

Kundalini

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Kundalini is described in Theosophical literature as the power of life, serpent fire and an electro-spiritual force present in Nature and the human being. H.P. Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence* relates its highest meaning to active *Buddhi*: spiritual intuition considered as a creative power. Professor Iyer develops this connection through initiation, compassion and the education of consciousness. The subject is an esoteric teaching about spiritual development, whose vocabulary of force and fire must be understood in that setting.

H.P. Blavatsky defines *Kundalini Shakti* as the power of life, a force of Nature known only to those who practise concentration and Yoga. *The Voice of the Silence* calls it the fiery power, the serpent power, mystic fire, and an electric fiery occult or Fohatic power underlying organic and inorganic matter. *The Theosophical Glossary* also identifies *Akasha*, in another aspect, with *Kundalini* as occult electricity. These teachings show that *Kundalini* is not a private energy belonging to the personal self. It is a cosmic current reflected in the human microcosm.

Because *Kundalini* is powerful, it is dangerous when divorced from ethics. *The Voice of the Silence* warns that this electro-spiritual force can as easily kill as create. A great force intensifies the state of the vessel through which it moves. In a purified consciousness governed by *Buddhi-Manas*, it may illumine. In a field of vanity, sensuality, fear, psychic ambition or spiritual pride, it may magnify disorder. The teaching is guarded not to create mystery for its own sake, but because power without purification injures the soul.

Professor Iyer's key safeguard is the identification of true *Kundalini* with *Buddhi*. He writes that when a disciple has reached inward ripeness, active *Buddhi*, called *Kundalini* in *The Voice of the Silence*, may become a reality. Elsewhere he speaks of true *Kundalini* as the pristine power of *Buddhi*. This moves the term away from sensationalism. *Kundalini* is not *Kama* energized, nor lower psychic heat, nor personal will intensified. True *Kundalini* is spiritual intuition made active through purity, concentration, self-mastery and compassion.

The serpent symbolism points to the spiral or annular working of the force. Professor Iyer speaks of *Kundalini* as mysterious energy flowing through two alternating currents intertwined, and also of the regulated flow of *Kundalini Shakti* within the astral spine. The emphasis is on regulation, relation and inward alignment. The mastery of *Kundalini* requires mastery of the relations within the human constitution: body and soul, breath and thought, desire and will, psychic and noetic action, *Manas* and *Buddhi*.

The Voice of the Silence places *Kundalini* in the heart. The fiery power must retire into *Brahma-pura*, the inmost chamber of the heart, the abode of the World-Mother. From the heart it rises to the region between the eyes and becomes the breath of the One-Soul, the Master's voice. This corrects crude ideas of mechanical forcing. The true path begins in purification of the heart, conquest of separateness and listening to the inner God through the ladder of mystic sounds.

For this reason *Kundalini* cannot be separated from compassion. Professor Iyer teaches that prolonged meditation for the sake of universal compassion makes one's breathing more benevolent for the purpose of elevating all beings in all the kingdoms of Nature. This is the awakening of *Bodhichitta*, the seed of enlightenment. *Kundalini*, rightly approached, is therefore not a power for private attainment. It belongs to a vow of service.

Professor Iyer says that something of *Kundalini* is at work in every human being. This does not mean that everyone has attained the mastery described in the initiatory teaching. It places the ordinary faculties within a larger metaphysical account of life and consciousness. The language of electrical and magnetic relations expresses the occult standpoint; it does not turn a feeling of warmth, excitement or pressure into evidence of spiritual attainment.

The practical concern is the quality of attention, motive and response. Anger can be recognized before it is given a voice; a wish to impress can be examined before it directs conduct. These acts of self-study can make life less reactive. Their meaning is ethical, and they should be valued without turning every change of mood into a description of an invisible current.

The relation to the Third Eye is important. Professor Iyer teaches that when active *Buddhi* becomes a reality, a creative fusion of consciousness can occur in which the Third Eye may open — the eye of spiritual vision, universal wisdom and inner enlightenment. This is not psychic curiosity. It is not seeing more objects. It is seeing from a purified centre. The Third Eye opens only when the mind and heart can bear a wider truth without distorting it.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception includes the effect that spiritual language can have on others. A newcomer may hear an account of unusual experiences and begin to feel deficient for having none. A thoughtful companion can return the conversation to the purpose of study: clearer understanding, steadier conduct and care for beings. There is no need to rank people by the intensity of their sensations. The account of ripeness asks for discernment about the whole life, much of which remains invisible to an observer.

