

Sukadev Bretz

Awakening KUNDALINI

Chakras, Prana, Nadis
and Spiritual Transformation

EXCERPT





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FUNDAMENTALS OF KUNDALINI YOGA – THE YOGA OF ENERGY

KUNDALINI YOGA IN THE MODERN AGE

Kundalini Yoga is considered a particularly mysterious path of yoga. One hears much about dangers and secret traditions. People are warned against it.

In this book, I would like to describe the path of Kundalini Yoga in the tradition of Swami Sivananda. This path of Kundalini Yoga is both a safe and powerful way to increase energy in daily life, to develop one's personality, and to expand consciousness.

Hatha Yoga, the most widespread form of yoga in the West today, is based in part on the Kundalini Yoga system. Many practitioners of Hatha Yoga will gain valuable insights into their exercises in this book, as well as tips on how to deepen their experience.

“Energy” is one of the buzzwords of our time. Our civilization is built on energy, both economically and personally. Shri Yukteshwar, the guru of Paramahansa Yogananda—one of the pioneers of yoga in the West—predicted as early as the late nineteenth century that the New Age would be built on the concept of energy. The Kriya Yoga he taught was—and is—nothing other than a form of Kundalini Yoga.

On an economic level, much depends on energy. People speak of an energy crisis, fear that fossil fuel sources will soon run out, and hope for alternative energy sources such as solar energy, bioenergy, and geothermal energy. Our daily lives depend on energy: whether it's electricity, gasoline, or heating oil—everything requires energy.

Moreover, more and more forms of communication (telephone, fax, internet, email, cell phone) are based on energetic vibrations.

In the realm of personal wellness, “energy” has been a key buzzword for decades. In the 1970s, people consumed glucose, which was said to instantly restore lost energy ... In the 1990s, it was so-called energy drinks—nothing more than caffeinated beverages ... And for quite some time now, the popularity of stimulating chemical cocktails has been on the rise—ranging from legal stimulants to misused prescription drugs like amphetamines, all the way to cocaine and others. There are reasons for this “hunger for energy”: In today’s world, more and more is possible. Consequently, the demands on performance are also increasing. The world of work is changing at a rapid pace and demands ever greater commitment. The productivity gains hailed annually as major progress mean that people have accomplished more in the same amount of time. Jobs are no longer secure. Today’s worker must constantly strive to remain attractive to an employer. The profession one once learned is no longer enough to last until retirement. “Lifelong learning” is an important principle. Parents are investing more and more in their children’s education. And leisure activities, too, leave less and less time for relaxation. Thus, ever-higher demands are being placed on people’s energy levels today.

Additionally, to the extent that people are able to fulfill more and more of their desires, to create ever greater comforts for themselves, and to develop increasingly sophisticated means of sensual gratification and the pursuit of thrills, they come to realize that none of this is enough. They realize that everything is fleeting. What has a beginning also has an end. Sensual gratification, money, security, fame, professional success, and even family happiness—these alone do not satisfy people in the long run. They seek something higher. But people today do not want to experience this higher reality only after death. They want it already in this life. People today are not satisfied with blind faith, consoling promises of an afterlife, or dry philosophy. They

want a living experience that encompasses the relative world while also providing access to a higher, meaningful reality.

That is why Kundalini Yoga is particularly important for people today. For Kundalini Yoga helps raise a person's energy level, enabling them to experience higher levels of consciousness, and ultimately realize unity with the Infinite.

The levels of impact in Kundalini yoga correspond to the seven main chakras. Practicing Kundalini Yoga provides the necessary energy for all seven levels:

- * On the first level, a person receives sufficient energy for health, physical strength, and the capacity for sensory enjoyment and “nest-building” (apartment, house, etc.).
- * On the second level, Kundalini energy helps one enjoy being with others more; it enables sexuality, creativity, healing powers, and extrasensory perception, and is partly responsible for beauty and attractiveness.
- * On the third level, Kundalini energy provides greater courage, self-confidence, the ability to utilize one's own talents, the power to change and shape things, to assert oneself, and to build personal power.
- * At the fourth level, the capacity for personal emotions is added, including higher emotions such as joy, love, devotion, and reverence, as well as the capacity to experience a sense of unity and connection with the Divine.
- * On the fifth level, Kundalini energy is responsible for communication, language, expression, interpersonal understanding, and a lasting sense of unity.
- * Energy on the sixth level provides power for the intellect and intuition, as well as various other mental abilities. The sixth level is also home to the third eye, the “eye of wisdom,” or realization of the Supreme.

