

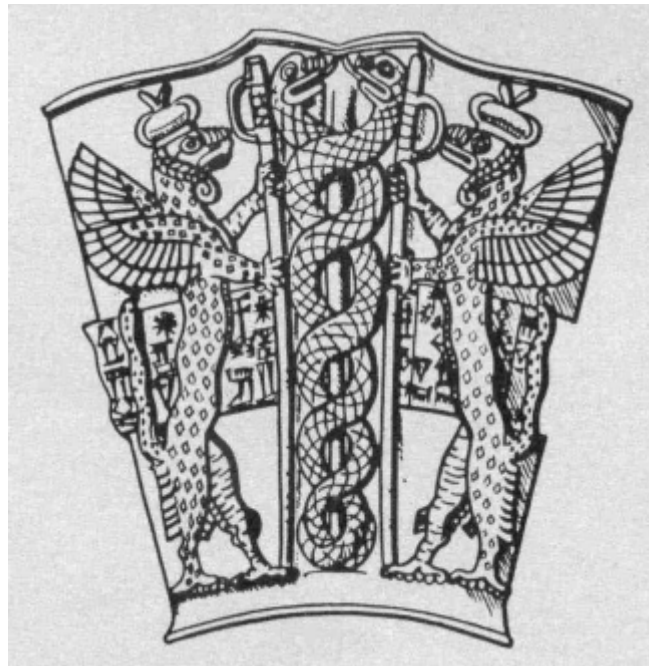


# Kundalini Awareness



## The Evolution of Joseph Campbell (And America)

By Gene Kieffer\*



An extended drawing of a libation cup of King Gudea of Lagash, Sumer, c. 2000 BC. "Two composite beasts of a type called 'line-birds' draw back the portals of a sanctuary, where an apparition appears of the great Mesopotamian serpent-god Ningishzida. The two are entwined about an axial rod as to suggest the Indian diagram of seven spinal centers touched and wakened to consciousness in Kundalini yoga by the rising Serpent Power." (Campbell, *The Mythic Image*)

### Mystery, Myth and Mysticism

If the theme of our conference this year could be embodied in the life of a single person, it would surely be that of Joseph Campbell, "the world's foremost authority on mythology." A "teacher whose works have had a profound influence on millions," he would have smiled with satisfaction, watching us try our best to tread the treacherous territory he loved so much, knew intimately and loved greatly—the world of "mystery, myth and mysticism."

Professor Campbell was, as Bill Moyers has said, the story-teller par excellence, gathering his material from the four corners of the earth and the star-filled sky above. In the short year since his death—he was 82—his name and fame have spread far beyond the seminar circuits customarily reserved for intellectuals. He was and still is America's favorite and most respected guru, thanks to his prolific writings and recent appearances on public television.

Though I attended only a few of his lectures, his ideas have occupied a front position in my mind for almost two decades. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* was a stabilizing rudder in my life when times grew turbulent. Until I came to know about "the hero's adventure," I lived the American dream, hoping to make lots of money, drive fast cars, vacation in exotic lands and surround myself with luxuries. Whether it was Campbell or some other force that changed my thinking

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is not entirely clear to me, but he was an important factor. In 1968, as my family and I struck out in new directions, I drew a line, as though on an ocean chart, under a paragraph in “The Hero” that has remained in my mind ever since. It read as follows:

We have not even to risk the adventure alone; for the heroes of all time have gone before us; the labyrinth is thoroughly known; we have only to follow the thread of the hero-path. And where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god; where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves; where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the center of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.

My compulsion to underscore particularly meaningful passages in Campbell’s books didn’t stop there, however, so taken was I with what he had to say. His words have assumed an even greater meaning with the passing years. He was not only the consummate story-teller but the master of symbols and metaphor as well. He had to be if he was to fathom the meaning of the mysteries that were his life’s pursuit. Was there anything about mythology that he didn’t know? Who is there to say? He stood apart. He was unique. And now, with television to broadcast his ideas far and wide, he could become the first of our global teachers. That is my hope, because he helped to popularize the ideas and discoveries that can help to unify the religions of the world.

## Old Myths Take On a New Life

Having been in the newspaper business for a time, I feel compelled to search out the “big story” and pass it on. So whenever I read a book by Campbell, I get excited and begin scribbling notes for stories I’d like to write. But the thought of speaking on “the evolution of Joseph Campbell, and America,” came from out of the blue, completely unexpected. I suppose it was because of the television series with Moyers. New life had been given to the old myths, and I thought it would be instructive to peruse his books again, comparing some of the things he said in the early 60’s with what he wrote in his later years. If there was a shift in his outlook—some new insights gained—it would mean, to me at least, that there had been an evolution in his thinking.

Wondering where to start, I began to thumb through *The Masks of God*. It is in four volumes—*Primitive Mythology*, *Oriental Mythology*, *Occidental Mythology* and *Creative Mythology*—published over the course of a decade. Campbell, it seemed, had said it all. If his thinking had changed over the years, would I be able to see it? Was there any kind of a spectrometer that could detect the subtle shades of meaning? Probably not. What could possibly gauge the depths of one’s development, especially a man like him, who had spent more than half a century gathering and assimilating knowledge?

## To Measure the Progress of Evolution

Ever since reading a book by another man—a person who was in many ways the epitome of Campbell’s “hero”—I have believed that it is possible to measure the progress of human evolution. It was Gopi Krishna’s first-hand account of his own spiritual transformation, and because it seemed to be a biological as well as psychological process, I was convinced that it was a verifiable phenomenon. A hundred thousand readers may know the book by now, certainly most of you who are here today. It tells what happens to the mind and body when the Kundalini is aroused spontaneously. That is what makes it one of the most breath-taking narratives in the whole of the world’s literature on the subject of the occult and the mystical. In order to set the stage for our inquiry, it is necessary to quote a few sentences from that book, significantly entitled *Kundalini, the Evolutionary Energy in Man*:

Suddenly, with the roar like that of a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal cord. . . . The illumination grew brighter and brighter, the roaring louder. I experienced a rocking sensation and then felt myself slipping out of my body, entirely enveloped in a halo of light, . . . the point of consciousness that was myself growing wider, surrounded by waves of light . . . I was now all consciousness, without any outline, without any idea of a corporeal appendage, . . . immersed in a sea of light simultaneously conscious and aware of every point, spread out, as it were, in all directions without any barrier or material obstruction. I was no longer myself, or to be more accurate, no longer as I knew myself to be, a small point of awareness confined in a body, but instead was a vast circle of consciousness in which the body was but a point, bathed in light and in a state of exaltation and happiness impossible to describe.

