

A Personal Experience of Kundalini

By Sarah Sourial

This talk is my personal account of a brief psychotic episode that seems to fit with the classical description of a Kundalini spiritual awakening. After a long career as a psychiatric nurse, I felt there was something different about my own experience compared to most regressive psychotic states I have witnessed in others, and instead of leaving me ill and damaged I feel transformed. As a result of this episode, the changes in me include a strong faith in God and an expanded consciousness that allows me to contact other dimensions previously unavailable to me. On reflection I would now say that it has improved my life beyond all recognition.

I am using Roberto Assagioli's (1993) four critical stages of spiritual transformation to structure the talk.

1. Crisis preceding the spiritual awakening

Assagioli said that in this stage there is often an existential crisis where the person begins to ask about the meaning of life and I would say this was the case for me. Despite experiencing an outwardly successful life in material terms, I was desperately unhappy inside and I sensed I was not living life in a way that was right for me. During this mid-life crisis, I first left my unhappy marriage and later my demanding and stressful job in nurse education management. Now that my life was not so exacting or busy, I found that some of my unresolved emotional issues were able to surface and be addressed. One major issue was an unresolved grief reaction I experienced when my 27 year old partner died in a plane crash, when I was 25 years old. As soon as I grieved for him I experienced my Kundalini awakening. I was 42 years old and I was not ill or taking any medication at the time and I do not have any personal or family history to explain the crisis.

2. Crisis of spiritual awakening

This is one description of Kundalini awakening by Lee Sannella (1989) I found in Grof's book on spiritual emergency: 'Classically, the (creative cosmic) energy awakens at the base of the spine, travels straight up the spinal canal, and has completed its journey when it reaches the top of the head. Along this route there are said to be several '*chakras*' or psychic energy centres which the Kundalini must pass through to reach its goal. These chakras contain impurities that Kundalini must remove before it can continue its upward course. It passes through every part of the organism removing blocks and awakening consciousness... the entire process can be seen as one of purification... and may mark the beginning of a process of enlightenment.'

My crisis lasted around two weeks with the second week occurring while I was on a trip to Nepal. I was on holiday with a walking group that included a GP and a friend of mine who is a midwife, and who is used to dealing with psychotic episodes in some of her clients. I was so well contained that neither of the health

professionals noticed I was psychotic. When I told my friend afterwards, she said she had thought I was a little more preoccupied than usual but she put this down to me probably having things on my mind.

The whole thing started with a powerful energy snaking around my body and intense heat coming out of my feet. I was wondering if I was becoming physically ill but I had no clues as to what the heat and energy might be and I did not feel unwell anyway. I also found the experience very sexual, with spontaneous orgasms and, as pleasurable as the experience was, I was equally confused, frightened and rather disconcerted by the whole thing. I felt that I was being interfered with sexually. But how, why and by whom?

On the second night I had got it into my head that it was my time to die. I asked (who I'm not sure) if it was alright if I could go to sleep first so I would know nothing about my passing. I did feel a bit of a coward making this request but at the same time I was surprisingly unafraid, as my death just felt inevitable at the time. Needless to say, after a good night's sleep, I was most surprised when I woke up the next day. I also got the general sense that I was not alone and started to see a variety of beautiful colours swirling around my room at night, as well as the most exquisite miniature angels flying around me. I was able to function as usual during the day but as I was lucky enough to be working for an agency, I chose not to work any nursing shifts during this period. Instead I just concentrated on getting ready for my holiday. I found the whole process tended to recede into the background while I was occupied during the day, only to reassert itself fully when I was alone in my room in the evenings and/or at night. I also experienced what felt like strange internal physical movements going on such as something being pushed down my legs. There was no pain or discomfort because of this but I was again baffled by the whole experience. I would also get strong intuitions about the universe and at one point I sensed and experienced the magnificent organisation and intelligence that surrounds us.

Eventually, I felt my crown chakra open and saw a massive white light surround me; an archangel came to tell me that I was to have a union with God, and give birth to Christ. The whole moment overwhelmed me and then the realisation dawned that I was the Virgin Mary. I found it was a very humbling experience for me and I cried. I was so convinced that I was now pregnant that I sought advice from the local pharmacist and I started taking folic acid for the health of my child. I was also sure that having a midwife with me on holiday was also part of the plan and I felt it would be prudent not to tell anyone who I had in my womb in case the evil forces in the world tried to put a stop to the second coming of Christ. On reflection, perhaps keeping quiet about the whole thing was to my advantage as it meant I was left alone to go through the psychotic process without any medical intervention of any kind.