Human Solidarity gives this discernment a compassionate direction. An aspiration concerned with humanity's awakening must remain attentive to actual persons, including their uncertainty and suffering. Listening to someone without converting the conversation into a display of spiritual knowledge is a modest expression of that orientation. It leaves the other person room

to speak and preserves the dignity of an experience one may not fully understand. The heart in the teaching is therefore both a profound symbol and a reminder of the purpose for which understanding is sought.

Kundalini also calls for reverent stewardship of the human instrument. Professor Iyer places changes in the subtle vestures within a profound transformation of desire grounded in universal compassion. The body is considered a temple of lives and an instrument deserving care. The teaching's emphasis on fitness is an invitation to patience and discernment, rather than a reason to force bodily processes in pursuit of a sign.

The terminology also asks for distinctions between levels. *Buddhi* names a spiritual principle; the astral spine belongs to the account of a subtle vehicle; the physical body is another instrument again. Correspondence relates these without making them interchangeable. Professor Iyer's use of analogy is intended to enlarge understanding of the whole constitution. Careful study therefore attends to the level at which a statement is made and resists interpreting every sacred image as a location or operation in the physical organism.

Kundalini helps *Manas* turn toward *Buddhi*. Knowledge without compassion becomes control, and compassion without discrimination becomes turbulence. When *Manas* turns toward *Buddhi*, intelligence becomes luminous, feeling becomes steady, will becomes sacrificial and breath becomes benevolent. The human task is to become self-determining and self-conscious in relation to the evolutionary process, so that every awakened faculty is placed in service to the whole.

Kundalini, understood through these sources, belongs to the education of consciousness for service. Its highest meaning is approached through *Buddhi* and the transformation of motive. The image of hidden fire can sustain reverence without becoming a personal claim. The student's immediate responsibility is to make the faculties already available more truthful, steady and compassionate, allowing the aspiration for wisdom to deepen care for the life that is present.

Glossary

Akasha — The subtle spiritual substance or medium of manifestation, distinguished from ordinary physical space and from the lower astral light.

Alkahest — The universal solvent sought by alchemists; used symbolically in Blavatsky's account of *Akasha*.

Anima mundi — Latin for soul of the world; a term used at different levels in accounts of universal life and its manifestations.

Annular — Ring-shaped; used in the source's explanation of the serpent symbolism of *Kundalini*.

Ascetic — One devoted to spiritual self-discipline and restraint; asceticism is the related practice.

Astral — Pertaining to a subtle order of substance or experience; the astral vehicle is distinguished from the visible physical body.

Astral spine — The subtle vehicle or structure described through correspondence with the physical spine in Theosophical teaching.

Atman — Universal Spirit or Self; the spiritual ground common to beings, distinguished from a person's temporary identity.

Bodhichitta — The aspiration toward enlightenment for the welfare of beings; described here as the seed of enlightenment.

Brahma — The creative deity in Hindu cosmological symbolism; distinguish *Brahma* from *Brahman*, the universal spiritual Reality.

Brahma-pura — The city of *Brahma*; in *The Voice of the Silence*, the inner chamber of the heart.

Buddhi — Spiritual intuition or wisdom; Buddhist means pertaining to this higher discernment.

Buddhi-Manas — Self-conscious mind illumined by *Buddhi*; the conjunction of spiritual discernment and higher thought.

Chela — A pupil or disciple receiving spiritual instruction.

Correspondence — A meaningful relation between different orders or levels; an instrument of analogy that requires attention to context.

Discernment — The capacity to distinguish what is true, fitting and spiritually significant; Buddhist discernment transcends personal preference.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception — Widening understanding to include more relationships, consequences and the needs of others.

Electro-spiritual — A term in Theosophical occult language for a relation of spiritual force and creative activity; not an identification with an ordinary measured electrical current.

Esoteric — Inward or hidden in meaning; an esoteric history or cosmology is a claim within the spiritual tradition.

Eye of Dangma — The spiritual vision of the purified seer, described as penetrating beyond illusion.

Fohatic — Pertaining to *Fohat*, the dynamic connecting power in cosmic manifestation.

Gnosis — Spiritual knowing or direct inward understanding; in the initiation passage, sacred knowledge approached through the Mysteries.

Human Solidarity — The shared dignity and interdependence of human beings, expressed through responsibility for one another's welfare.

Incarnation — The embodiment of an enduring principle or individuality in a particular life.

Initiation — An inward passage into spiritual knowledge through a corresponding transformation and preparation of the knower.

