

Ramji

Love from this side of the ocean. I have a question. When I was reading the book "Play of Consciousness" by Swami Muktananda maybe you have read the book also it caused a question and an inspiration. First the question: Swami is talking much about the Kundalini and the process of awakening that snake energy so it can get up through your chakra's. He is supposing that it is necessary to awaken the kundalini for getting enlightenment. I searched your Vedanta-CD and found little about it. Just in one of your satsangs you pointed something out which gave me some more insight. But while I already had the idea of laying the question at your feet, I still want to do. It might still help give me more stable view at the topic. On the CD you said, "The Self is everything and everything is the Self, so why bother working on kundalini? It will happen when it needs to happen, and when it doesn't happen it doesn't need to happen." Is that your answer? What use is it anyway?

Rheinhardt

Dear Rheinhardt,

What does it mean to say that the kundalini is awakened? When most people think of kundalini they think of the incredible psycho-spiritual mystical' experiences that happen when the kundalini awakens and passes through the charkas on its way to union with Shiva. Additionally, people often believe that if these experiences do not happen in the way that they have read about them or heard about them from others that they will not get enlightened. So they take up certain practices that they believe should initiate the shakti and start this process in motion. As they are described these experiences are almost always incredible, fantastic, and exotic. Considering that most people feel sensation-starved the they are attracted by this kind of shakti sadhana.

But trying to wake up the kundalini is a little like the tail wagging the dog. If they happen and it is not necessary that they do happen for enlightenment contrary to what Swami Muktananda says they should be the result of the spontaneous awakening of the kundalini.

The kundalini does not awaken in the same way in every person. It often produces dramatic experiences but in most cases it does not. You can assume that your kundalini is awakened if you have an interest in religion, mysticism, meditation, etc. If you find yourself attracted to chanting, reading holy books, associating with spiritual people, going on pilgrimages,

etc. then your kundalini is awakened. If you have experienced altered states of consciousness it means your kundalini is active.

What actually is the kundalini? It is the Self creating experiences that shake you up and cause you to seek answers to the basic existential questions: what is this world and who am I? The kundalini of everyone in the so-called spiritual' world is active to varying degrees; they all have had spiritual' or mystical' experiences that have caused them see the world and themselves in a different way. It is not giving you experiences just for the fun of it.

An awakened kundalini is not enlightenment. It just means that the mind has become somewhat subtle and can now experience inner' states, not just sense objects, emotions and thoughts. These inner experiences are of every imaginable type, positive and negative, gross and subtle. The type of experience that an individual has depends on the nature of his or her vasanas when the kundalini wakes up. What cause her to wake up? Usually the person has had enough worldly experience. They are fed up with the world, bored perhaps. They know there is nothing in it but they don't know where to go. The Self is awaiting for this to happen. When it does it illumines the latent vasanas for spiritual experience and something dramatic happens one's life starts to flow in a different direction.

There is nothing mystical about the chakras.' They are just general categories of experience. For example sexual energy means that the kundalini is associated with the root charka and this causes creativity and sexual desire, is a gross desire for union. An experience of great power means that the kundalini is associated with the manipura charka. An experience of universal love means that the kundalini is associated with the heart chakra, the anahata. And so on. Spiritual literature is full of these experiences. You may have read Mystic by Default, my autobiography. In it there are many kundalini' experiences. In fact every experience that we have, inner or outer is kundalini, the Self in the form of matter and energy. It is important for a spiritual person not to turn the idea of kundalini into a big romantic fascination. Ninety nine percent of people, Eastern and Western, who are practicing kundalini' yoga are not qualified for kundalini sadhana and will not see it through to the end. In fact most of the kundalini' sadhanas you find in the West are not proper kundalini sadhana at all. The kundalini symbolism is very beautiful and very dramatic and mysterious and so people are attracted to it. It has become a fashion now and almost completely corrupted by the Westerners.

Enlightenment is the knowledge “I am the Self, limitless awareness.” It is the hard and fast knowledge that all my experiences are me but I am something more than my experiences, subtle and gross. Kundalini Yoga says the enlightenment is the union of shakti and shiva, the energy of Consciousness, the Self, with Pure Consciousness. So the next question is: what is this union?’ Supposedly it is an experience in which the subject and the object become’ one. This tempts us to ask: what is this becoming?’