Fascinating as it was, few readers were prepared, in 1967, to accept the story as having a scientific basis. But times have changed, and now, after only two decades, what the author, Gopi Krishna, described is not only believed by a great number of people but taken for granted as an example of a biological process that can only be explained by thinking in terms of accelerated evolution of the brain. For many, it is a description of something they, too, have experienced. In short, the concept of Kundalini as the evolutionary mechanism in human beings triggered a revolution in thinking, beginning as far back as 1970, when Shambhala first published the book in America. For this reason, I have taken it as a measuring stick to apply in our investigation.

## Jung's 'Mysterium Coniunctionis'

There is no reference to Kundalini in the *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, which is not surprising. There seldom was in any book published before the 1970's. But that doesn't mean Kundalini is not there. As in the case of C.G.Jung's *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (1955), the Serpent Power permeates the entire book, though it is not mentioned by name. Since it would be very hard to entirely separate Campbell from Jung, we have to touch upon the latter to some extent in our brief survey. It has been said that in many ways, *Mysterium* is the summing up of all Jung's later work, the harvest of decades of study and reflection. In an editorial note, introducing that particular book, we are informed that his "interest in the symbolical significance of alchemy for modern depth psychology first found expression, in 1929, in his commentary to *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, an ancient treatise on Chinese Yoga. This is crucial to our thesis because it has as its primary objective to convey one of the most fundamental doctrines of Kundalini, namely the sublimation of the sexual energy. "The fool wastes the most precious jewel of his body in uncontrolled pleasure," it says, "and does not know how to conserve the power of his seed. . . . If, at the time the true power has been copiously gathered together, the pupil does not let it flow downward and outward, but allows it to flow backward, that is the Light of Life; the method of turning the waterwheel must be used." As explicit as these words appear to us today, they were perplexing to Jung, who seemed to sigh with frustration when he made the following statement in his commentary:

We should do well to confess at once, that, fundamentally speaking, we do not understand the utter unworldliness of a text like this, indeed, that we do not want to understand it. . . . In general, and looked at with the incurably external point of view of the intellect, it will seem as if the things so highly valued by the East were not desirable for us.

The master of analytical psychology can be forgiven for not grasping the full meaning of the Golden Flower—samadhi—and key to its attainment, the backward-flowing method. Who among those in the intellectual front ranks of his day were even half as curious to know the secrets of mystical attainment? Jung was of course aware of the fact that sexual energy must be aroused and converted into spiritual force, but he was unprepared to go beyond that. There is more to it than the mere sublimation of sex energy. If that were not so, there would never have been the need to jealously guard the secret:

An ancient adept said: Formerly, every school knew this jewel, only fools did not know it wholly. . . . Therefore it is said, the meaning of the Elixir of Life depends entirely on the backward-flowing method. . . . If we reflect on this we see that the ancients really attained long life by the help of the seed-power present in their own bodies, and did not lengthen their years by swallowing this or that sort of elixir. But worldly people lose the roots and cling to the tree-tops. (*ibid.*)

## Kundalini On Almost Every Page

Campbell was as at home with the ideas of Jung and other pioneering psychologists, such as Freud and Adler, as he was with those of shamans, saints, medicine men, priests, mullahs, monks and yogis. But it is always hard to surpass the master, and since Jung was not privy to the secret teachings—he had to ferret out every jot of information by analysis and reflection—his knowledge was limited. This had the effect of putting a lid on the attainment of his followers. His book on alchemy—*Mysterium Coniunctionis*—which deals with the integration of opposites, is a confirmation of this fact. While it is true that the word Kundalini isn't used, anyone reading the book with the Serpent Power in mind would see it on almost every page, ready to spring to life if given the slightest nudge. It would be a great service to psychotherapy in particular and psychology in general if someone were to insert the word in his writings wherever it directly applies.

“Ideas develop from seeds,” Jung said, “and we do not know what ideas will develop from what seeds in the course of history.” If Kundalini is truly the super-intelligent energy behind consciousness, i.e, the evolutionary mechanism that determines the capacity of the brain, it should be a hidden participant in alchemy as well as all of the other genuine transformative systems, both ancient and modern. And indeed it is! For instance, once when speaking of “the ineffable mystery of the *unio mystica* or *tao*, or the content of *samadhi*”—the true aim of yoga practice and alchemy, too—the great psychologist made the following comment:

Remarkably enough, this experience is an empirical one insofar as there are unanimous testimonies from the East and West alike, both from the present and from the distant past, which confirm its unsurpassable subjective significance. Our knowledge of physical nature gives us no *point d'appui* that would enable us to put the experience on any generally valid basis. It remains a secret of the world of psychic experience and can be understood only as a numinous event, whose actuality, nevertheless, cannot be doubted. . . . What, then, do the statements of the alchemists concerning their arcanum mean, looked at psychologically?

Without saying so, Jung was referring to Kundalini, for there can be no *samadhi* without it, as has been said. Most if not all the well known alchemical terms have their counterparts in Yoga, as for example “Wind,” “Sol,” “Luna,” which mean, respectively, *prana* and the *pingala* and *ida* nadis. When asked about the “Wind,” Ramakrishna replied, “The ‘wind’ means the great current that one feels in the subtle nerves, *Ida*, *Pingala*, and *Sushumna*, when the Kundalini is awakened.” The *lapis philosophorum*, or discovery of the Philosopher’s Stone, is the result of the “chymical marriage,” the supreme act of union in which the “work” reaches its consummation. This, too, is *samadhi*. Over simplification has its dangers, of course, but for the sake of brevity, it is perhaps excusable. Imagine, though, what a change would have occurred in the thinking of psychologists had Jung identified Kundalini as Campbell did years later. He would have caused the eyes of a thousand scholars to focus on the source material. Their findings, blending with the existing speculations of their day, would have given rise to a new approach to psychology at a most crucial period in history. To his everlasting credit, Campbell took the leap and said what needed to be said, though he was not able to do it overnight.

