

KUNDALINI YOGA

by

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(Spoken in April 1981)

In Sanskrit philosophical parlance, the universe is called Brahmanda and the individual is called Pindanda, by which what is meant is the universe is the macrocosm and the individual is the microcosm. The individual is an atomic representation of the cosmos, so it may be said that we can recognise a cross section of the universe in every individual. The pattern and the layers of expression of the universe can be found exactly in a similar form in the individual, only very minutely. Perhaps we may say that it is something like a huge banyan tree hiddenly present in a tiny seed thereof.

We are aware that even an inanimate atom works like a solar system, with a central sun controlling the movement of the planetary activity of what scientists call electrons, with a ratio of distance between the centre and the periphery equivalent, as it were, to the ratio of the distance between the Sun and the planets moving around the Sun. This pattern operates, they say, everywhere – not only in the world of living beings, but also in the level of inanimate matter. There is a small universe present everywhere. Even in a grain of sand, the universe is hidden.

This great doctrine is the background of a system of yoga practice known popularly as kundalini yoga – the shifting of the consciousness on the microcosmic centres of the individual which correspond to the macrocosmic planes of

existence. To touch any part of the universe is to touch the whole universe. If we touch a grain of sand on the bank of the Ganga, we have touched the entire cosmos, because everywhere the same pattern is present. This great truth is taken advantage of in a meditational system known as *kundalini sadhana*.

The word 'kundalini' means a coiled up serpent-like force. The zigzag movement thereof is very intricate in the lower forms of life, and the intricacy becomes less and less, and more and more straightened, as life evolves higher and higher. It is terrifically involved in an unintelligible manner in the lowest forms of life, in crude forms of thinking, in matter or the material way of living. The involvement is unimaginably intricate in these forms of life. There is no transparency present, even in the least modicum. It is totally opaque to the entry of any kind of life. *Tamas* predominates in the lowest centre which, according to the jargon of the system called kundalini yoga, is the *mooladhara chakra*. These are all technical terms used in this system or doctrine of practice.

The physical realm- the material form of living, the crudest side of existence- is demonstrated and symbolised in the fundamental position, or the basic form, which the individual assumes, represented in what is known as the *mooladhara chakra*. There are infinite planes of existence and, therefore, there can be infinite layers of our personality. These layers in the individual, microcosmically representing the cosmos, are called *chakras*, a Sanskrit word again, which means a circle- or rather, a circling pattern of power or energy, like a whirl that is sometimes seen in a moving river, a whirl which vigorously works in a particular manner, so that anything that is caught in it is held in that whirly motion. It will not allow the ascent or the descent of anything which is involved in the whirl. If a person is caught up in the whirly force of the waters in a river, that person can neither come up nor go inside. He is caught in a whirl or a current which moves very forcefully. These centres, or chakras, are whirls of energy in which the consciousness of the individual is

caught up, like an insect that whirls round and round in the same point of the whirl, unable get out of it. Cosmically these are all called the yogas, or the various planes, in the language of the Puranas and the Epics, and individually they are called the chakras, or the whirls of power. The details that are provided to us in regard to the formation and the function of these chakras are enormous, and the literature on this subject is equally enormous.

The reason why I thought of speaking on this theme today is that many students have a subconscious feeling that this is a pre-eminent form of yoga practice, and there is also a consequent feeling that the liberation of the soul, or the salvation of the spirit, which is supposed to be attained through the practice of yoga, is capable of achievement only through the particular path known as kundalini yoga. Many students put the questions: Can I rouse the kundalini by devotion to God? Can I rouse the kundalini by the Patanjali system of yoga? Can I rouse the kundalini by *japa*? Can I rouse the kundalini by worship?

The implication behind all these doubts is that the principle occupation of spiritual practice is the rousing of the kundalini, a notion that somehow enters into the minds of students, partly due to the great propaganda that is done in the name of this yoga by protagonists thereof, and partly due to reading literature of a mystical or an occult nature, due to which one gets the idea that yoga is nothing but the rousing of the kundalini. It may be so, and it is perhaps so, but the interpretation that is foisted upon this system of practice is a little misconstrued and far divergent from the truth of the matter.

Apart from the philosophical suggestiveness involved in this practice, by which we can compare this with any other system of yoga with equal force, it has to be added as a word of caution that this particular technique has a special form of danger involved in it which is not so patent in the other types of practice. The reason is psychological or, we may say, psychophysical. The interference of the consciousness with

the operations of the body is to be engaged in or undertaken with caution, because any concentration that is bestowed upon parts of the body affects the function of the parts on which concentration is bestowed, and a vigorous activity can be set up of that particular centre, and this vigorous activity can assume such proportions that it can go out of control.

