anxiety, guilt and depression, through to compassion, love and joy, with accompanying bouts of uncontrollable weeping.

5. Extra Sensory Experiences

As perception expands outside of consensus reality, people experience atypical visual phenomena, including visions of lights, symbols, entities, or review of past life experiences. Auditory input may include hearing voices, music, inner sounds or mantras. Even the olfactory system may be stimulated with perception of scents of sandalwood, rose or incense. There may also be disruption of the proprioceptive system, with losing a sense of self as a body, or feeling bigger than the body, or out of the body, with the resulting confusion and disorientation.

6. Psychic Phenomena

With the opening up of psychic abilities, a person may experience precognition, telepathy, psychokinesis, awareness of auras and healing abilities.

7. Mystical States of Consciousness

A person may shift into altered states of consciousness where they directly perceive the unity underlying the world of separation and experience a deep peace and serenity with a profound knowing of wisdom.

In some cases, the state of emergency due to psychological upheaval is so acute that it resembles a psychotic episode. Many clinicians still regard phenomena associated with spiritual emergence as indicative of pathology because the signs are so easily confused with the indicators of psychosis, mania, depression, schizophrenia or borderline personality disorder. Many people undergoing spiritual emergency are misdiagnosed and treated with suppressive medication which further complicates their process.

What can be done to support a Kundalini awakening?

When Kundalini awakening happens to people who are not on a spiritual path or who have no context or framework to understand the bewildering upheaval of mind, body and spirit, the experience can leave them fragile and fragmented. As the Kundalini process involves a redefinition and reintegration of self, it adds extra pressure when health professionals or significant others wish to suppress the transformation and insist that the person conforms to old ways of being in the world.

Of greatest benefit is a supportive framework which can allow people to make sense of the intricate connection between spirit and the movement of physical energy in the body, rather than fearing they are going insane. It is more empowering to understand that Kundalini awakening is a process which taps into the blueprint for higher consciousness which is latent within every human. While the enormous changes associated with a spiritual awakening may demand psychological and social adjustments, they are not in themselves necessarily indicative of illness. Communication and connection with others who can provide support and a meaningful context for understanding the process reduces the isolation and overwhelm and can help to minimise the disturbance. Someone who has the personal qualities of creative adaptation to change and a flexible mental framework is more likely to weather the changes with grace and style than someone who is rigid in their beliefs and world view.

Humanity's Wake Up Call

Usually the awakening of Kundalini was a process which only occurred after years of spiritual practice and meditation. Yet increasingly, the Kundalini experience is being reported among people who are not undertaking spiritual practices. Since 1993, when Shared Transformation, an American journal for connecting spiritual awakeners first began, it has been contacted by over 700 people in the throes of spontaneous Kundalini arousal (Collie & Kress, 1995). These increased reports of spontaneous Kundalini awakening at this time of planetary upheaval may be indicative of a larger purpose at work, the beginning of a planetary wake up call. Anyone who is on a spiritual path, or engaging in practices which change body energies, such as meditation, yogic practices, breathwork, rebirthing or polarity balancing, may find they begin to resonate with the changing energies at this time and that they begin their own Kundalini awakening process.

Is Kundalini awakening the same as enlightenment?

It is important not to confuse Kundalini awakening with enlightenment. Enlightenment rarely results from a single encounter with the numinous. It is more as if the energetic awakening initiates an expansion in consciousness which sets the scene for a progression of many experiences with transpersonal states of consciousness. The intensity and duration of each of glimpse varies with our readiness to contain and integrate them. Thus the Kundalini awakening is not an end point in itself, but the beginning of a transformation of consciousness which expands our capacity to KNOW the infinite. Spiritual emergence often includes expanded perceptual abilities, increased energy, creative expression and a dedication to being of service for the greater good.

In her book, *The Energies of Transformation*, Bonnie Greenwell (1990) gives us an indication of what this transformation may bring in practical terms. "Most of those who awaken this connection with the ecstatic inner Self will return to being who they were, perhaps doing their lives with more contentment or a gentler perspective, perhaps more involved and committed in service to others, perhaps more energised and expressive, perhaps writing poetry, teaching, loving unconditionally." (p302)

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