In *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*, he wrote, “As apprehended by the mystic (the herald’s summons) may mark the dawn of religious illumination, what has been termed ‘the awakening of the self.’” Today, many of us believe, along with Ramakrishna, that whether one is aware of it or not, Kundalini must first become active in order for the Self to awaken. There isn’t any necessity to know about the chakras or the nadis, or any of the asanas or mudras of Yoga. One can successfully complete the Hero’s Journey and become wholly integrated, even transformed, without any knowledge of the practices or physiological processes involved. The evolutionary energy can awaken imperceptibly and do its transformative work behind the scenes undetected. This is probably what Professor Campbell meant here:

The ultimate adventure, when all the barriers and ogres have been overcome is commonly represented as a mystical marriage of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the World. . . . In the Tantric books of medieval and modern India the abode of the Goddess is called *Mani-dvipa*, ‘The Island of Jewels.’ Her couch-and-throne is there, in a grove of wish-fulfilling trees . . . They are laved by the still waters of the ocean of the nectar of immortality. (1949)

## Ramakrishna, the Great Mystic

In a footnote, he added, “Among the Tantras are a group of particularly important scriptures (called Agamas) which are supposed to have been revealed directly by the Universal God Shiva and his Goddess Parvati. . . . These support a mystical tradition known specifically as ‘The Tantra,’ which has exercised a pervasive influence on the later forms of Hindu and Buddhist iconography.” The Tantra is, of course, Kundalini. But more revealing is what he said about Ramakrishna, “the great Hindu mystic of the last century”:

Ramakrishna was a priest in a temple newly erected to the Cosmic Mother at Dakshineswar. . . . Only geniuses capable of the highest realization can support the full revelation of the sublimity of this goddess. For lesser men, she reduces her effulgence and permits herself to appear in forms concordant with their undeveloped powers. Fully to behold her would be a terrible accident for any person not spiritually prepared.

Campbell did not say it at the time, but he did ten years later, when, in *The Mythic Image*, he called Ramakrishna “a veritable virtuoso” in the practice of Kundalini yoga, and then quoted him at length. This is but a brief excerpt:

A man’s spiritual consciousness is not awakened unless his Kundalini is aroused. Just before my attaining this state of mind, it had been revealed to me how the Kundalini is aroused, how the lotuses of the different centers blossom forth, and how all this culminates in samadhi. This is a very secret experience. I saw a boy twenty-two or twenty-three years old, exactly resembling me, enter the Sushumna nerve and commune with the lotuses, touching them with his tongue. He began with the first center at the anus, and passed through the centers at the sexual organ, naval and so on. The different lotuses of those centers—four-petalled, six-petalled, ten-petalled, and so forth—had been drooping. At his touch they stood erect. [Then] he came to the sixteen-petalled lotus in the throat and the two-petalled lotus in the forehead. And last of all, the thousand-petalled lotus in the head blossomed. Since then I have been in this state [of samadhi].

Could anyone have been more explicit? There is no need to be concerned with how the energy is awakened. Aspirants require different methods, each according to his or her evolutionary development. It is enough to say that Kundalini *must* be awakened if one is to develop spiritual consciousness. They are synonymous terms. Today almost everybody who has visited a New Age book store knows something about Kundalini, that it can in fact awaken in a variety of ways. Even a fall while climbing a stairway might do it, if the system is already ripe for the experience. By introducing his readers to Kundalini, Campbell advanced the cause of evolution immeasurably.

## Purveyors of Spiritual Junk Food

History may be rewritten from time to time to suit those who hold the reins of power, but authors seldom rewrite their books to accommodate insights gained at a later time. Instead, they write new ones. Campbell’s early works, like old soldiers, may never die—as indeed they should not—but they may lead the uninitiated to wonder why Kundalini had been left out. Fortunately, the record was set straight in his later books. But why, if Ramakrishna was right, and Campbell agreed, didn’t other writers on mythology, psychology and religion follow suit? Why even now do they continue to beat around the bush when advising students about what is and what is not spiritual consciousness? Disseminating truth can never be a business but will always be a duty. If physical evolution tends towards complexity, the very opposite is true in the spiritual domain, where the drive is towards unity.

This is not, however, what we find in the vacuous wasteland of the New Age media, as writers compete with one another to lead unwary readers deeper into the labyrinth. Compare the literature of today with what was published before the advent of the New Age. Both in quality and quantity, it has more than kept pace with the products of the junk food industry. Campbell had it straight when he wrote the following:

Briefly stated, the goal of every yoga is to go . . . where there is no longer any resting on this object or on that, whether of the waking world or of dream, but there is met the innate light that is called, in Buddhist lore, the Mother Light. . . . This inconceivable sphere of undifferentiated consciousness is experienced not as extinction but as light unmitigated. . . . The sound Aum is . . . heard when the rising Kundalini reaches the level of the heart. . . . “When the Kundalini reaches this plane,” said Ramakrishna, “the devotee longs to talk and to hear only of God.”

Kundalini is all there is. Ramakrishna said it, Campbell agreed, and a dozen other voices could be raised to speak the same truth, in words as plain and emphatic as theirs, if given the opportunity by the publishing industry. America, determined to lead the world in the pursuit of materialism, has entered a period of spiritual malaise. How can it regain its former state of grace and evolve beyond if the media persists in purveying spiritual junk food instead of the real stuff! If Kundalini is not the key to spiritual attainment, why hasn’t a single voice been raised against it? Is there a law against coming to grips with this question? Why should millions of seekers be kept in the dark because the few who happen to have the say cannot perceive the light? The latest New Age catalog issued by Samuel Weiser advertises no less than seventy books on channeling. But isn’t it odd that not one of these “enlightened discourses from the Beyond” has a word to say about Kundalini? Without proper guidance, the vast majority are helpless to find their way. They place their trust in business men and charlatans, and they are betrayed, leaving them hopeless victims of moral irresponsibility.

## An Eerie Silence On Accelerated Evolution

There is no dispute about the legitimacy of Ramakrishna. His Enlightenment is held to be of the highest by scholars and Yogis alike. But what about the writer Ken Wilber, who, according to Daniel Goleman of *The New York Times*, is the “reigning theoretician in the field of transpersonal psychology?” Has he assigned Kundalini to its rightful place? On the contrary, in a ten-page interview in *Yoga Journal*, he took pains to draw a veil over the light. When asked about his own spiritual disciplines, he replied, “I practice Vajrayana, including visualization and mahamudra (or formless) meditation.” Since few of the magazine’s readers knew, as he did, that the aim of such practices is to awaken Kundalini, the answer was meaningless. How can America evolve spiritually if our mentors, for reasons unspoken, maintain their eerie silence about the mechanism that makes it possible? Secrecy can be appropriate in business, government and the military, and even in the dissemination of spiritual truths at times of religious persecution, but what possible reason is there for it now? Why the silence? Vajrayana is Kundalini yoga.

About six months after that interview appeared, the same magazine gave Wilber the opportunity to critique the New Age movement. Again he smothered the light. One of the questions put to him was phrased in this way: “The new age movement has, as one of its central tenets, the idea that evolution is continuing, and that we are on the verge of a higher level of consciousness, a global and spiritual consciousness. ... and that this will usher in a ‘new age,’ the age of Aquarius, the age of global peace and spiritual brother/sisterhood ... so why are you annoyed with the movement?” His reply:

It’s one thing to say that evolution is continuing and will eventually—hundreds or thousands of years down the road—bring in a higher level of spiritual growth and development, which I believe will happen. It’s quite another to say, “I myself am a leading participant in this monumental transformation that will occur within a few years and totally remake history.” You see, this new age position is extremely narcissistic. Particularly in light of the fact that this great transformation will not occur in our lifetime, nor is it even slightly likely to. Once you subtract that from the scene, you’re left with its core: narcissistic me-ness. It’s no accident whatsoever that the new age movement came out of the “me decade.”