- * The seventh level represents the opening to Divine Grace, to Higher Guidance, to devotion, and to complete merging with the Infinite through the realization of unity.

This is the greatness of Kundalini Yoga: it gives us the power to fully savor every aspect of human existence. Kundalini Yoga provides us with energy that allows us to approach all our actions with greater vitality. It offers experiences that make us realize there is more to life than the material world. Ultimately, Kundalini Yoga leads from authentic spiritual experiences to self-realization.

Practicing Kundalini Yoga does pose some dangers. It can happen that practitioners want to remain at a certain level. People who previously could not enjoy life may find that food tastes much better and they may experience beauty much more consciously. People who, out of fear, have not lived up to their talents will learn to assert themselves confidently and stand by themselves. People who, through Kundalini Yoga, gain access to subtle-body perception (aura-reading, astral travel, healing abilities, clairvoyance, etc.) sometimes succumb to the fascination of these phenomena. One must constantly remind oneself: Yoga does not end here.

But the greatest danger is that when people have a lot of energy, it also means they have power. And as the saying goes, power corrupts. Kundalini yoga provides a great deal of energy—and thus a great deal of power. This can lead to corruption. It is no coincidence that there are many warnings in Indian mythology. Many stories are told of people who practiced intense energy techniques and then used them to increase their personal power, thereby becoming people that cause much evil in the world. These are compelling reasons why Kundalini yoga practices were kept secret for centuries and passed down from teacher to student only after rigorous testing. Today, Kundalini yoga teachers have become more open, and for good reason: those who primarily seek power and success are less drawn to Kundalini yoga

practices these days. Instead, they attend various seminars on “personal empowerment,” “management,” “communication,” “rhetoric,” etc., hire media consultants, and cultivate their networks. Perhaps it is especially good today that the possibilities of Kundalini Yoga are open to spiritual seekers, so that they not only focus on their own personal development but also have the strength to do good for others and help a tolerant spirituality find its rightful place in the emerging global culture. Through the practices of Kundalini Yoga, the ideal practitioner gains the strength to achieve much through an authentic presence.

It is important to find the right pace for awakening Kundalini energy and to ensure that purification and stabilization accompany this activation. A premature and overly powerful awakening can carry various risks. For this reason, I have chosen not to describe in this book the particularly powerful practices taught in the Kundalini Yoga seminars at the Yoga Vidya seminar centers. Although Kundalini Yoga is primarily a system of exercises, this is primarily a theoretical book. For a practitioner, it is first and foremost important to understand the process. In this book, I describe the human energy system—a comprehensive system comprising various *pranas* (life energies), *chakras* (energy centers), and *nadis* (energy channels). I describe the stages of energy awakening and the necessary precautions at each stage. I will also provide simple and effective tips for basic energy practices and for daily life.

Some readers may have already experienced various energy phenomena or even spontaneous awakenings of Kundalini. Here, I will offer a series of tips on how to deal with such energy experiences and how to advise people going through these phases of their spiritual development.

More advanced Kundalini Yoga practices must be learned directly from a teacher, in workshops or classes. If you study with a respon-

sible teacher, you will also learn what prerequisites are necessary for practicing these techniques, what precautions to take, and how to respond to different experiences. Based on 25 years of experience from my own practice and guiding students, I can say that Kundalini Yoga is a wonderful, effective, and safe path when learned under competent guidance and practiced with due regard for safety precautions. The dangers of Kundalini Yoga are often exaggerated. Sometimes I also get the feeling that some people use the alleged dangers of Kundalini Yoga as an excuse for their lack of personal practice. I would therefore like to encourage the reader to first familiarize themselves with the subject matter of this book. And then to seek out a competent teacher to practice with and gain experience. In this book, I describe a series of simple exercises that can be practiced by most people without any special prerequisites. Even trying them just once can lead to interesting experiences and effects. You will derive the maximum benefit from them if you integrate them into a regular yoga program that you have learned from a competent yoga teacher.

Kundalini Yoga is an interfaith classical tradition that, while originating in Hinduism, has also influenced Sikhism, Jainism, and Sufism, and has been incorporated into Tibetan Buddhism as part of the Tantric tradition. Kundalini Yoga, the yoga of energy, is a systematic science, a path that has been proven to exist for centuries, and likely for millennia. In books, it is described only cryptically.