I was psychotic for a total of five days before I talked myself down from it while still in Nepal. A crack appeared in my delusional state when something I expected to happen didn't. I felt very confused at this stage because I was not sure about what was real and what was not, but I told myself that if I had my period after all, which was due in the next couple of days, then I would know for certain things were not right. I did have my period and then had to contend with the problem of having brought no sanitary protection with me, and now finding

myself in the middle of nowhere.

I was left shaken and tearful at times but experienced no further symptoms, or the need to seek any follow-up treatment once I got home. I was lucky enough to have a friend to confide in after this episode, who was a medium herself and so did not find my story as strange as most others would have done. (She herself has experienced a near-death experience that has had a lasting effect on her life). I also went back to work and thought to myself that I certainly would not have discussed it with my colleagues in psychiatry under any circumstances at the time. I'm just grateful I didn't have to and that's saying something, considering I am in the same profession myself! This crisis occurred nearly six years ago now and I have not experienced any further symptoms or difficulties of any nature since this time.

It is clear to me now that the pattern of my experience was recognisably consistent with my chakras opening up one by one from the root to the crown. The sexual experiences, for example, were the result of the energy reaching my (second) sacral chakra. It is interesting to note that Nelson (1994) argues that Kundalini is intimately connected to sexuality, which he said must be directed towards higher purposes and Marion (2000) discusses the Kundalini vibrations as being exquisitely beautiful, warm, intelligent, and dazzling. He goes on to say that even sex pales in comparison to the energy pleasures we feel by means of our inner senses. I would certainly second that.

Wilber (1993) argues that the most dramatic awakenings are those that are spontaneous and usually unsought and he said the spontaneous awakening of Kundalini can be psychological dynamite. The symptoms of Kundalini also seem to vary considerably from person to person depending on the area of the mind and body where a person is blocked. Having said that, the process is also part of a predictable pattern. According to Sanella (1989), any negative effects that occur during Kundalini are a result of resistance to purification, rather than due to the process itself. Comparing it with other types of regressive psychosis, he said that people with Kundalini elements are more objective about themselves and interested in sharing what is going on in them. Sensations of heat are also common in Kundalini and rare in other psychoses.

Lukoff, Lu and Turner (1996) add that those in the midst of a spiritual emergency with psychotic features usually have good pre-episode functioning, acute onset of symptoms with a duration of three months or less, stressful precipitants, and a positive exploratory attitude toward the experience. Scotton (1996) feels that the best course is to assess the level of functioning and the spread of the psychosis. If the dysfunction is circumscribed to the Kundalini content and experience and the previous history is negative to psychosis, then support with minimal drug intervention is needed. He also recommends seeing a yogic teacher familiar with the phenomena. My instinct to keep away from medicine and to talk it through with someone with some knowledge of the spiritual world was right after all. I find it interesting that I also shied away from seeking help within the church. In fact, it seems that anyone in my position is hard pushed to find someone available who has the right knowledge and experience to support the spiritual process without the danger of misunderstanding and interference with the outcome.

3. Reactions following the spiritual awakening

Assagioli talks about a painful loss of an exalted state in the aftermath of an awakening. I would not say this was quite so in my case because I was never really the same again after my own experience. Although I had experienced a brief psychotic episode it was not too difficult for me to accept this, and I thought that after years of nursing others it was perhaps just now my turn to be unwell. However, the new found paranormal abilities which remained with me after the episode were more difficult to come to terms with. Now I felt different to other people who probably would not understand me even if I told them about it anyway and this made me feel uncomfortable. Sadly, I even felt like a freak at times. Thankfully now I would not be without it all and I see it as a wonderful gift and a grace from God.

4. The process of transmutation

This is the process of assimilation and integration of new spiritual energies. Although the acute aspect of this crisis happened over a two-week period, I would judge that the whole process continued on for a further two and a half years. It culminated in my heart chakra opening, which I now understand to be the ultimate purpose behind the Kundalini rising anyway. Interestingly, when my heart finally opened, I suffered from pleurisy and was quite ill for six weeks.

Jim Marion (2000), former Catholic monk, mystic, and attorney, discusses Kundalini in relation to the path we are all on to reach the highest level of human spiritual development or enlightenment. He looks at seven levels of consciousness of the human personality and then two further levels that he argues are the consciousness of a human as a realized divinity, that is, the causal level and non-dual consciousness. He explains my type of experience as relating to the sixth and seventh level of Psychic and Subtle consciousness respectively. The entrance to the psychic level is often dramatic, taking the form of a conversion experience. At this level the person is more consciously aware of information coming from beyond the five physical senses and is making use of extrasensory perception.

