

Kundalini RISING

EXPLORING THE ENERGY
OF AWAKENING

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Introduction

TAMI SIMON

IN 1984, I needed the book *Kundalini Rising*, and it didn't exist. I was twenty-two years old and I had just returned home from participating in a series of intensive meditation retreats in Sri Lanka, India, and Nepal. I was in a very strange condition (at least *I* thought it was strange). I had developed a case of the “shakes,” which meant that my body would twitch and contort of its own accord. The shakes would get worse whenever I meditated, to the point where I would find myself shaking and then twisting into weird positions during sitting practice. I consulted with various teachers, and I was told that what I was experiencing was the natural releasing of blocked energy in the body. I should simply relax and let the process unfold. A couple of meditation teachers mentioned that what I was experiencing was sometimes associated with “kundalini” beginning to awaken in the body, and again, I should just relax.

Relax? I wanted to know everything there was to know about kundalini. Was it a good or bad sign that I was shaking and contorting? Why did some people say that the awakening of kundalini could be dangerous? Why was kundalini so often compared to a snake coiled at the base of the spine? Was the “rise” of kundalini just a metaphor, and if so, a metaphor for what transformative process?

What I discovered at the time was that there were few comprehensive resources available on the topic of kundalini. Mostly what I found were yogic texts that had been translated from Sanskrit and felt to me ancient and distant, their meaning hard to decipher. I also found some individual accounts of kundalini awakenings that were quite fascinating to read but didn't help me contextualize or map the process in a way that enabled me to understand my own experience. What I wanted was a contemporary resource guide, a book on kundalini that could help me understand the experience in Western language and from many different vantage points.

Here is the book I wish I'd had twenty-five years ago. Gathered into one volume, *Kundalini Rising* comprises twenty-four essays on different aspects of the kundalini experience, including what transpersonal psychologists have to say about kundalini; understanding the yogic brain from a scientific perspective; the relationship between near-death experiences and kundalini awakening; understanding the relationship between kundalini energy and sexual energy; yogic exercises to catalyze the kundalini process; the role that kundalini awakening plays in the unfolding of our highest human potential; and more.

It is now time for our understanding of kundalini to be broad and multi-disciplined, for our discussions about kundalini to come out of the realm of esoterica and to enter ordinary discourse. The primary reason for this is that more and more of us are experiencing spiritual awakenings of all kinds, identity-shattering experiences that leave us open to the mystery of being beyond name, shape, or form. These intense experiences "re-wire" us; they bring with them changes not just in our mental self-structure (our mental sense of who we are) but in our *energetic* self-structure (our felt sense of who we are). When we experience intense spiritual openings, movements and changes occur in our subtle body; at the energetic level of our being, kundalini begins to stir, and rise.

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It is my belief that kundalini is on the rise, literally—that more and more people are having experiences of spiritual awakening. I base this belief on reports that I hear from contemporary spiritual teachers along with the increased public acceptance and growing popularity of practices such as meditation, energy healing, and kundalini yoga—all practices that are designed to dissolve our solid sense of self and open us to the transformative power of awareness. Such spiritual awakenings are inevitably accompanied by openings in the energetic channels of the body. It is as if our physical body, our energetic body, and our sense of boundless being are all synced up, interpenetrating and affecting one another in every way.

While kundalini is most often associated with the snake (the term itself is Sanskrit for “that which is coiled”), in traditional Hindu mythology, kundalini is sometimes referred to as a goddess—a fierce and powerful energy that works according to her own sense of timing and the evolutionary needs of the situation. Her movement through the body can be thunderous, destroying whatever energetic attachment is obstructing her free flow.

When this energy began to awaken in me, I felt afraid. (All these years later I sometimes still shake during meditation, but the good news is that I no longer feel worried when this happens.) What I have since learned is that the experience of shaking and involuntary movements (called *kriyas* in yogic literature) is a perfectly normal part of the awakening process. Kundalini is intense energy moving through the body and clearing out energetic blockages. There was never any reason for me to be panicked or afraid. And yet at the time, I lacked information. My hope is that this collection of essays on “kundalini rising” will help demystify the kundalini experience for you, providing you with the helpful information and contextual understanding you need to support your own process.

I have one further hope for this collection of essays. It is my experience that reading about kundalini can actually help catalyze

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the awakening process. It is as if once we understand the energy that lies within us and the pathways through which it can travel in our subtle body, we have an ability to visualize and flow with the process with heightened sensitivity. May *Kundalini Rising* help activate this natural unfolding of our expanded human potential in you, for the sake of the whole.