The centres, called the chakras, to put it in a different language or style, are the centres of the desires of man. We are interfering with our desires when we concentrate on these chakras; and nothing can be worse for us. They are like serpents that cannot be handled easily. When they lie in a corner and are not active, they do not assume the ferocity they are capable of. It is only when we touch them or rouse them into action – wake them up from their sleep – that they begin to assume their true nature. This is the case with any animal, not merely the snake. And desires are animals. Either they have to be left to themselves or they have to be controlled; there is no third alternative. Either we do not interfere with them, leave them to themselves, or we have the power to control them or harness them in the way we require.

Most of the desires of man are like sleeping beasts. They are there like wild powers. But because they are sleeping and nobody interferes with them, it looks as if they are not there at all. A sleeping tiger or a sleeping lion or a sleeping snake may not attract one's attention, because they are asleep. To rouse them to action is a danger. But if it is necessary to rouse them or wake them from sleep for some purpose, and we cannot avoid rousing them, then before we enter into this adventure of waking them from their sleep we should guard ourselves with the necessary equipments to face them when they wake up.

This is not done by most of the seekers of yoga. They unnecessarily poke the sleeping snake, throw a stone at the sleeping tiger, or give a blow to the lion that is sleeping. This is a mistake that most of the seekers make when they take to kundalini or tantra yoga, etc. It is beautiful to ride on a tiger

or to utilise the lion for our homely or personal occupations in daily life. We can use the lion to plough the fields, if we can. But one knows what it means to even to attempt such a procedure.

The desires are not merely appearances on the surface of the mind. They are terrific powers which try to have their way in a particular direction. Their force is such that they have succeeded in compelling the consciousness to assume the form of this body itself. The so-called 'I' or 'we' seated in this hall, this person or these persons, are only the slaves, the puppets in the hands of these uncontrollable powers which are microcosmically directed by the macrocosmic purposes – the will of God, if we would like to call it so. In the Upanishads, particularly in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, we are given a mythological or, we may say, an epic description of the very manner in which the universe was projected. The same doctrine is propounded in such scriptures as the Yoga Vasishtha, for instance. All this is beyond us at the present moment. We will be merely flabbergasted if we try to probe into their mysteries. We will be overtaken with consternation.

The scientists of today also seem to be heading towards this conclusion when they have propounded their final say in the matter of the origin of the universe as a concretisation of cosmic dust, which again is a picturesque form taken by a centrality of the universe which, in a humorous manner, our physicists call the cosmic atom. We cannot understand what a cosmic atom means. We have to try to stretch our imagination to understand what that could be. This is the Brahmanda, called the cosmic atom in English. Why they call it an atom, we do not know. Perhaps because it is an indivisible compactness of a universally expanded nature, it is called an atom, and perhaps there is no other word to explain the situation. This atom split into bits, says our modern science. The Brahmanda split into two halves, says the Manu Smriti. Both the scriptures and the scientists tell us the same thing. One half became gold and the other half became silver, is the epic description of the splitting of the

central atom of the cosmos, the Brahmanda. The two become four, four become eight, eight become sixteen, sixteen become thirty-two, and the infinitely variegated pattern of the universe down to the minutest sand particle, the electrons, and what not.

All these are subsidiary reverberations of the impact given by the original thought, if we would like to call it a thought, or the original impulse. No one knows from where that impulse came. The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad tells us that the Ishvara, Purusha, willed, and that will is the original impact. The One became two. The One, having become two, attempted a union of the two again into the original one. This also is mentioned in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, which describes creation – how the two, which was the original seed form of the division into individualities, took all the multitudinous aspects of the phenomena that we see with our eyes. You and I, and every blessed thing that we can see or think of, are all shreds, bits, or chopped-off pieces of this original, indivisible Wholeness, Ishvara's Being. We are little pieces of Ishvara, perhaps cut off in the same way the Earth was chopped off from the body of the Sun by the movement of a giant star. Scientists say that once upon a time, aeons back, a giant star passed nearby and caused the Sun to split into the planets that revolve round it today.

Thus we are bits of God, pieces of the Absolute, and miniature eternities moving here on the streets of this Earth. This is the philosophy behind tantra and kundalini yoga – a grand philosophy and a wondrous technique. Nothing can be compared to it in its efficacy. But the danger that I hinted at lies in the fact that the original will has the capacity to compel the little bits to work according to its own pattern in such an intensity that to operate in a different manner, as required by the practice of yoga, would mean a hectic or herculean feat on the part of the seeker. Often it is said that it is like moving against the current; but it is something more difficult than even that.

We have to humbly submit to what the ancients have told us as to the manner of the manifestation of the universe. We cannot question why and how this happened. Perhaps, some mystery was there and it took the shape described in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the Yoga Vasishtha, the Manu Smriti, etc. Therefore, to return to God would be to take a counter-track of the process by which we have descended through the current of the manifestation of this Cosmic Will which formed itself into these little wills of all of us, down to even an ant.

