



Kundalini Awareness



Introduction

The earth and the universe that surrounds it is filled with a constant supply of beauty and mystery that keeps the human mind stimulated and challenged. It is this “human mind” that has learned to survive the harsh elements of Nature, has battled disease and to this point in history survived war. Throughout the centuries it has been those we call “genius” that have provided the answers to the riddles and problems that have faced the race. These men and women have shown the way in all aspects of human experience - both secular and religious. In various ages they have been the great explorers, tribal chiefs, sorcerers, high priests, pharaohs, artists, musicians, mystics, scientists, doctors and humanitarians. They have lead us to explore the unknown and respect the ineffable and intangible forces around us. They have enriched our lives with art, music and literature, provided technological and medical advances to keep us safe and healthy and reminded us of the need to love and care for each other. Somehow these individuals were vouchsafed knowledge that was not readily available to their contemporaries or to those that proceeded them. Where humankind would be without a Christ, Patanjali, Guru Nanak, Buddha, Socrates, Michaelangelo, Bach, Einstein, Newton, Jefferson, St. Teresa of Avila or Gandhi is impossible to imagine. The “genius” mind has been the conduit through which the human race has survived and evolved during these past thousands of years. These minds have provided us with generally accepted theories relating to, among others, biological evolution, physics, chemistry, and theology. Yet, today with all our knowledge of how the human body functions – including genetic engineering and organ transplants – there is no generally accepted theory of the evolution of human consciousness nor is there a basic understanding of consciousness itself.

The appearance of mystics and geniuses throughout history is still not fully explained. The early Greeks had two views on genius – One view equated it with an act of creativity by God – the major source of an individual’s genius had its source in a mystical power. Socrates described this power as a “murmuring in his ears like the sound of the flute in the ears of the mystic”. The other view related genius to insanity – Aristotle believed that there was “no great genius without madness”.

Studies dating from the late nineteenth century, by Lombroso, Ellis, and others have concentrated on the observed connection between insanity and genius. In addition, Galton has studied the role played by heredity in the production of genius. None of these studies have provided adequate explanations for inspiration and creativity.

Near the beginning of the twentieth century, the Canadian psychiatrist Richard Maurice Bucke treated the issue of Illumination in both mystics and geniuses from the standpoint of psychology. He suggested that the human mind was evolving toward a new kind of consciousness – which he called Cosmic Consciousness - far in advance of ordinary human self-consciousness. Using arguments based upon analogy, Bucke examines some forty-three “great cases” within the framework of eleven characteristics of the Cosmic Sense. However he does not identify any somatic basis for his Cosmic Sense.

In more recent times, Gopi Krishna drew from his own personal experience and the ancient esoteric literature to suggest that the mystic and the genius are products of a more highly evolved brain. He further postulated that there is a specific psychosomatic power centre – known as Kundalini – in human beings and that human evolution has proceeded by the action of this mechanism in the human body and brain. Traditionally Kundalini is held to be responsible for creativity, genius, mystical experience, psychic phenomena and in its morbid form certain classes of mental illness. If this is indeed the case, then the mystic, the genius and the psychic should share a set of common characteristics and experiences, which would have to be consistent with those, attributed to the awakening of Kundalini in the ancient esoteric scriptures.

Furthermore Gopi Krishna, along with Bucke and other visionaries such as Teilhard de Chardin who believed that human consciousness was evolving, was convinced that we had reached a critical juncture in this evolution — a time in which many ordinary, everyday people would begin to awaken to this evolutionary process within themselves. As this awakening occurred, Gopi Krishna maintained, these individuals would begin to experience varying degrees of spiritual transformation; some might even attain the degree of illumination or Cosmic Consciousness that marked the lives of the great geniuses and mystics of the past.

Ideally, this ongoing transformation is a slow one, with the changes occurring gradually and virtually imperceptibly over a long period of time. However, due to a number of factors, including the general speed and intensity of our lives today, this process of spiritual transformation is occurring extremely rapidly for a number of people. When this happens, it can cause anything from mild consternation to an almost cataclysmic upheaval in the life of the person experiencing it.