## The Human Brain is in an Iron Mask

If this is the view of an “Einstein of Consciousness,” as he has been called, we would be better served by the mutterings of an Australian aborigine. Whether he likes it or not, Wilber is a leader and as such he has a responsibility to those who respect his opinions. He should know that when a writer of his stature, perched on Mt. Meru, says that it is impossible for others to reach the summit, they won’t even try. He knows - or should know - that an awakened Kundalini can achieve in a single lifetime what would otherwise take thousands. Why else would he, himself, engage in its practice? He is wrong in articulating such an archaic and defeatist attitude. We need *inspired* leadership more today than at any other time in history! The world is in crisis.

But it is not necessary that everybody should awaken Kundalini or even try. It is only necessary that the New Age media assume a modicum of responsibility, not only for what they publish but also for what they don’t publish. A degree of enlightenment would follow as day follows the night. What else is there to stimulate the spiritual circuitry of the brain or stir up the altruistic stratum of the mind? Even the television news shows have had to yield to the relentless pressures exerted by “The Wheels of Fortune.” The acclaimed PBS series on “The Mind” opened with a caveat emptor to the effect that “if there is one thing we know about the mind, it is this: it is the product of the brain!” Not the slightest peep of protest came from the New Age media, though to the discerning, it was transparently clear that one episode after another showed that this simply wasn’t true. The actual position is that the brain, a complex flesh-and-blood computer to be sure, is a product of the mind, not vice versa. How can America evolve if billions of dollars are spent to anchor it to a rock of materialism while not a penny is available to acquire knowledge of the spirit?

There are few remedies offered for society’s ailments because we have reached an impasse and few, if any, thinkers are able to see a way through. We need to be given legitimate alternatives, not phony “courses in miracles” that never breathe the thought of evolution. The truth is that the American brain is locked in an iron mask. Our mode of life is totally inappropriate for the harmonious evolution of the brain. We have adopted a lifestyle and a social order that are diametrically opposed to the evolutionary drive. It is as though we have encased our brain in a rigid shell that not only prohibits its growth but causes a fitful irritation, driving us in the direction of madness. This is perhaps the most realistic explanation for

the plague of drugs infecting the well-to-do. With what we know about the mutation of viruses, AIDS, may at root be a spiritual disease, too. Pollution starts in the mind just as corruption begins at the top.

Many, if not most, of the people who awaken Kundalini today are unable to cope because they have become too sensitive to the harsh realities of life. They are like orchids left to bloom in the arctic, completely unsuited for the environment. That is why one new crisis follows on the heels of another, without any of them ever finding a solution. Nature is attempting to force mankind back on the path of evolution. Since the goal of life is to elevate the divine in man, it cannot happen until the right environment is created both within and without! From a spiritual point of view, what we are doing - to suit our own ends - is against the will of God. From the scientific side, our way of life and our political institutions are in direct opposition to the evolutionary laws, which have a certain predetermined target in mind for human beings.

## **A Rising Tide Lifts All the Boats**

It is a cop-out to make free enterprise or capitalism an excuse for catering to the lowest common denominator. No one expects the establishment media to disseminate spiritual knowledge. Nor can organized religions be expected to call attention to the one unifying factor common to all people, namely the evolutionary mechanism. It remains for the New Age media to do it. What motive would there be for a magazine dedicated to Yoga, or for any other publication espousing truth, to throw dust in the eyes of its readers on such an all-important issue? The facts about our evolving brain - about Kundalini - have to be made widely known, because the idea is new, and only a small percentage of those who read or hear of it are capable of comprehending. Whether we like it or not, the information has to be drummed into us just as is the custom in grade school. Take the act of human generation. Though millions of spermatozoa reside in the semen, but a single one is needed to fertilize the egg. The seeds of trees, plants, flowers, etc., are also produced in huge numbers, yet only a few take root and grow to maturity. The fact that the brain's evolution can be accelerated to an incredible degree needs to be made widely known. Each of us has a duty to expand our awareness to the limit of our capacity. Time is running out. The crisis is mounting.

Three of the four Gospels tell the parable of the sower. Some of the seeds fell by the wayside and were trodden down. Some fell on rocks, and when they sprung up, they withered away. Others fell on good ground and produced fruit a hundredfold. "He that have ears to hear, let him hear," said Jesus to the crowd. To his disciples, he said, "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." Does Wilber have a different message for the "initiated?" If the New Age media would publish informative, factual articles on Kundalini, many of their readers would benefit beyond measure. These would be the men and women who would evolve into the real New Age leaders, replacing the smug and complacent, the cynics and defeatists. As Kennedy said, a rising tide lifts all the boats. Without balanced, moderate, wise, intelligent, compassionate, honest leaders, how can America expect to solve its problems? We cannot stop the use of narcotics, wipe out AIDS, mend the ozone hole, overcome poverty, eliminate acid rain, reverse the greenhouse effect, protect the oceans, save the tropical forests, and end the arms race, without the aid of supernatural forces. It is as simple as that. If the New Age media cannot see it that way, they should fold up their printing presses and steal away in the night. What good purpose can they serve otherwise, when the fate of the world is at stake?

## **120 Hymns Addressed to Soma**

To return to Joseph Campbell, the hero of the moment. As we have seen, a dramatic breakthrough occurred in his thinking - if we use Kundalini as the indicator - between the time he wrote *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* and the publication of *The Mythic Image*. Though several examples can be given, just one from *Oriental Mythology* should suffice. Like the three other volumes comprising *The Masks of God*, it is packed with valuable information. In one section, the definition of *Veda* is given. It means "'knowledge,' taken from the root vid (compare Latin video, 'I see'), 'to perceive, to know, to regard, to name, to find out, to acquire, to grant:'"

The Vedic hymns, it was supposed, had not been humanly composed, but 'heard' (*sruti*), as by revelation, by the great seers of the mythic past. They were therefore a treasury of divine truth, and consequently power, to be studied, analyzed, and contemplated.

For example, of the 1028 hymns of the Indo-Aryan Rig Veda, no less than 250 were addressed to Indra, king of the gods; ...200 to Agni, the deity of fire, ...and 120 went to Soma, the liquor of the sacrifice poured into Agni's mouth.

. . . The fire in the stomach is Agni. The food, therefore, is Soma. And when the individual dies, he, in turn, becomes Soma; for Agni consumes him on the funeral pyre, and in the maggots. So that this entire world is a never-ending Soma sacrifice: immortality poured forever into the fire of time.