I come from the tradition of Swami Sivananda and Swami Vishnudevananda. Swami Sivananda lived from 1887 to 1963. Raised in Tamil Nadu in southern India, he learned spiritual practices from childhood. He studied medicine and worked as a doctor in Malaysia for many years. In 1923, he gave up his medical career, moved to Rishikesh on the banks of the Ganges at the foothills of the Himalayas, and practiced various yoga disciplines intensively. After his enlightenment, he generously passed on the yoga exercises to his students, both in person and through books such as *Kundalini Yoga, The*

Science of Pranayama, and *Swara Yoga*. One of his students was Swami Vishnudevananda (1927–1993), who began to train with Swami Sivananda at the age of 17. For many years, he practiced Kundalini Yoga for up to 14 hours a day. After various experiences of Kundalini awakening and many years of selfless service in his guru's ashram, Swami Vishnudevananda was sent to the West by Swami Sivananda in 1957. I was trained by Swami Vishnudevananda in the practice and teaching of Kundalini Yoga.

Swami Sivananda and Swami Vishnudevananda taught Integral Yoga, a holistic yoga that harmoniously combines the various types of yoga. And they taught their students according to their temperament and spiritual inclinations. Their students learned a foundational system for developing physical health through Hatha Yoga, the energy system through Kundalini Yoga, the heart through Bhakti Yoga, the practical mind through Raja Yoga, and the philosophical intellect through Jnana Yoga—all in conjunction with Karma Yoga, the yoga of selfless service in daily life. These teachers also gave each of their students special teachings that they were to practice and pass on.

In addition to the art of holistic yoga, Swami Vishnudevananda instructed me in Kundalini Yoga in particular. He guided me toward an intensity of Kundalini practice that he did not impart to any of his other students. He taught me in great detail through personal conversations on how to pass on these practices. I have had most of the experiences described in this book myself, and I have guided thousands of students in Kundalini Yoga seminars and accompanied and guided countless students through Kundalini experiences, various energy states, and spiritual development processes. I have trained many yoga teachers to lead intensive energy practices and guide students.

But I have learned not only from Swami Vishnudevananda but also from other teachers such as Swami Muktananda, Swami Narayananda, Swami Satyananda, Mantak Chia, and Harish Johari—partly in person, partly through their students, and partly through their works.

And I have continually made an effort to compare what I have learned with yoga scriptures such as the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, *Shiva Samhita*, *Goraksha Shataka*, *Gheranda Samhita*, *Shatchakra Nirupana*, and *Shiva Svarodaya Shastra*. I have practiced what I have learned and synthesized it into my own system of practice.

Today, there are various traditions of Kundalini Yoga in the West. In addition to the Kundalini tradition of Swami Sivananda, which I teach and which is primarily taught at Yoga Vidya centers, the 3HO tradition, which is based on the teachings of Yogi Bajan, is well known for Kundalini Yoga. This tradition is similar to my own in terms of theory and the goals of the practice. The practical exercises, however, differ greatly. I do not intend to provide an overview of the various systems in this book, nor will I comment on the different Kundalini Yoga traditions. There is now extensive research on Kundalini and attempts to relate nadis, chakras, and Kundalini to physiological phenomena.* Likewise, there are some psychotherapists, from C. G. Jung to Stanislav Grof, who relate Kundalini to Western psychological concepts. I will address this only very briefly in this book. Rather, I wish to provide an overview of classical Kundalini Yoga from the perspective of my own tradition, and I ask the reader for understanding regarding my perspective, which may consequently be somewhat limited in places. In what this book offers, it is unique: a comprehensive presentation of classical Kundalini Yoga, as described in the ancient scriptures, taught by Indian masters, and as it is still practiced today with great benefit. I believe that, thanks to its classical approach, this book can serve as an introduction for those new to Kundalini, offer interesting insights to aspirants from other traditions, and provide deeper understanding for Yoga Vidya practitioners. Especially in the final

* See the works of Gopi Krishna, Hiroshi Motoyama, Lawrence C. Wile, Günter Haffelder, Lee Sannella, and Bonnie Greenwell and the article on Kundalini in Wikipedia.

chapters, I have compiled a wealth of advice on how to handle experiences of Kundalini awakening.

WHAT IS KUNDALINI?