A becoming’ means that something that was in one form before changes into another form. To use the yogic metaphor, the individual soul that merges’ into the universal soul. In short, something limited inadequate and incomplete becomes’ limitless adequate and whole. This is all very fine as an idea but it presents a very real problem: experience, becoming’ is subject to change. It never stops changing. This means that there is no such thing as a permanent experience.’

So what happens is that the person who ‘became’ the Self, ‘unbecomes’ the Self after the experience of union has run its course. This is what one might call temporary’ Self realization. These temporary Self realizations or epiphanies are useful in so far as they give the experiencer an idea that there is a Self (Shiva) and maybe some insight into its nature. But, if the person believes that enlightenment is the permanent experience of the Self’ he or she will simply develop a vasana for Self experience by practicing a sadhana designed to produce Self experience. There are many sadhanas beside kundalini sadhana that give experience of the Self. In fact sports, accidents, sex, and many fear related activities produce Self experience. Any practice that you do with great faith, concentration, and devotion will awaken the kundalini and produce a spiritual’ experience. But you should know that if something wakes up it will definitely go back to sleep. This is karmic law. This is why you have so many frustrated people in the spiritual world. However, if you pursue the sadhana that awakens kundalini with incredible intensity, day and night without a break, forgoing every worldly attachment and desire, the mind, which is what is waking up, will eventually become so energized with shakti that it will only fall back to sleep for very short periods. This is important because most of the time it is in direct contact with the Self and this is desirable if you want Self knowledge. This is why the yoga shastras encourage the pursuit of a sattvic mind. Remember, the Self is not awake because it was never asleep. It is the awareness of waking and sleep. It is the knower of the mind. It is the knower of the kundalini. So as the Self you are already beyond the kundalini. It will not turn you into the Self. I think this is what people

believe. They think they will be transformed' into the Self, like a larva becomes a butterfly...but this is just imagination.

Nonetheless, this sadhana is so severe that only one person in ten million can practice it successfully. The desire for liberation has to be one hundred percent. If you have even a small attachment to your body or to worldly things it will not work.

Vedanta questions the whole idea underlying yoga. It says that the problem with this union' idea is: anything that was caused by action, karma, will only last for a finite time. When the energy that generated the experience plays out the experience ends and one returns to a state of separation, limitation and incompleteness. Kundalini is a karmic force. It is the Self operating in time. It may lead you to the Self or it may lead you far away. It may even cause madness in people who are weak minded. Much of the mild insanity you see in spiritual people is caused by their inability to integrate their spiritual experiences into everyday life. So the kundalini, the energy of the Self, is a very mixed bag and not something to be sought after. If it comes, it comes and you must learn how to deal with it. But rather than cultivate it, it is better to cultivate devotion for God. Yes, bhakti is a dualistic path, just like kundalini, but cultivating love for the Self in some form is more natural than forcing the body and mind to do a lot of very complicated and potentially dangerous practices. Vedanta says that experiential sadhanas may purify the mind but they will not produce enlightenment. This is so because enlightenment is the removal of Self ignorance. Experience will not remove ignorance. Only the knowledge that arises with experience can do that. If you don't know this you can have all sorts of amazing mystical experience and be as Self ignorant as an animal.

Vedanta says that there are not two separate selves that must become one. It says that there is only one Self that has been misunderstood to be two or many. Now, who is it that misunderstands that he or she is separate from the Self? Is it the kundalini? It is not the kundalini, the shakti, because the kundalini is not conscious. Activated by the Self it moves, it changes and causes all sorts of things to happen but it does not know anything. It has (is) a strong feeling that it is missing something and so it works its way through many experiences (the charkas) seeking for freedom from this sense of limitation. This is not a conscious seeking. It is trial and error. Sometimes it goes into a positive experience (Pingala nadi) and sometimes it goes into a negative experience (ida nadi) (I may have these names reversed). And it can get stuck in an experience which is very

pleasureable or very painful. That it gets stuck indicates that it is ignorant, unconscious. It foolishly clings to pleasureable experiences because it doesn't realize that experience is changeable and that the pleasure will eventually disappear. When it gets stuck in a painful experience, this shows that it doesn't have discrimination or it would have avoided the experience in the first place. Discrimination is the most important function of consciousness. Without it you cannot function in this world nor can you separate the pure Self from the moving Self, the kundalini shakti. Kundalini is just a force, a power, an energy. It is not real. The Self alone is real. Yes, the kundalini is the Self but the Self is not (only)the kundalini.