If Kundalini is the yardstick by which evolution can be measured, then Soma is both the foot and the inch. And since much has been written about it, we need to be clear about what it is. The French scholar Alain Danielou, who spent more than twenty years in India, studying under the most eminent pandits in music and philosophy, referred to Soma more than fifty times in his book, *Hindu Polytheism*. Keep in mind, as we sample a few of his remarks, that in Jung's book on alchemy, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, the most frequently used terms are sun, moon, Sol, Luna, ambrosia, the elixir of immortality, etc, which have been commented on above. Danielou wrote:

Semen is the essence of life. It is the best offering, the purest form of the sacrificial-elixir (*soma*). All beings are born of an offering of semen cast into the fire of lust. Agni, the lord of fire, is shown devouring the semen which flows from the *linga* of Siva. This semen is worshiped under many names. It is stored in the Moon. The meaning of Agni and Soma, the meaning of the ritual sacrifice, is best understood as the offering of the seed of life into the sacred fire of love.

In the later Hymns of the *Rig Veda*, as well as in the *Atharva Veda* and in the Brahmanas, the Offering (Soma) is identified with the moon and with the god of the moon. Soma is the most frequently occurring name for the moon in the Mahabharata. The moon is the vessel of divine ambrosia drunk by Ancestors and gods yet ever refilled again. As the ambrosia, the chalice of immortality, Soma does not belong to the world of death. . . In Yoga, "ambrosia" is the name given to sexual energy. Semen is of the same substance as the mind. By sublimating his seed, the yogi acquires prodigious mental powers. The moon is the chalice of semen, the substance of the mind. The moon is the mind of the Cosmic Man, Virat, Purusa, the presiding deity of the mind. . . The moon is also the cup of offering placed near the yogic center of fire located between the brows. It is the chalice of semen, the power of sublimated eros, near the fire of penance.

The ritual *soma* used in the Vedic sacrifices was prepared from a creeper thought to be the *Sarcostemma viminalis* or *Asclepias acida*. . . [And] in the Soma sacrifice the liquid soma is drunk by the priests. This is the exoteric ritual, corresponding to the inner sacrifice (*yajna*), in which the vessel of divine liquor is man's own body and the essence of life which fills the vessel is reabsorbed inwardly and becomes the elixir of immortality.

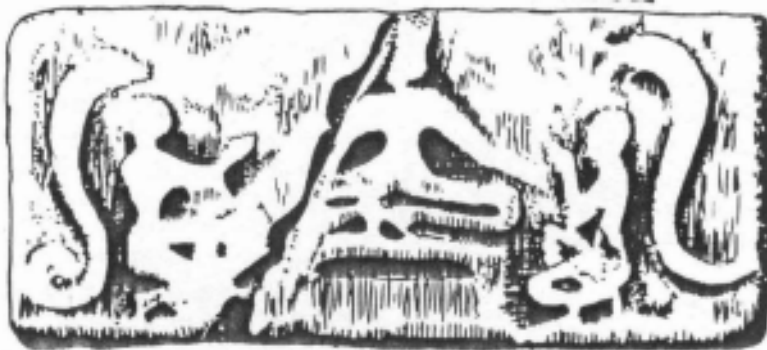
Many illustrations could be given to show that there was and is both an esoteric Soma and an exoteric soma. It is doubtful, however, that Campbell was aware of it, since he did not make the distinction in his writings nor in his seminars, so far as I know. It could be, however, that he thought his readers and students were not ready to know all the facts.

## The Story of Ajatashatru and King Soma

There are many facets of Kundalini that are unknown to scholars. In the case of the genuine mystical experience or spiritual illumination, the brain is fed by a superior, highly potent prana or life-energy through the spinal duct after extraction from every part of the body. It is this subtle radiation that is referred to as Soma in the Vedas and other ancient writings of India. For instance, in *Oriental Mythology*, Campbell relates the story of the white-robed King Soma without touching upon its significance in his commentary which followed. Here, though, is an excerpt from the legend:

There was once a proud and learned Brahmin of the Gargya family, Balaki by name, who went before the king Ajatashatru of Benares. "I will tell you," said he, "about Brahman [God]." The king replied: "For such instruction I will give you a thousand cows." And the Brahmin Gargya said: "That person who is in the sun I honor as Brahman." But Ajatashatru said: "Do not talk to me about him: I already revere him as the supreme head and king of all beings. Anyone revering him as such becomes the supreme head and king of all beings." Gargya said: "That person who is in the moon, I honor as Brahman." But Ajatashatru said: "Do not talk to me about him: I already revere him as the great white-robed king Soma. Anyone revering him as such receives abundant soma continually pressed out every day: his food does not fail."

From this, it is obvious that King Ajatashatru was aware of the esoteric meaning of Soma, whereas the learned Brahmin was not. According to Campbell, “This lore belongs without question to a psychosomatic doctrine of yoga—already well developed here, c. 700-600 B.C., although we have heard nothing of it in the Vedas.” True enough. The legend does indeed belong to the doctrine of yoga, the cornerstone of which is Kundalini, but Campbell did not make the connection with Soma, though he had already mentioned that no less than 120 hymns were addressed to Soma in the *Rig Veda*. This shows that it made no impression on him at the time. Even more instructive, however, is a reference to Yoga a few paragraphs before we come across the story of King Ajatashatru. “Benares was the city of the god Shiva, ‘The Lord of Yoga,’” he wrote. “And there is, in fact, a possibility - as noted earlier - that this may have been the center from which the yoga postures represented in the Indus Valley seals ultimately derived.” One would do well to cultivate the diligence and persistence of a Sherlock Holmes before attempting to decipher the ancient enigmatic symbols. Here “the seals” are of the utmost importance to our investigation. Campbell must have held them in the same high regard, for he has reproduced pictures of them in at least three of his books. Typical of timeless India, he wrote in *Oriental Mythology*, “is the imagery of a series of about a half a dozen Indus seals showing figures in yoga posture, of which two examples will suffice for our present view.



“The first [on the left] shows a personage seated in yoga [position] on a low dais. His immense headdress of horns, with its towering crown between, suggests the form of a trident. And the phallus, exposed, is erect.” Since no explanation is given for it, the reader is left to wonder. (According to Campbell, “All who have commented on this figure have perceived in it a prototype of Shiva.”) In the second seal, a serpent on either side of the meditating yogi rises to a height “precisely of the crown of his head, while kneeling worshipers pay him honor at either hand.” Though numerous phallic symbols have been found among the Indus Valley ruins, Campbell did not connect them to the Serpent Power in 1962. This reticence bears out what has often been said, that if it was not the most jealously guarded secret in history, Kundalini was at least one of the greatest secrets ever kept. There was no mention made of it in the *Masks of God*, so far as I know. Its initial appearance was made, full blown, in *The Mythic Image*, as if it had been waiting in the wings all those years for just the right moment to come on stage center.