There is some tendency in *prakriti*, in nature, the downward pull of this original will, to compel everything to think externally, outwardly. This compulsion is called desire. The original will is the central desire of the cosmos – to which reference is made in the Nasadiya Sukta of the Veda, where we are told the universe had its origin in the desire of the Eternal. So desire, or *kama*, is the cause of the universe: *kamastadagre tamavartata*. And that central desire of the Eternal has become the little vehemence with which the minds of the individuals work in the direction of their objects.

Now, the tantra and the kundalini yoga go deep into this process by which one has descended from the Eternal, and try to reverse the process, to take a round-about-turn. This is described in secret languages in the texts of tantra, unintelligible to the common reader and misleading to novitiates, so that to practice this yoga by merely reading a book would be to handle dynamite without knowing how it works. The teachers of these techniques have kept this art very secret by guarding it through ambiguous language, by using imagery in the style of expression, and by a purely symbolic way of presenting the entire technique. Therefore, if we take the whole thing literally, we would be losers. Their language is very strange. Sometimes it is totally impossible for us to understand what is in the mind of the person who expressed himself in such style.

To give one example of this humorous way in which they speak about interesting themes: “When the dog is there, there is no stone. When the stone is there, there is no dog.” Now, what do we understand from this? We would think that we would like to pelt a stone at the dog, of course. That is all that we can do when we see a dog, and we are impelled to do only that. But when the dog is there, we do not see a stone, and so we are helpless because we cannot throw a stone at it. And when the stone is there, there is no dog, so how to throw a stone at the dog, when the dog is not there? This is how our mind may work in understanding this interesting enigmatic saying. But this is not the meaning of the statement. I am not going to tell what it actually means, as it is a different subject. “Embrace the tree,” says a great saint called Tirumular in one of his poems. Why should we go and embrace the tree? If this instruction is taken literally, everyone would go and hug a tree and imagine that yoga is being practised. He does not want us to hug a tree. What is in his mind is something quite different.

Likewise, many mysterious practices and techniques are seen to be involved in these peculiarities of practice, by which the desires are handled and harnessed for the reverse process of the movement of consciousness to the Eternal Will from which we originated and through which we have come down. By controlling the whirling powers within us by a practice of fixing the attention of consciousness on the different parts of the psychophysical individuality, we unlock the knot with which we are tied to this individuality – the *granthis*, as they are called. There are supposed to be three *granthis*, called Brahma Granthi, Vishnu Granthi and Rudra Granthi. They are to be untied, and not snapped. The Gordian knot is not to be cut, but untied, which is a difficult process. Because it is a Gordian knot, it is not easy to untie it.

Both the tantra and the kundalini systems, being almost parallel in their doctrines and their practices, invoke certain systems of thinking, behaving and concentration, which require uncanny willpower on the part of a person. Desires are controlled by the manipulation of the desires themselves.

We catch one elephant with the help of another elephant. A desire is controlled by another desire. We do not destroy the desires, but utilise them in a strange manner, as we can utilise one thief to catch another thief. We become friendly with one thief, and he will tell us where the other thieves are. Thus we catch hold of one desire and force it – in a very intelligent manner, of course – to handle the other desires also. Thus, the so-called desires become an impersonal means by which one can overcome the limitations to which one is subject on account of the centralisation of these desires in these knots or locks.

But a person who is subject to desires cannot handle them. This is the danger. And who is not subject to desire? Therefore, Swami Sivanandaji Maharaj used to say that these yogas are not suitable for this age, Kali Yuga, where the will is weak and no one can understand anything. Hence, these techniques are not to be adopted by impure minds or unintelligent individuals whose discrimination has not been properly awakened, and who do not have a proper guide or a superior before them.

These few words which I felt like placing before you are like an introduction, as it were, an introductory feature to a great treasure of knowledge bequeathed to us by the ancient masters, which has been lost these days on account of the extraneous occupations of the human mind and the involvements which are totally opposed to the inward aspirations of the Spirit.

All yogas, whatever be their nature, aim at the same goal. The purpose that is served by one yoga is also served by other yogas. So, to the question whether by bhakti yoga the kundalini can be raised, the answer is yes, because there is an automatic action taking place when the mind is concentrated in whatever manner, as prescribed by the particular system or doctrine, provided the conditions laid down are fulfilled and there is no deviation from the prescribed conditions.

There are not many yogas. There is only one road. And, as the Bhagavadgita puts it, we may safely designate it as Brahma yoga: *se brahmayoga yuktatma sukhamakshayamasnute*. All the other yogas are various faces of the single crystal of the integral approach of the whole being to God, which is Brahma yoga.