So who is it that takes his or herself to be limited? Who is it that wants to erase this sense of limitation and is therefore open to the seductive message of kundalini yoga? The common answer is that it is the ego. But Vedanta says there are not two selves, a higher enlightened Self and a lower ignorant ego Self. There is only one Self.

Now we come to the most difficult thing to understand. If there is only one Self and this Self always knows who it is, i.e. that it is limitless and whole and therefore does not need any particular experience to erase its sense of limitation and make it whole, how can it forget who it is?

Vedanta says that it can't forget but that it can forget. Or to put it another way it says that there is only one Self, pure Awareness, and that this Self is capable of both knowledge and ignorance. It would not be limitless if it were unable to be ignorant. This capability of being two opposite things at once is called Maya. The definition of Maya is: that which is not. You can see the problem in the definition. How can something that is not, be? Well, strangely, it can.

Now the question that arises with reference to the process of experience, which we can call kundalini, is: does the experience of union with the Self erase ignorance and produce knowledge? Knowledge means that you understand that you are whole, complete, limitless and free. And the answer is that it may produce knowledge and it may not produce knowledge. Whether it produces knowledge or not depends on what you think enlightenment is. If you think enlightenment is the permanent experience of the Self then you will not get enlightened.' You will experience oneness, wholeness, and limitlessness for a time and that experience will wear off and you will then experience duality, incompleteness and limitation once again. This is why kundalini yoga and all the other yogas rarely bring about enlightenment.

But it is possible for yogis to get enlightened if they develop inquiring minds as a result of their spiritual experiences. When the experience of oneness happens one needs to remain alert and try to determine what one is actually experiencing. This is what Vedanta calls inquiry. If you are trained to observe and draw the correct conclusions from your observations you will see that the oneness' that you are experiencing is you, not some incredible state of consciousness, unless you understand that incredible state of consciousness to be you, the seer, the experiencer. If you understand that what you are experiencing is you, you have freed yourself of experience. You never have to practice yoga again. Why? Because when are you not you? How far are you from you?

What kind of knowledge is it? It is immediate experiential' knowledge. This means that when ignorance tries to rise up and tell you that you are missing something and you see your desires being activated, you have a good laugh and can let the whole process of desire die before it produces karma. It means you are the master of your mind, not the other way around.

Is it possible to attain' enlightenment without an awakened kundalini as it is presented in the kundalini shastras? Yes, absolutely. Is it common. Enlightenment according to Vedanta is the removal of Self ignorance brought about by the understanding that the Self is limitless actionless awareness and that I am that Self. I have met perhaps twenty enlightened people whose kundalini was not active in that it was not producing mind altering inner experiences. I have also met many people who were having intense kundalini experiences...sometimes for many years...and who were actively seeking ways to turn the experience off because it was completely disrupting their lives. You won't be able to accomplish anything solid or real in the world with this going on. It is too disturbing and it often has a strong negative impact on the people you come in contact with. You say and do things that make normal people think you are nuts. And in a way you are. The spiritual world is full of people who have had it going on for varying periods and it does not rise up and 'mate' with Shiva and they stay unenlightened. It just bounces around in the chakras. Shakti sadhanas can be very dangerous without the right teacher and the right karmic situation.

It is also important to know that kundalini does not generate the same experiences for everyone. It generates the experiences that are necessary to stimulate inquiry. Certain people have developed very subtle minds as a result of the way they have lived. So for these people the Self

as kundalini awakens inquiry, leads them to a jnani, and their ignorance is removed by the non-dual teachings. Their enlightenment is in no way inferior to the people who have realized during or after an intense kundalini sadhana. Enlightenment is enlightenment; it has nothing to do with the way it came about. Ramana, for example, did not practice kundalini sadhana although his kundalini was obviously active; it produced his 'death' experience. He is an example of a yogi who had an inquiring mind and practiced vichara, Self inquiry, not kundalini sadhana.