Kama — Desire; it can designate a cosmic creative impulse or personal craving, according to context. Kamic means pertaining to desire.

Kundalini — The serpent power or mystic fire; in its highest meaning in the cited teaching, *Buddhi* considered as an active spiritual principle.

Kundalini Shakti — The power called *Kundalini*; *Kundalini Sakti* is the spelling of the quoted glossary entry.

Latent — Present as a possibility or capacity that has not yet become active or manifest.

Mahatma — Great Soul; in this Theosophical usage, an Adept of the highest order, joining spiritual mastery to moral elevation.

Manas — The principle of self-conscious mind and moral choice; Manasic means pertaining to it.

Maya — Illusion or conditioned appearance; the tendency to take the relative as final reality.

Microcosm and macrocosm — The smaller and larger orders considered through correspondence; especially the human being and the cosmos.

Noetic — Pertaining to higher spiritual intelligence and self-conscious discernment.

Occult — Hidden; in this context, concerning the spiritual philosophy of unseen causes and levels of existence.

Occult electricity — A term in the cited esoteric account of *Akasha* and creative force; its meaning is wider than physical electricity.

Planes — Levels or orders of consciousness and substance within the Theosophical account of manifestation.

Pratibha — Intuitive illumination or the radiance of pure intellect in the quoted account of spiritual knowledge.

Pristine — Original or primordial; also conveying purity in the quoted descriptions of spiritual principles.

Psychic — Pertaining to subtle or psychological modes of experience; its level and relation to spiritual intelligence depend upon context.

Sakti — Power or energy; commonly transliterated *Shakti*.

Shakti — Power or energy; a creative potency.

Shiva — A divine figure of transformation; also written *Siva*, and associated with *Rudra* and the *Kumaras* in the sources.

Spiritual Sun — A symbol of spiritual illumination and its source, distinguished from a physical object within the human body.

Taraka jnana — Transcendental or liberating knowledge, described as the knowledge that saves.

Third Eye — An organ and faculty of spiritual perception described in Theosophical occult anthropology; the account distinguishes natural changes from moral misuse.

Transcendental — Exceeding the conditions of ordinary sense experience; the particular meaning depends on the context.

Vedic — Pertaining to the *Vedas*, the early sacred texts of Hindu tradition.

Vehicle — A principle or medium through which another principle can be expressed; *Buddhi* is the spiritual vehicle of *Atman*.

Vesture — A sheath, vehicle or instrument through which consciousness acts; vestures is the plural.

Yoga — Spiritual discipline directed toward integration and realization; a *yogi* or *yogin* is a practitioner.

Yogin — A practitioner of yoga; *yogi* is an alternative form, and *yogins* or *yogis* the plural.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 185, “Kundalini Sakti”.

“*Kundalini Sakti* (Sk.). The power of life; one of the Forces of Nature; that power that generates a certain light in those who sit for spiritual and clairvoyant development. It is a power known only to those who practise concentration and Yoga.”

Meditation thought: This esoteric definition joins spiritual power with the discipline of concentration.

2. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Voice of the Silence*, pp. 7–8.

“Let not thy ‘Heaven-born,’ merged in the sea of *Maya*, break from the Universal Parent (SOUL), but let the fiery power retire into the inmost chamber, the chamber of the Heart and the abode of the World's Mother. Then from the heart that Power shall rise into the sixth, the middle region, the place between thine eyes, when it becomes the breath of the ONE-SOUL, the voice which filleth all, thy Master's voice.”

Meditation thought: The heart symbolism places inward purification at the centre of the teaching.

3. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Voice of the Silence*, pp. 7–8, note.

“The ‘Power’ and the ‘World-mother’ are names given to *Kundalini* — one of the mystic ‘Yogi powers.’ It is *Buddhi* considered as an active instead of a passive principle (which it is generally, when regarded only as the vehicle, or casket of the Supreme Spirit *ATMA*). It is an electro-spiritual force, a creative power which when aroused into action can as easily kill as it can create.”

Meditation thought: The warning makes ethical preparation integral to the account of spiritual power.

4. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 10, note.

“*Kundalini* is called the ‘serpent Power’ or mystic fire. *Kundalini* is called the ‘serpentine’ or the annular power on account on its spiral-like working or progress in the body of the ascetic developing the power in himself. It is an electric fiery occult or Fohatic power, the great pristine force, which underlies all organic and inorganic matter.”

Meditation thought: The serpent image describes an occult principle; its symbolism calls for careful interpretation.