## The ‘International Tantrik Journal’

But was America all that much in the dark also? In an essay, entitled *The Secret of Kundalini* (1987), the present writer tried to show that this was definitely not the way it was. Many secret and semi-secret societies, brotherhoods, etc., taught the facts to one degree or another. The Masons and Rosicrucians were but the most conspicuous. Why the secrecy then, and why now? Ask this question of yourself: If you owned a bit of land somewhere in the country and one day discovered a vein of gold in a creek passing through, would you shout the good news to all your neighbors? Probably not. And so it was all through history. Knowledge of Kundalini gave those who possessed it an edge over those who were not in on the know. It would be better, so it was thought, if they believed in superstitions, which would keep them in fear. That’s one answer. Another is that those who profess to be “catalysts for change” might in fact abhor change. Most institutions, and individuals too, feel they are better served by the status quo. Why risk the unknown? Edison said it best, that the hardest thing in the world is to make people think.

Considering all this, it is amazing that at one time there was a publication called the *Tantrik Journal in America*. For many years, I have had one of the “external” issues (Vol. V, No. 1, dated October 1906) but knew nothing about who was behind it. An enigmatic publication of 190 pages, with a gold-embossed, red cover and impressive typography, it was evident that the publisher had not to skimp on production. Nor was the content made to suffer. Thousands of words per-

taining to Kundalini were gleaned from many ancient sources, both in the East and West, by the unknown editors. Here are a few typical paragraphs, adapted from *Yoga Vasishtha*, that appeared in this particular issue some eighty years ago:

Attend, O Gargi! to what I say. Press the ankle of the left foot. . . and meditate quietly upon the jet of the flame (within) Prana, the action whereof is so much waste of vitality, being thus stopped, flows up the place of fire in the body. The fire then burns more brightly on being made the subject of contemplation every morning, evening, and midnight. . . The vital air being thoroughly mastered, various psychic experiences will begin to dawn spontaneously upon the inner consciousness. The voice within will then begin to be heard, and if the practice is continued for six months or twelve, physiological processes will alter.

In its normal condition the Kundalini winds itself around the central knot, and obstructs the upward course of the vital air through it by gagging its own mouth (the way of access) with the tail held fast in it. It lies like a sleeping serpent ever shining with its own light. O innocent one! when vital air passes along with the said fire, beyond the navel and pervades the whole body, all diseases disappear, fresh vitality and vigor are imparted to the whole system, and the body shines with supreme beauty. When the vital air enters with the said fire into the Brahmarandhra [in the head], the Yogi should meditate upon the brilliant jet of light which immediately appears in the heart. The air thus held in the heart by this process of meditation enters the thousand-petalled lotus (in the head) and turns its face upside down. In the lotus of the heart called, O Gargi! the “city of Brahman,” thus made to bloom in full, the Prana appears like numerous suns shining simultaneously in the morning. The fire extending from the center of the heart to the opening of the Sushumna appears like an unbroken streak of lightning in the clouds charged with water.

This is but the tip of the iceberg, enough to show that the knowledge of Kundalini was well known in America nearly a century ago. Page after page of Tantrik lore, more than one would find in all the magazines published in the U.S. since 1960 combined, were contained in this single issue of the *Tantrik Journal*. Despite the wealth of information, however, there wasn't any mention of the people responsible for its publication. ‘Under the title on the cover were only these few words: “American Edition. Supply Depots: Chicago, Seattle, New Orleans. Tantrik Press, New York.” Another cryptic note inside read, “External Issue, 2d Calcutta—1st N.Y., Br. Am. Eds. 20,000, 5,000.” With such scant information to go on, I was at a loss until I mentioned it to the editor of the Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology, Leslie Shepard. In a letter dated 20th September, 1988, Dublin, Ireland, he provided the following information:

This is just a quick response. . . to assure you that the *Tantrik Journal* arrived safely, and I was very happy to have it! Probably the reason why I didn't mention it [when we talked earlier] was that I was checking to see if my hunch that this was the work of Pierre Bernard (1875-1955) was correct. It was! Bernard (born Peter Coons) started a Sanskrit College in New York in 1909. You'll find a brief note on him in my Encyclopedia, but there is also an update in the first supplement. Known as “Oom the Omnipotent,” he taught yoga and Tantric Hinduism, later moving his group to Nyack, where he became a community leader. Clearly he did his homework and knew what he was talking about. Many famous people and gurus visited Nyack, including Sir Paul Dukes. Bernard's nephew, Theos Bernard (1908-1947), was one of the first Western students of Hatha Yoga to follow a traditional training in the U.S. and India, and his book *Hatha Yoga* is a classic of its kind, integrating the traditional texts and describing minutely his own development to the final stage of maintaining the major *asanas* for a period of three hours each.

## Unfoldment of ‘This Subtle Spiritual Force’

One wonders what happened between the turn of the century and the 1960's to halt the spread of Kundalini knowledge. If 25,000 copies of a single issue of the *Tantrik Journal* were sold eighty years ago, what does it say for America's evolution since then? Why, when Campbell's books are on the list of best-sellers, and two actually feature Kundalini, is the subject still such a hot-potato in the New Age media and taboo most everywhere else? Can we assume that he knew more about the significance of the meditating yogi with erect phallus than he let on in *Oriental Mythology*? Expanding on the subject again, many years later, in the *Mythic Image*, he wrote:

The earliest known evidences of yoga appear on a half-dozen or so of the Indus Valley seals (2500-1500 B.C.), an example of which appears here. Two attendant serpents elevate their giant forms behind a pair of worshipers kneeling at either hand of an enthroned figure seated in what appears to be a posture of yoga. And the fact that the elevation of the so-called Serpent Power is one of the leading motifs of yogic symbolism suggests that we may have here an explicit pictorial reference not only to the legend of some prehistoric yogi, but also to the unfoldment through yoga of this subtle spiritual force.

If so, the question arises whether some sort of yoga may not have been practiced outside India at that time as well. For a number of the symbols that are interpreted in psychological terms in yogic lore appear also in the monuments of other ancient cultures—where, however, no explanatory texts, such as those that can be studied from the Hindu- Buddhist sphere, are known. For example, an ornamented Sumerian ritual cup of the same period as the Indus Valley seal. Two composite beasts . . . draw back the portals of a sanctuary, where an apparition appears of the great Mesopotamian serpent-god Ningishzida. . . The two are entwined about an axial rod in such a way as to suggest both the caduceus of classical Hermes, guide of souls to rebirth in eternal life, and the Indian diagram of seven spinal centers touched and awakened to consciousness in Kundalini voga by the rising Serpent Power.