The masters of Kundalini Yoga say that within every human being lies a vast latent potential of abilities, talents, and possibilities. Accordingly, the human being is absolute, pure consciousness—called *Shiva* or *Parama Shiva*—and possesses the entire cosmic primal energy, known as *Shakti*. This cosmic primal energy has brought life into being and continues to work in the continuous evolution of all creation. It is this primal energy that brought forth plants from the mineral world, animals from the plants, and humans from the animals. It is this energy that makes humans restless, causes them to seek and strive for something higher. Ultimately, it is also this energy that helps humans attain the highest state—unity with the Absolute.

This Kundalini yoga theory also aligns well with Darwin's theory of evolution. Darwin proposed the theory of "survival of the fittest"—the survival of those best adapted to environmental conditions. But how life arises in the first place and how complex life forms emerge from simple ones is only inadequately explained by Darwin's theory of evolution. Kundalini Yoga states that the Kundalini Shakti resides in every living being as evolutionary energy. That this energy seeks to bring the inherent consciousness into ever greater unfolding and thus, over time, gives rise to increasingly complex forms of life. Darwin's theory of evolution can explain how life forms adapt to environmental conditions. Kundalini Yoga can also explain why, following major catastrophes (such as the extinction of the dinosaurs and most other living beings about 60 million years ago), life has repeatedly emerged anew and eventually become more complex than before: Kundalini Shakti is inherent in all things and will always bring

life into being. Therefore, Kundalini yogis would assume that life must also exist on other planets. If the external environmental conditions are even approximately suitable, life will seek to unfold.

The Kundalini energy is considered dormant in humans (Kundalini means “the coiled one”—symbolic of a sleeping snake), but not dead or nonexistent. It can awaken gradually in various stages. A first sign of this awakening is when one asks oneself questions such as, “Who am I?,” “Where do I come from?,” “Where am I going?,” and “What is the purpose of life?” The further the Kundalini awakens, the more intensely it drives the seeker not to stop at these questions, but to take action—to seek spiritually, to practice.

Kundalini is the force behind all great charismatic figures and geniuses with extraordinary talents such as Leonardo da Vinci, Mozart, Goethe, Newton, Einstein, and many others. It is no coincidence that the diaries and personal letters of many geniuses contain accounts of energy awakenings, a burning sensation in the spine, throbbing and tremors in the lower spine, special experiences in the heart, in the center of the forehead, or at the crown of the head, and expansions of consciousness. Einstein himself said that he could hardly imagine a life without the experience of God.

Ultimately, Kundalini is the energy behind every spiritual experience and the evolutionary energy behind all of humanity. This Kundalini energy propels individuals, in ever-renewing creative surges, toward new inventions and cultural achievements.

In recent centuries, there has been great external progress in the material world. Industry and technology are enabling ever larger segments of humanity to live without famine. More and more people are gaining access to education. Democracy, human rights, humanism, the welfare state, and the market economy are cultural achievements that are becoming increasingly widespread and capable of further development.

All of these can become valuable foundations for authentic spirituality. But great dangers are also hidden within these external advances: large nations are becoming increasingly difficult to govern, global environmental catastrophes loom, and major wars could render the Earth largely uninhabitable. Thus, inner progress is necessary alongside external progress. That is why there are more and more people today with a deep spiritual interest and a longing for something higher. A growing number of people possess the capacity for extraordinary experiences of consciousness and perceptions of energy. It is to be expected that in the future, more and more people will have experiences of Kundalini awakening, and thus inner development will keep pace with outer development.

The Kundalini energy is more or less active in every being. In most people, it is dormant and only very faintly active. Its awakening takes place gradually and, except for temporary, sudden, and seemingly inexplicable psychological crises and biographical ruptures, is barely noticeable.

If the energy is stronger and the energy channels have not yet been sufficiently cleansed, it can lead to various experiences of energy awakening, which I will describe in detail later. At this point, I will mention only a few: intense heat, especially in the spine; tremors and shaking throughout the body; a sensation of energy throughout the body; reduced need for sleep; *kriyavati*, which is the automatic assumption of various postures (*asanas*), hand, tongue, and head postures (*mudras*), and the automatic performance of breathing exercises; perception of subtler realms; manifestation of various subtle phenomena; experiences of expanded consciousness, and feelings of bliss.