Muktananda does say that enlightenment can only come through kundalini sadhana but he knew that this was not true. He was very smart about psychology and he was trying to build a big religion...Siddha Yoga...and he knew for that purpose it does not help to give people too eclectic a view of enlightenment. It just confuses them. So he said it was the only way. It is very much like the Christians who say Jesus is the only way. Well, Jesus may be a 'way'...but the only way? I don't think so. The same with Kundalini. It may work...there is no sense putting it down...but I would bet my last dollar that of all the enlightenments that happened since the beginning of time not more than one or two percent were the result of a classic kundalini sadhana. Look at all the great enlightened people that have come out of Buddhism and other paths. They they are not talking kundalini.

I knew Baba very well. I stayed with him for quite a while and he liked me and I liked him and we had a very interesting relationship. When I went to visit him I knew who I was and he knew that. He asked me who I was the moment we met and I said, "The infinite Brahman" and he understood completely. He asked who my guru was. He knew I got it through a guru.

He also knew my guru...there was a picture of him and Swamiji in the ashram...and he knew what Vedanta was. He even took one of his velvet sequined hats and crowned me with great flair. I never went to get anything from him...I had time to kill and I was curious about him...and this did not bother him at all. In fact it made him happy that someone was there who could share the vision, particularly since the place was swarming with very immature Western people who really didn't have a clue what they were doing or who Baba really was. Almost everyone was seduced by the romance of India and the personality of Baba and of course the shakti.

There were very few qualified people. We had many good laughs. He let me stay and do and think whatever I wanted as long as I played by the ashram rules. He never expected personal devotion from me and I never offered it. It was true that my kundalini had been activated and I had had

all the important yogic experiences but, if anything, those experiences were a huge problem for me, not the solution. I think (mind you I'm not sure because it was thirty years ago that I read it) if you will read on in the book, Chit Shakti Vilas, the Play of Consciousness, you will see that Baba was not set free by any experience. I don't remember exactly, since it was many years ago that I read the book but I think he tells about going to stay with a devotee and finding a Vedanta text and saying that it was at this point that he realized that it was jnanam, not experience, that would set him free.

The truth is that everyone is basically in love with experience and this is all we have to our credit when we awaken. But experience is only as good as one's ability to understand it. So when you begin consciously searching you are naturally drawn to yoga because it promises a spectacular experience that is supposed to solve all problems. In a way this is true but in another way it is not true.

What should happen when you take up an experiential sadhana like kundalini is that your mind should become subtle and inquiry should start to happen. But what usually happens is that you get addicted to experience. You want to meditate all day and go into trances and have transcendental experiences. You want to hang out with powerful gurus and get shaktipat, etc. And so you build up a vasana for experience and you fantasize the big one...enlightenment...which you always imagine is just around the corner. It's like going to Las Vegas and pulling the long arm of one of those big slot machines. You pay and pull and pay and pull and in your mind every minute you are waiting for the big Ka-Ching! and a flood of money to bury you. It never happens. All that happens is that you get a big experience vasana.

Rheinart: How do you see kundalini and trying to work with that in relation to Vedanta and Self-knowledge. "The Self is everything and everything is the Self, so why bother with working on kundalini? It will happen when it needs to happen, and when it doesn't happen it doesn't need to happen". Is that your answer? But what is the use of it anyway?

Ram: I would not advise working on 'kundalini.' Vedanta says that kundalini is just another name for the Self. So everything is already kundalini. Every experience you have is kundalini, the shakti. Why limit it to a particular set of experiences or a particular process? You can have all sorts of amazing experiences and never learn anything about who you are and you can also have very boring ordinary experiences and suddenly understand who you are... because you were thinking clearly. If you had a certain experience and you found yourself walking out of the house without

saying goodbye to your family and getting on a plane that was going somewhere and when you got off you met a strange man in a café who invited you home and you started to spontaneously perform kriyas and have visions and felt amazing things taking place within yourself then that would be kundalini and you would be into it and there would be no question of working on it.' It is not something you work on. It is something that happens. And it is not something that needs to happen. So don't long for it and imagine that you are spiritually incomplete unless you have had it happen. I had it happen and it all stopped many years ago and I am very happy that it all stopped.

You - the Self - are the source of the energy. Without you there is no energy. You are not this little body/mind instrument that perks up with the influx of energy and wilts when the energy leaves. Kundalini is a very fickle bitch. She is completely unfaithful and inconstant. One minute she is seducing you and driving you wild with passion and the next minute she abandons you without so much as a by-your-leave and you end up angry and depressed. Aim for shanti, it beats shakti every time.

Love,

Ramji