A Sumerian seal shows a god enthroned before a caduceus, offering his worshiper the cup of an immortal drink, held directly beneath the celestial vessel of the moon [Soma]. The worshiper is being presented by his patron deity, while behind him stands the porter of the palace gate, wearing a sort of serpent cap and bearing in hand one of those ambrosia pails that we have already found associated with guardians of the tree of life.

## Producing the Mysterious Inner Soma

More than 2,500 years before the birth of Christ, then, our ancestors were perfecting, or perhaps had already perfected, the powerful, transformative technology of Kundalini yoga. It was meant to produce a highly concentrated form of prana, the mysterious inner soma, amrita or ambrosia—i.e., the elixir of immortality—which bestows longevity, greater vitality, genius and higher consciousness. Moreover, the science, was apparently known far and wide, though undoubtedly confined to a small segment of the priesthood and ruling class. Campbell did not say so in these words, but the idea had to have been in his mind. Because years later, in *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space* (1985), he again wrote about this same phenomenon at even greater length:

At some point the body and mind together become fundamentally aware and convinced that the energy by which the body is pervaded is the same as that which illuminates the world and maintains alive all beings. ..Ramakrishna has described the actual sensation:

‘Sometimes the Spiritual Current rises through the spine, crawling like an ant. Sometimes, in Samadhi, the soul swims joyfully in the ocean of divine ecstasy, like a fish. Sometimes, when I lie down on my side, I feel the Spiritual Current pushing me like a monkey and playing with me joyfully. I remain still. That Current, like a monkey, suddenly with one jump reaches the Sahasrara. That is why you see me jump with a start. Sometimes, again, the Spiritual Current rises like a bird hopping from one branch to another. The place where it rests feels like fire . . . Sometimes the Spiritual Current moves up like a snake. Going in a zigzag way, at last it reaches the head and I go into samadhi. A man’s spiritual consciousness is not awakened unless his Kundalini is aroused.’

One gets the feeling, in reading Campbell's later writings, that with him all was Kundalini in the end. "That extreme psycho-physiological exercises of this highly sophisticated and effective, spiritually transformative [Yoga] have been practiced in India for at least four thousand years, we know from the evidence of a number of engraved stamp seals." etc.

## **Kundalini Can be Found Almost Everywhere**

So much for the evidence. The author with a million loyal fans in fact went much further when he boldly stepped into the rarified world of near-clairvoyance, stating that Kundalini can be found in almost all cultures on every continent, dating from even before the dawn of civilization. Research into the distant past might yield far greater returns than our explorations in space over the next three decades. Here Professor Campbell returns once again to comment on the seals that depict the erect phallus:

And so, indeed, it does appear that anyone viewing with unprejudiced eye the religions of mankind must recognize mythic themes at every hand that are shared, though differently interpreted, among the peoples of this planet. . . . C.G. Jung, as we have also remarked, proposed his theory of "archetypes of the unconscious" . . . [but] there are, however, instances that cannot be so readily interpreted in purely psychological terms, as for example in the matter of our present interest, where a structured constellation of ideas, images, and related exercises, yielding transformational experiences will have appeared over an extensive historical field . . . unmistakably of one originating structure. For it is evident that knowledge of what is known today in India as the kundalini was not in ancient times confined to the Indus Valley Civilization.

What can be added here except to emphasize the word "unprejudiced?" May we be forgiven for putting words in his mouth, that Jung had missed the boat, that Heinrich Zimmer failed to see it, that Mircea Eliade was not aware of it, that Freud had no inkling of it, either? Campbell alone among the erudite made it known that wherever one turns and however scholars may comb the world for the Rosetta Stone that can decipher the most arcane and enigmatic religious and spiritual symbolism, they will find only Kundalini. It took him to put it all together and to tell it to the world.

## **When and Where Did Kundalini Originate?**

At this point, in *The Inner Reaches of Outer Space*, he proceeded to catalog a large number of examples of where the Serpent Power was paramount in various civilizations, from India to nearby Mesopotamia, then Egypt and Ireland and throughout the four quarters of the globe:

There is in the Musee Guimet, in Paris, from China of the Chou Dynasty, c. 1027-256 BC, a coiled bronze serpent, showing just three and a half turns, which to me at least, very strongly suggests the *kundalini* in the *muladhara*:

And at the opposite margin of the vast Eurasian common-culture field, in Ireland, ninth century AD, not only were the enigmatic illuminations of the Book of Kells made alive with symbolic serpents. . . but also, on the side of an immense stone cross of the same pre-Gothic Christian period—the "Cross of the abbot Muiredach"—there was engraved in high relief an astonishing panel known as *Destra Dei*, the "Right Hand of God," in which two interlacing serpents appear, one heading downward, the other upward, enframing three human heads in ascending series, with a human right hand above, reaching to the center of a crowning, halo like, ornamented disk. If this is not an explicit reference to the top four states of an ascent of the *sushumna*, the sense of such an appearance on a Christian monument commemorating the Crucifixion remains to be explained.

One may even suspect that covert Gnostic connotations may underlie much, if not all, of the recondite Irish-monastic symbolic art of that formerly Druidic province of the Christian mission.

What Campbell has said, in effect, is that Kundalini is not only an organ in each and every human being, it is a fundamental principle in nature, pervading, at a certain level, the whole of society, dormant at times and active at others. It is an astonishing assertion, coming from a scholar whose popularity among both the learned and untutored is unprecedented. How can any intelligent person dismiss the heaps of evidence he presents? He showed that Kundalini was - and still is - at the very heart of all:

At what time and in what place or places, then, did the great Eurasian constellation originate, those macro-micro-mesocosmic metaphors, ritualized devotions addressed to the same, and psycho-physiological exercises reconfirming them, of which the Indian gurus, Tibetan rimpoches, and Japanese Zen masters are the inheritors?"

## **Kundalini Among the Navahos and Maya**

He didn't offer a definitive answer. Kundalini yoga was practiced in the Early Bronze Age of the Near and Middle East, certainly, but knowledge of it may have existed even earlier and at other places. Campbell found strong evidence for it in South America, among the Maya and the Aztec people, and in North America as well. For example, he wrote, "There is the Navaho sand painting, where the imagery and connotations so perfectly match those of the ascent of the *sushumna*, that if one were to be told that it was Tibetan, it would immediately be recognized as Kundalini. He concluded that in both the Old and New Worlds, it is a certainty that Kundalini was the underlying reality of the priesthood, "as though of one and the same mystical heritage."