For some people, this energy has been particularly active since childhood. For others, a spontaneous awakening occurs unexpectedly or as a result of various circumstances. I know people who woke up one morning and suddenly had a Kundalini awakening

experience—and their lives were never the same again. One person reported that he fell on his behind, then his spine became hot, everything spun, the world was bathed in light, he was filled with love, and from that moment on he was a real bundle of energy. Others report that their Kundalini experiences occurred during sexual intercourse, after taking drugs, during a classical concert or a rock concert. Many have awakening experiences after engaging in various spiritual or psychotherapeutic practices. Normally, these Kundalini awakening experiences are associated with bliss and intense feelings of happiness. Things become difficult when people don't know what is happening to them, or when they receive the wrong advice. They often hear the warning that they must stop it immediately (which is not possible), or else they will go mad, or someone tells them they have already gone mad. Such advice and assertions, made solely out of ignorance, lead to fear. And since Kundalini is a powerful energy that amplifies whatever one focuses on, it can also amplify fear.

In a later chapter, I will discuss in more detail how to deal with experiences of Kundalini awakening and how to distinguish them from other energy experiences. Here are a few basic principles: It is helpful to have trust and courage and to let it happen. It is also important to practice cleansing, grounding, and cooling techniques, to reduce stimulating practices, to maintain a very pure (*sattvic*) diet, and to seek refuge in God, cosmic energy, or a spiritual guide.

In principle, the Kundalini can be awakened through any kind of spiritual experience and practice. However, the specific path of Kundalini Yoga offers techniques for the systematic preparation, purification, and strengthening of the entire body-mind system, as well as for the awakening and guidance of the energies. Thus, Kundalini Yoga is actually the safest of all spiritual paths when practiced correctly.

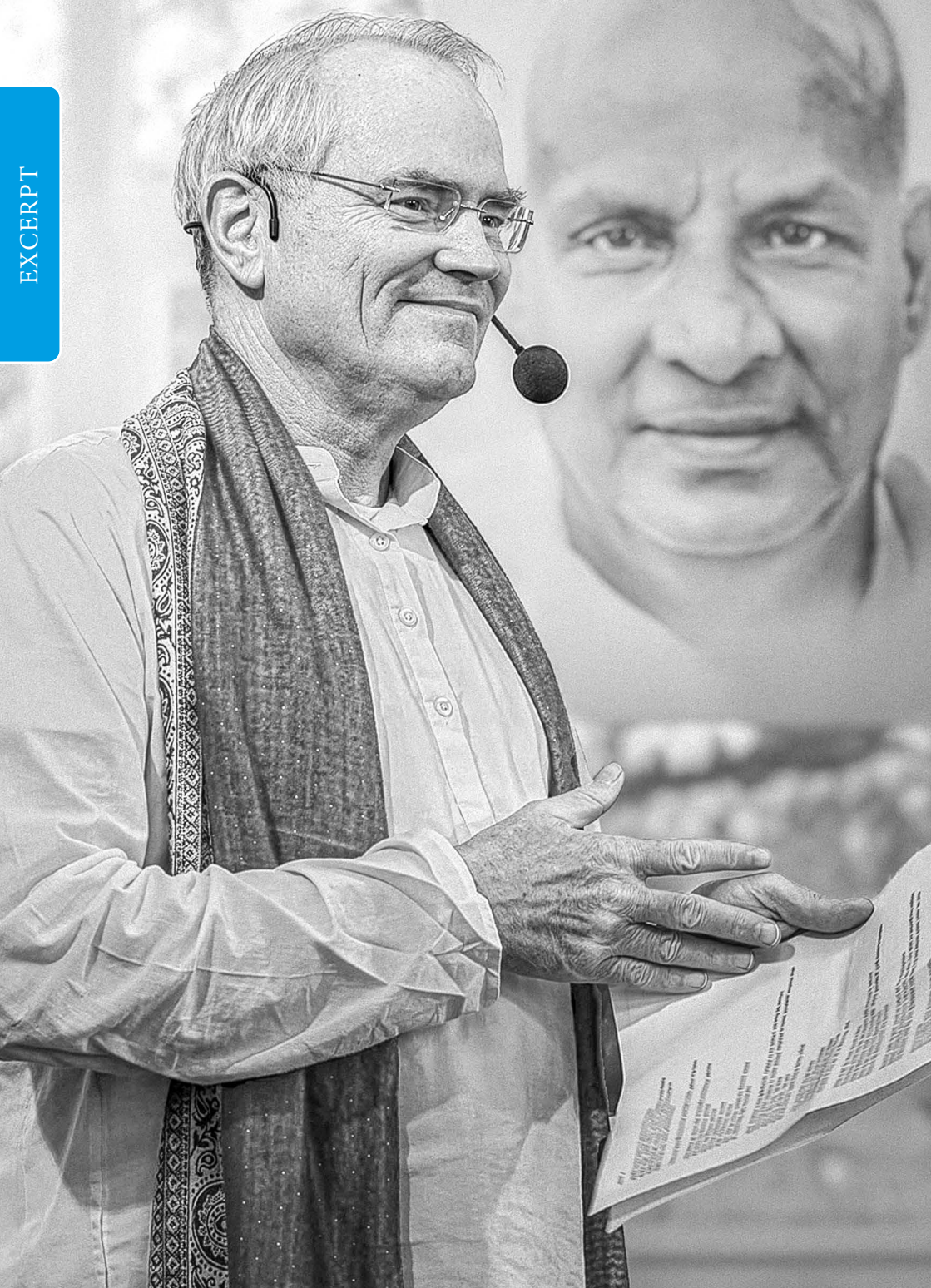
Kundalini yoga does not, therefore, mean the immediate awakening of the Kundalini. Rather, the steps are:

- * Increase in prana, the subtle life energy
- * Purification of the nadis (energy channels), the body, and the emotional life
- * Strengthening of the body, the mind, and intellectual clarity
- * Opening of the chakras
- * Development of various talents
- * Spiritualization of all aspects of life
- * Various spiritual experiences
- * Awakening of the Kundalini
- * Gradual raising of the Kundalini to the Sahasrara, the highest of the chakras (energy centers)

Thus, the awakening of the Kundalini is, in any case, a spiritual, inner adventure that will transform one's life. If it occurs spontaneously, it is important to seek the right guidance promptly. If it is awakened through Kundalini yoga practices—following the various steps, under competent guidance, and observing all safety precautions—this is a safe path without major risks. Kundalini awakening is the key to deep meditation, spiritual radiance, life energy, profound love, and expanded consciousness. Not everyone will become a genius as a result. But everyone will be able to transcend self-imposed limits and experience unity with the Divine.

KUNDALINI YOGA COMPARED TO OTHER YOGA PATHS

Kundalini Yoga shares many similarities with, but also has differences from, other paths of yoga. There are various classifications of the paths of yoga. Here, I will first follow the classification by Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), who was one of the pioneers of modern yoga. Swami Vivekananda distinguished four main paths:



THE AUTHOR

Sukadev Bretz is the founder and spiritual head of Yoga Vidya. He is an inspiring spiritual teacher, an experienced teacher trainer, a sought-after lecturer, and the author of numerous books, videos, and podcasts on yoga, meditation, practical psychology, spirituality, and holistic health. He teaches Integral Yoga and a comprehensive spiritual path in the tradition of the Indian yoga master Swami Sivananda. After studying for twelve years under Swami Vishnudevananda, he founded Yoga Vidya in 1992. Today, with four ashrams, around 80 yoga centers, and well over 20,000 trained yoga teachers, Yoga Vidya has become one of the largest yoga networks in Europe.

Sukadev is an expert in all major paths of yoga, combining profound knowledge with the ability to communicate timeless wisdom in a practical, accessible, and inspiring way through seminars, teacher training programs, online lectures, and conferences. His published works include commentaries on *Patanjali's Yoga Sutras*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and the *Hatha Yoga Pradipika*, as well as books on Kundalini Yoga, karma and reincarnation, an extensive practical manual on *Pranayama*, and several books on meditation.

In this book, Sukadev introduces the spiritual mysteries of Kundalini and explains how awakening the divine primordial energy within can enrich our lives. Clear explanations of the tantric tradition, purification and grounding practices, the astral body, the nadis, and the chakras provide a deeper understanding of Kundalini and offer practical guidance for approaching spiritual awakening experiences with wisdom and balance. In this way, Kundalini becomes an inner adventure that can reveal hidden potentials and abilities, expand consciousness, and lead us toward self-realization.

Like a coiled serpent, Kundalini—the cosmic primal energy within us—rests at the base of the spine. Through the gradual awakening of this inner power, we can attain the highest goal: union with the Absolute.

With inspiring clarity, yoga master Sukadev Bretz introduces the profound spiritual mysteries of Kundalini and demonstrates how awakening this divine primordial energy can enrich our lives. Explanations of the tantric tradition, purification and grounding practices, the astral body, the nadis, and the chakras provide a solid foundation for understanding Kundalini and encourage a balanced and responsible approach to spiritual awakening experiences.

In this way, Kundalini becomes an inner adventure that can reveal hidden potentials and abilities, expand consciousness, and ultimately lead to self-realization.