The paranormal abilities I referred to include clairsentience or sensing, which as Marion said is the ability to sense the spiritual energy in a church or negative energy in a dangerous place. I can now pick up energies around me both from in this world and from spirit, whether they are earthbound spirits or from the spirit world beyond this dimension. I can now also hear (clairaudience) and sometimes I see flashes of images too (clairvoyance).

At this level Marion also points out that regular peak experiences are also a feature he calls nature mysticism or cosmic consciousness. This is a beautiful feature for me as now just a walk in the park can be a very moving experience. The psychic level is also about becoming more inner-directed, listening to the still small voice within and becoming more sensitive to the messages of the soul and the higher self. I now know that my higher self has been relating to me ever since I had the episode but it has taken me a long time to work out the specific feeling my higher self gives me when it does. It is a welcome addition to my decision making about what I do in life but it is not always easy, as at times I feel called to

do things that otherwise I would not really choose to do.

I feel that the psychic level became established during the two-week crisis period, when the Kundalini or subtle energies also peaked. But it took a further two and a half years for me to begin to become established at the subtle level. Marion argues that living at the subtle level cannot be done without the transmuting of a sizable part of our often unconsciously held negative emotions and mental vibrations. A year after my Kundalini, I was drawn to train in Psychosynthesis Psychotherapy, over the next four years shedding a great deal of unconscious negative material for which I certainly feel the better. Marion even suggests it is the soul that directs the person to want to heal the dark parts and reunite them with the rest of the soul.

All I know is it is a good job I went in this direction because, as Nelson (1994) puts it, any tidal withdrawal of spiritual energies has the habit of exposing unresolved issues that were once covered over by the high water of spiritual emergence. An unintegrated Kundalini, and greater exposure of my unconscious issues because of it, would have left me impoverished rather than transformed, I'm sure this would have happened if I hadn't taken the steps I did to work on my inner life after the event.

During this period of psychotherapy, after every major healing there came an accompanying physical illness and I began to see a pattern, where the healing and the illness were both linked by a particular chakra. This fits with Marion's idea of negative vibrations being cleared by manifesting in the physical body as disease. I was also plagued at this time by the earthbound spirits of discarnate human beings who had not found their way to the light. It was as if I was a magnet for them; I could clearly sense that they were attached to me because of my new found clairsentience ability.

The process of Kundalini is intended to develop compassion in a person in an ongoing, comprehensive and universal sense. According to Marion, our heart centre opens up and we begin to know what love means. I was privileged enough to experience these qualities of love and compassion while I briefly experienced myself as the Virgin Mary. Mary had enough love for the whole world and she loved every single person in it. Perhaps it is the closest I will ever get, in this life at least, to experiencing what it is to be Marion's 'Human as a realised divinity'.

I will never forget my psychotic experience and I consider that it was certainly worth having. Since this time I have experienced a much deeper level of relationship, with myself and with others, including God. Over the last six years I have grown ever closer to Mary and Jesus to the point that I only have to think about the Christ and I weep. Marion is, of course, describing this path for Christians in particular, but it does relate closely to me when he said that at the subtle level, our inner identification with Jesus as Christ comes ever more quickly into fulfilment. He also said at the subtle level we gain immediate contact with our guardian angel and Jesus himself.

I started to pick up angelic energies about a year ago, after the final major healing I experienced in the fourth year of my Psychosynthesis course. My guardian angel introduced himself to me in July 2006 and I have now had direct communication with Jesus himself. From this, I gauge that the subtle level has finally arrived and established itself within me. I also found my way two years ago

to the White Eagle Lodge. I find that this organisation has helped me to accept and integrate my experience because they believe in and teach about the invisible life that has become part of my day to day existence. I have found it vitally important to have my experiences validated by others who I consider to be sound, trustworthy, in touch with reality and with a good track record or I would have been in danger of becoming isolated by my changed reality and worse still left feeling that I was mad.

The White Eagle Lodge also provided meaning about the episode itself, which helped with the process of integration. According to White Eagle (2004), the Kundalini creative power or life force is a feminine power, or the divine mother, and is housed in the root chakra. When this power rises and meets with the male or divine father in the crown, through the impregnation of these two forces the Christ child is created in the heart centre. He also warns that if the power rises without love in the heart, it is the greatest enemy that humanity knows, as it can stimulate the worst in a person.

Kundalini is really a beautiful love story and something that is integral to all our lives.

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