Joseph Campbell is becoming a household word in America, thanks to his many books and the six hour-long television interviews with Bill Moyers. He is as renowned in his field as Jonas Salk is in biology, and soon he may be as well known. It is not important that he did not describe Kundalini as the evolutionary mechanism in man. He didn't have to. From what he said, it could not be anything else. One would have to struggle very hard to find a loophole in his arguments. He did not pretend to know everything there is to know about Kundalini. On the contrary, he plainly admitted, when queried by Moyers on television, that he himself had never had the genuine mystical experience, without which it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to decipher much of the ancient spiritual iconography. More important, he had an open mind and a seeking heart, a sure sign that in him the divine energy was active nonetheless. He often talked about the "Kundalini system," interpreting the symbolical and psychological significance of the chakras according to the views of Jung, Adler and Freud.

## **Significance of the Erect Phallus**

But what, really, was so important about the Indus Valley seals that drew him back to them again and again, as though they posed a host of questions still to be addressed? That the yogi with penis erectus held a fascination for him cannot be denied, else why would he reproduce the pictures in his books, from first to last? There was not just one seal but hundreds, many bearing pictographic characters that have still to be deciphered. According to Gopi Krishna, who commented on them also, the fact that the phallus is shown prominently in a state of tumescence is highly significant. In *The Dawn of a New Science* (1978), he wrote:

From a common point of view, an erect phallus is the last thing that one could expect of Divinity. ..But it is in this very aspect of God Shiva that the mystery of higher consciousness lies concealed. The reproductive and evolutionary mechanism are so closely inter-related as to be almost identical. The same life-energy produced by the nerves is at the base of erotic excitement at one end and of passion for the Divine at the other. The same intensely pleasing sensation that provides a powerful incentive for the reproductive act also supplies a strong inducement for the evolutionary effort. In the latter case, the rapture is even more enhanced and magnified.

The prevalence of symbols in Egypt, the Indus Valley and other ancient centers bespeaks an elaborate knowledge of Kundalini from the very beginning. This could only be possible if we postulate a still anterior place of origin for the cult, where it had already developed to a high degree never attained in any subsequent period to this day. The symbol of the lingam and yoni interlinked is a representation of the final stage of arousal of the Serpent-Power. The intricacies of the system and the varied mode of the awakening constitute a vast area of study and experiment extending to ages.

The object of the transformative processes set in motion by the arousal of Kundalini is to create a new inner man in tune with the infinite world of life. Joseph Campbell was aware of it and demonstrated time and time again that he knew that the deepest levels of the cerebro-spinal system are involved in the process of spiritual transformation. Had he been reared in the middle of the century instead of the beginning, he would no doubt have been one of the most enthusiastic advocates of empirical research on Kundalini, as his writings over the years appear to indicate. The harvest of such an

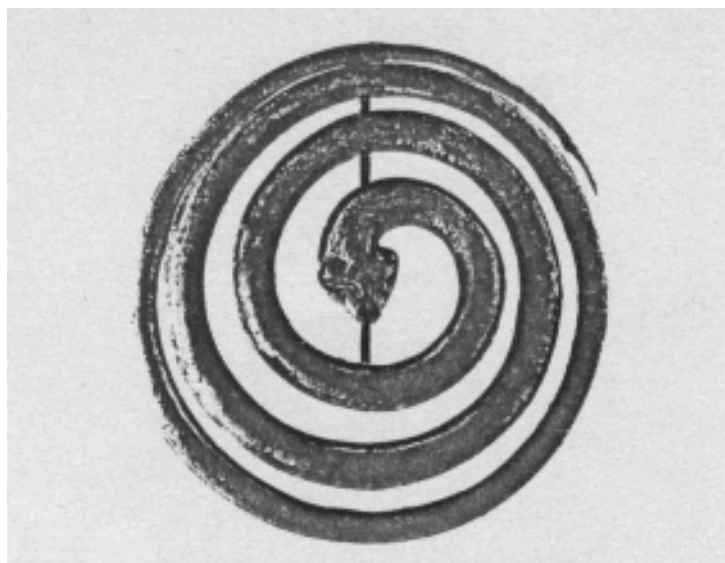
investigation, when it comes, should be far greater than anything conceived of by any scientist of our day. The data gathered, even in the beginning stages, will revolutionize our thinking and transform our lives for the better.

## **We Have Only Ourselves to Blame**

The aim of all spiritual disciplines is to reach a transcendental level of consciousness by the manipulation of a “spiritual energy,” using Campbell’s term but called prana by the ancient adepts. It is the hidden agent behind the mind-brain relationship, the vital force behind all phenomena of Life. We have taken a great leap forward in evolution because of the amenities made possible by science, and with this a different environment and social order are necessary. If they are not provided, the race will degenerate and come to a disastrous end, rejected by the forces of evolution. Unless we become aware of the needs of the evolutionary mechanism, nature will take recourse through drastic methods to change the direction of life. It is our duty to bring these facts to the attention of the people. In his way, Campbell did his best.

There is a law of life, like the law of gravity, ruling all the actions, all the progress, and the life of mankind. The key to this law is Kundalini, the mechanism in the body for accelerating the evolutionary processes. We can call it by any name we choose, but the adepts of times past knew it as the Serpent Power. Disregard of this law is at the root of all or almost all the evils that we are experiencing at present. We cannot survive as a solely materialistic species. Our evolutionary direction is different. The brain is actually remodeling itself by extremely slow degrees to reach another dimension of awareness, and the greatest obstacle in the path of this metamorphosis is our own unenlightened intellect. If we are able to prove by experiment that the brain is in a state of evolution, all conflicting ideologies will disappear. We will then know what lifestyle, government and social structures are best for us. Otherwise, we will degenerate. Glance at history. Every civilization of the past reached a certain zenith and then fell, never to rise again. The same thing is happening now, but we are not aware of it. Correct knowledge of the facts of Kundalini can reverse the trend and lead to a glorious future.

According to Gopi Krishna who, I believe, had a glimpse of the future, we have only ourselves to blame for our faults, because we are not able to understand that this creation and all we see around us is provided by nature for our progress, stage by stage, step by step, until we reach the stature of Godhood and are able to live for maybe hundreds of years, with all the blessings that earth can provide. It is because some people are over ambitious, too full of greed, too lustful, that they stand in the way of progress. Nature is not to blame. It is the scholars who fail to understand the plan of nature. They will not be able to understand it until they explore themselves and come to know the secret of the brain. Once they do it, everything will be clear to them like an open book. In either case, a radical change is inevitable.



Coiled serpent. Bronze. China c. 500-250 BC. " Showing exactly 3 1/2 turns, this bronze serpent may be evidence already from pre-Buddhist China of an original knowledge in some way related to the much later tantric development in India, for the metaphorical coiled serpent said to be sleeping in the muladhara is described as 3 1/2 turns." (Joseph Campbell)