Gopi Krishna knew this based on his own personal experience. In 1948, after spending three hours in intensive yoga meditation every day for seventeen years, he experienced a spiritual awakening so abrupt that it set his life on end for a number of years. Determined to help others avoid similar crises, he spent the rest of his life researching mystical experience and urging the scientific and medical communities to launch serious scientific studies on the subject.

Because he was from India and practiced yoga, he naturally presented his case to the Western community using this philosophy's terms and symbols. This did not mean he thought that yoga or the experiences of the yogi were in any way superior. On the contrary, he believed that the profound mystical experiences described by great saints and mystics of all traditions - whether they called these experiences samadhi, nirvana, enlightenment or mystical union - were essentially the same.

In yogic terms, such experiences are brought about by what is often called the awakening of kundalini. Although the word kundalini defies adequate translation, it is sometimes defined as an evolutionary energy/consciousness force. Kundalini is believed not only to have this crucial role in mystical experience, but to also be related to other phenomena associated with exceptional states of consciousness including the awakening of the paranormal abilities — for example the ability to prophesy — and divinely inspired creativity and genius.

In order to put these esoteric Eastern ideas into a conceptual framework that Western science could more readily study, Gopi Krishna formed what he called the kundalini hypothesis. The first part of this hypothesis can be paraphrased by saying simply that the force/energy known as kundalini in yoga is responsible for such phenomena as mystical experience, psychic awakening, and inspired creativity and genius. A second part of the hypothesis states that, in an aberrant form of awakening, kundalini can also be responsible for, or related to, some types of mental illness - or what appears to be mental illness.

Although much of Gopi Krishna's energy was directed towards promoting scientific research based on the experiences of people who were undergoing this transformative process today he also suggested that a tremendous amount of insight could be gleaned from scholarly research into the lives of the great mystics and creative geniuses of the past. If, he argued, kundalini was really responsible for such phenomena as mystical experience and inspired creativity, we should be able to look at the lives of mystics and creative geniuses and find signs of an awakened kundalini as it was described in the ancient yogic tradition.

To this end Gopi Krishna provided a list of the characteristics of kundalini awakening. (Interestingly enough, these traits correspond very closely with what Richard Maurice Bucke called the characteristics of Cosmic Consciousness.)

Central to the awakening itself, Gopi Krishna explained, is a profound mystical experience that includes an inexpressible sensation of divine love, bliss, or awe; an unfathomable vision of inner light, fire or flames, and an overwhelming, all-encompassing awareness of the divine oneness of all things. Depending on a number of factors, such as lifestyle and heredity, the intensity — or profundity — of this experience can vary. It can also

occur once or many times in an individual's life, and can be anything from a brief, transitory experience to an on-going feature of his or her existence. The rare yogi who reaches perennial higher consciousness is said in some yogic traditions to live in a state known as sahaja-samadhi. In *The Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga*, Georg Feuerstein describes this level of samadhi as being a state of permanent enlightenment or 'liberation while being alive'.

Arising out of the mystical experience itself comes a transformation in the mystic's consciousness and, consequently, in the way he or she perceives and responds to the world. The most significant of these changes is an actual transformation in mental acuity or capacity that — again depending on a number of factors — might range from paranormal abilities or creative inspiration to the ability to bring new knowledge to the world, or even ultimately, to receive divine revelation. Thus, just as there are degrees in the mystical experience itself, the way the transformation manifests in different individuals occurs along a continuum that ranges from the development of a creative gift or paranormal ability to becoming a saint or, in the rarest cases, one of the great spiritual masters.

Other traits of the person who has tasted some degree of true mystical experience include an unshakable belief in the validity of the experience itself and in the reality of a divine cosmic force; the loss of fear of death and the certainty of the immortality of the soul; the development of both a powerful charisma and a highly moral, ethical nature that is often expressed in a passion for social justice and a deep concern for the suffering of humanity.

We seemed to be paying more attention to the state of our individual consciousness with the idea of 'expanding' or 'raising' it to a higher level. In the last few decades of the twentieth century there was a tremendous upsurge in self-improvement and individual expansion of consciousness. In the West, this was in part brought about by the 'street' availability of mind-altering drugs and hallucinogens as well as a rise in interest in Eastern esoteric traditions. The goal of expansion of consciousness is of course not new.