5. H.P. Blavatsky — *The Theosophical Glossary*, pp. 13–14, “Akasa”.

“The expression ‘to stir up the *Brahmâ*’, means to stir up the power which lies latent at the bottom of every magical operation, Vedic sacrifices being in fact nothing if not ceremonial magic. This power is the *Âkâsa* — in another aspect, *Kundalini* — occult electricity, the alkahest of the alchemists in one sense, or the universal solvent, the same *anima mundi* on the higher plane as the astral light is on the lower.”

Meditation thought: The distinction of higher and lower planes matters when several names are used for related powers.

6. R.N. Iyer — “Deity in Action”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 28.

“Always aware of the quintessential distinction between internal and external relations, and the continuous modification of each through the other, which determines the regulated flow of *kundalini shakti* within the astral spine, the *Mahatma* is fully able to overcome the process of transmigration, as well as to transmute it during voluntary and partial incarnations into this world.”

Meditation thought: Mastery is attributed to the *Mahatma* in the context of a transformed relation to the whole constitution.

7. R.N. Iyer — “As Above, So Below”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. I, p. 176.

“When a disciple has reached a moment of ripeness in inward development, it is possible for active *Buddhi*, or what is called in *The Voice of the Silence*, *Kundalini*, that mysterious energy which flows through two alternating currents intertwined, to become a reality. Thus a creative fusion of consciousness can be attained wherein the Third Eye may open, the eye for which there is no past, present or future, the eye of spiritual vision, of universal wisdom and of inner enlightenment, the eye of *Shiva*, the eye of *Dangma*.”

Meditation thought: The teaching places spiritual vision within a ripened and unified consciousness.

8. R.N. Iyer — “Individuation and Initiation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 174.

“Through ever-renewed contact with the teaching, the *chela* begins to enact self-consciously and by degrees the realities which ordinary individuals sporadically experience at some level through deep sleep. This process comes alive through prolonged meditation for the sake of universal compassion, making one's breathing more benevolent for the purpose of elevating all beings in all the kingdoms of Nature. When a person begins to do this, it is the awakening of *Bodhichitta*, the seed of enlightenment.”

Meditation thought: Compassion gives prolonged meditation a purpose extending to all the kingdoms of Nature.

9. R.N. Iyer — “Individuation and Initiation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 174.

“The practical import of the metaphysical teaching of *The Secret Doctrine* lies in the fact that the highest spiritual powers are partly used by each human being every day but without fully knowing it. Light is universal, but it makes all the difference whether one has a blurred sense of perception and merely consumes light, or whether one can take a magnifying glass and concentrate light. There are also those who are like the laser beam which can direct a concentrated shaft of light to destroy cancerous cells and produce a range of extraordinary effects upon the physical plane. There is something of *kundalini* at work in every human being.”

Meditation thought: The analogy of concentrated light invites reflection on the difference between scattered and directed attention.

10. R.N. Iyer — “Individuation and Initiation”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. II, p. 174.

“Electricity and magnetism are sevenfold and work at the highest cosmic level of *Akasha*, but they also work at the most heterogeneous and diffusive level because everything is electrical and magnetic, from the occult standpoint. The aspirant must grasp, even at a preliminary level, the moral and psychological implications of this metaphysical ‘power or Force which moves in a curved path’ in man and Nature.”

Meditation thought: Consider the moral implications before seeking to apply a metaphysical account of force.

11. R.N. Iyer — “The Pilgrimage of Humanity”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 100.

“For the *yogin* who has mastered many modes of training, this involves the ability to achieve at will within all his vestures full mastery of the true *kundalini*, the pristine power of *Buddhi*. A humble aspirant intently using the sacred teaching about the Spiritual Sun may have little knowledge of the psycho-spiritual centres and the higher states of consciousness, but may nevertheless experience and renew each day a deep sense of the oneness and transcendence of all life, which in reality is beyond form and colour, as the limitless light of electric intelligence.”

Meditation thought: A humble aspiration toward oneness can be renewed without claiming knowledge of advanced states.

12. R.N. Iyer — “Vibhuti Pada”, *The Gupta Vidya*, Vol. III, p. 290.

“Similarly, concentration on the laser light of spiritual intuition, *kundalini* released by *buddhi*, results in flashes of inward illumination. This light emanates from *pratibha*, the pure intellect which is self-luminous and omnidirectional, constant and complete, unconnected with earthly aims and objects. Focussing on its radiance releases *taraka jnana*, the transcendental *gnosis* which has been aptly termed 'the knowledge that saves.'”

Meditation thought: Inward illumination is considered in relation to intuition freed from merely personal aims.