

Book Reviews

KUNDALINI. The Evolutionary Energy in Man.
By *Gopi Krishna*. With an introduction by Frederic Spiegelberg
and a psychological commentary by James Hillman.
(Stuart and Watkins. 40s.).

Review by Whitall N. Perry.

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Given the rapport between the macrocosm and the microcosm (man being the mirandum Dei opus), laya-yoga is a spiritual technique in Hindu tantrism for, "localizing" cosmic energies and centers within the human being that have their correspondences in various bodily regions (chakras or "lotuses"), and which are used as progressive points of departure on the way to ultimate Liberation (moksha). The method is to awaken the kundalini ("coiled energy" or "serpent power"), considered as the Shakti or Goddess (Devî) recumbent in the mûlâdhâra plexus at the base of the spine, by directing the prâna (vital energy, breath) onto it. Thus aroused, it travels up the sushumnâ (central column or axis) illuminating and transforming the chakras until emancipation is attained. All authorities are agreed that this path is only to be followed under a qualified guru by a sâdhaka (aspirant) of intelligence and purity and veneration for the Vedas (âstika). Otherwise irreparable physical, psychic, or spiritual harm may ensue, even leading to disintegration in demonic states.

In 1903 to a family of pious Kashmiri Brahmins was born a boy destined with the greatest message for mankind since Aurobindo laid down pen. His father was exemplary in *satsanga* (frequenting holy company) and his mother in ritual, versing him moreover in all the lore of the Hindu pantheon. From his uncle he learned the *Bhagavad Purâna* and "unquestioningly accepted every impossible and unbelievable incident with which the story abounds as truth". Then came the catharsis of Western education, which "had the effect of purging my mind gradually of irrational and fantastic notions I had gathered in childhood, replacing them with a rational and realistic picture of the world".

The echo of his heritage resumed in the *Bhagavad-Gîta* died hard, however, and seized at the age of seventeen by the idea of a Yoga that through "concentration of mind and cultivation of will" could bring about an "alteration of personality", a "physical and mental metamorphosis" leading to the "incomparable bliss of unembodied existence", this "Guru-less" and "wholly un-intellectual personality" as Spiegelberg calls him, secured a minor clerical post, married a Pandit's daughter favorably inclined to his resolve, and forthwith assumed the lotus posture to await results.

After seventeen long years he "suddenly felt a strange sensation below the base of the spine, at the place touching the seat". Thus encouraged he intensified his concentration

until "suddenly, with a roar like that of a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal cord". Then *this* was that "vital mechanism called Kundalini... wrapped up in the legendary mist of ages, about which people talked and whispered without having once seen it in action"! But the next twelve years were to be sheer hell. Far from mastering the *sushumnâ* he had unwittingly aroused the *pingalâ* or solar nerve and was literally burning up. Nor were teachers, then sought for frantically, of any use. One *sâdhu* diagnosed that "my malady was probably due to the venom of malignant spirits"; while another counseled him to "seek directions from the same teacher who had prescribed the practice responsible for the disturbance"; and it was only by hitting in sheer desperation upon the *idâ* or lunar nerve that he managed to save his life and sanity. Later, thanks to his Western education, he gradually unraveled the entire mystery. Kundalini, stripped of all its mystification about *chakras*, etc., which "in these days of physiological knowledge" are "nothing short of an insult to intelligence", is really a "wonderful mechanism... at the base of the spine", and when activated by "energy supplied by the reproductive organs" can effectuate a "cellular and organic transformation" capable of modifying consciousness and leading to a "state of pure cognition, free from the limitations of time and space", reaching "to the zenith of cosmic consciousness". Neither is this due to the performance of a "supernatural agency" but simply the outcome "of natural though as yet unknown biological laws". The whole secret of the technique proved to lie in disciplining the senses, and in eating massively to give the brain tissues and body substances the indispensable nutriment to sustain this gigantic evolutionary hurdle, which would be accompanied, moreover, "by an abnormal rapidity of the pulse".

With all this going for him, what else could be expected but a prodigious biological breakthrough of the personality? "There could be absolutely no doubt that I was the exceedingly fortunate possessor of an awakened Kundalini". Everything was now *enchanting, miraculous, indescribable, phenomenal, staggering, amazing, overwhelming, extraordinary, fascinating, stupendous, colossal*, seen as bliss intense by the "projection of my own internal radiance... until with a plunge I found myself detached from all belonging to the causal world, lost in the inexpressible void, a marvelous state of being absolutely devoid of spatial and temporal distinctions". But a "tangible proof of the change" was still needed, and this touchstone came in the form of glossolalia: he found himself spouting verse in a dozen languages—Indian and European (doubtless never having read Dr. Ian Stevenson and others in this field, he could scarcely suspect the same phenomenon occurring with mediums in trance states and cases of "reincarnation").

Anyhow, what mattered was the glad tidings "in the nature of a divine revelation" for humanity about the wonders of an "awakened Kundalini" which when made "the principle of an exact science... will remove the threat of wars, usher in an era favorable to the establishment of a universal religion, a new world order and a one-world government, with the demolition of racial and color barriers and the introduction of other much-needed reforms conducive to the unhindered progress and uninterrupted happiness of mankind" (his evolved brain seems to think very much along the patterns of current unevolved ones). This, then, "is the only method to bridge the gulf at present yawning between science and religion".

Provided one does not tumble headlong into that gulf—a victim of both. For not even

the "imprimatur" of an authority like Spiegelberg can get this man into the company of the saints, which in any case would be irrelevant if not incongruous to a deist concerned with biological evolution rather than traditional orthodoxy. Nor can Dr. Hillman's competence in Jungian Analytical Psychology specializing in *individuation* cast little else than shadows onto its *antitype integration* on the — Universal plane. With the subject at hand, moreover, we are confronted with purely erratic and extra-normal extensions of the individuality, whether provoked by fragmentary irruptions from the supraformal realm or simply coming from lower modalities of the psychic domain—in either case an aberrant phenomenon outside of ritual (and above all medical and scientific) control and consequently without significance or interest. A tree can be known by its fruits, and the taste here savors of Pondicherry.