Our religious and esoteric traditions attest to the fact that human beings have long sought to expand their awareness and commune with the ineffable and intangible forces in Nature. But from the 1960's on it seemed that more and more of the general population took an active interest in self-development where previously that interest appeared to be confined to those undertaking strict religious or esoteric practices. Furthermore people seemed to be reporting more internal experiences that could be classified as mystical or consciousness expanding in nature.

The currently accepted Western scientific paradigm does not generally allow for the healthy integration of many of these experiences into an individual's life. People having these experiences are more than not at a loss for a reasonable explanation or do not know how or where to find help if they are in crisis. In many cases they are afraid to confide in family or friends for fear of ridicule, misunderstanding or medical misdiagnosis.

So far we have discussed the experience from a moral, ethical and psychological perspective. But of essential importance is Gopi Krishna's assertion that mystical and other "exceptional" states of consciousness are somatically anchored in the body, particularly in the brain and nervous system, and that human consciousness - like the human body was in a state of evolution. He further maintained that the evolutionary process occurring in the brain and nervous system was essential to the expansion of consciousness, particularly if the expanded states were to become a permanent feature in an individual's consciousness.

Recent scientific studies support this contention. In 1980, neurophysiologist Peter Fenwick suggested "that there exists within the brain, ...a system which when activated either naturally or by esoteric practices, or spontaneously, or on the operating table by direct stimulation or by the ictal discharges of epilepsy, can give rise to the mystical experience....What I am saying is that there are structures within the brain which, when stimulated either "normally" or pathologically, will give rise to the experience." He concludes that mystical experience seems to be an emergent property of brain functioning, in part dependent on brain structure and on the activation of several systems within the brain, specifically the temporal lobe and the mid brain.

Even more recent research has lead many scientists to conclude that the brain is “hard wired” for exceptional experiences including mystical experience. According to psychologist Daniel Baston “the brain is the hardwire through which religion is experienced. To say the brain produces religion is like saying a piano produces music.” Although the theological interpretation may differ, this “hardwire” has been born out by the investigations of scientists who have been exploring what physically occurs in the brain during a religious or mystical experience. It bears repeating that this does not necessarily mean that religious/mystical experience is a function of the brain only. These experiments have only shown that certain images and/or perceptions associated with religious experience can be brought out by artificially stimulating certain regions of the brain. However, these images (such as angels or saints) and perceptions (a oneness with the universe) do not on their own constitute all the essential elements of a complete religious/mystical experience.

One of the main purposes of the research on kundalini is to provide a theoretical basis for individuals interested in or in the process of having mystical related or consciousness expanding experiences. This should provide a framework into which the individual can integrate their experience and offer guidelines that will help keep the process on a course that will lead to a healthy conclusion.

Much of this research is based on the Eastern esoteric concepts of Kundalini and Prana (the subtle intelligent life-energy). The concept of Kundalini provides an established and time-tested model with which we can measure and judge our own as well as the experiences of others. Information about Prana is key to understanding and interpreting consciousness expanding experiences. In addition to this, the lives and writings of mystics and geniuses provide examples of what to do and what not to do when in the throes of an expanding consciousness. They also provide an indication of the state of consciousness to which the entire Race is evolving. This does not degrade or diminish the role of the average person. For each of us has an important role to play in this life. We must always remember that human consciousness is experienced on a continuum and each individual's brain is its own laboratory. And, in this sense, each and every one of us has an opportunity to observe the changes occurring in our own consciousness and add to humanity's understanding of the process.

What follows is a summary of the research done as outlined by Gopi Krishna more than four decades ago. This work has been carried out on a volunteer basis principally by members of the Institute for Consciousness Research. We feel that this research offers the possibility of a peaceful solution to the current turmoil in the world - one that could be reached simply by increasing our understanding of the evolution of human consciousness through the scientific investigation of Kundalini - a divine, intelligent, cosmic force operating in every member of the human race.