

The Unfolding Mind

The terms 'levels of mind' and 'altered states of consciousness' are often loosely and imprecisely used to refer to experiences that are somehow out of the ordinary. However, the looseness of usage results not so much from a peculiar feature of these experiences but simply from the inability of Western concepts and frameworks to encompass them.

Because such experiences are not common or ordinary, they are generally not considered as important or as valuable as experiences which are more straight forward and mundane. In the modern world many people even deny that spiritual experience exists at all. It is therefore vitally important to the future of spirituality that non-ordinary states of consciousness and higher levels of mind be understandable within the framework of a sound and logical theory. Tantra provides such a theory. Its concept of kosas (layers of the mind) and chakras (psychic energy centres) offers a unique explanation of the mechanism

through which human consciousness expresses itself in both ordinary and non-ordinary ways.

Kosas

From the beginning, Tantra makes a fundamental distinction between consciousness and mind. Consciousness is basic and does not change. On the other hand, mind is extremely variable, acting as the medium through which consciousness is able to come in contact with the varied manifestations of the real world. Even though we may speak of higher states of consciousness, consciousness itself does not in fact change and is never higher or lower. What does change is the particular mental machinery through which consciousness functions.

Tantra distinguishes five main types of mental machinery or

modes of mind, calling them the five Kosas: the sheaths or layers of the mind. For example, the most basic Kosa is called Kamamaya, and is concerned with the operation of the senses and the fulfilment of the fundamental drives related to food, security, reproduction and sleep. The next Kosa, termed Manomaya, is what we normally call the intellect or ego, and is involved in learning, thinking, remembering and so on.

When a person is totally immersed in sensory pleasure it is a common observation that his or her intellectual and rational faculties are greatly reduced. Similarly, when one's intellect or ego is developed, it is possible to control sensual inclinations so as to fulfil higher desires.

In the first instance, the person's consciousness is operating predominantly through the Kamamaya Kosa, while in the second case it is functioning through the Manomaya Kosa. In these two situations consciousness itself has not changed, only the mode of mind with which it is mainly associated.

Perhaps more interesting are the so-called 'higher Kosas': the three layers of mind beyond the intellect. That Tantra should distinguish and detail no less than three distinct Kosas beyond the intellect, in itself, shows the poverty of a Western approach which has failed to find boundaries or clear outlines at the higher levels. The problem is mainly that Western psychologists have tried to understand the higher Kosas purely with the intellect – which is only just above 'animal consciousness' (Kamamaya) on the Tantric scale. To understand 'Divine Consciousness' or 'Cosmic Consciousness' one must be Divine or 'Cosmically aware' oneself.

To comprehend the full extent and features of the higher levels of mind, we need the insight of real spiritual experience gained through meditation.

Many people reading books on Yoga or Tantra for the first time are often confused by the contrapositions of dualities like seeing and Seeing, knowing and Knowing, sleep and wakefulness. The former refer to consciousness functioning through, and thus limited by, the narrow scope of the lower Kosas, specifically the Kamamaya and Manomaya. The latter then refer to consciousness as it is reflected through any one or more of the three higher Kosas – the Atimanasa, Vijinanamaya and the Hiranamaya.

There are some very interesting philosophical implications of distinguishing knowing from Knowing. Tantra calls the methods for improving our knowledge (information from the lower Kosas) crude or physical science, while those techniques for improving our Knowledge (information from higher Kosas) are called spiritual science. Persons investigating Tantra or other similar Eastern systems are often astounded at the huge vistas of both knowledge and Knowing (the two are intimately related) that are opened up.

In such a brief account as this it is not possible to do justice to the detailed descriptions that Tantra provides of the three higher Kosas, however some of the most important characteristics are listed below:

Atimanasa Kosa is the storehouse of the reactions in potential form which have been impressed in the mind by past actions

(see Chapter 9). Dreams, which are a reflection or expression of these reactions, are experienced in the Manomaya Kosa but have their origin in the Atimanasa. Intuitive knowledge and creativity, extra-sensory perception and clairvoyance are attributes of this Kosa.

Vijinanamaya Kosa is the Kosa of true objectivity, where the subjectivity of the ego, its attachments and conditioning, are practically non-existent. One sees things as they really are, and is able to distinguish between what leads to lasting Bliss and what leads to transitory pleasure. Being well beyond instinctive and intellectual desires, this Kosa is dominated by intense spiritual attraction towards the Infinite Consciousness.

Hiranamaya Kosa, the "golden" Kosa, glows with spiritual light and wisdom. It is the most subtle and refined layer of mind, so pure that it is experienced only through deep meditation. The state of Cosmic Consciousness can be reached only from this Kosa.

Idealism vs Materialism

The concept of Kosas has also enabled Tantric theorists to resolve the old dualistic problem of materialism versus idealism. Idealists say that only the mind, or what the mind thinks of, is real. the external world being either an illusion or just imagination. The materialists take the opposite view and maintain that the material world is all that is real and that mind or consciousness (neither traditional idealism nor materialism really distinguish the two) is merely a reflection of the external reality, or is ultimately constructed from, and therefore dependent on,

matter.

Tantra resolves the dilemma by saying that, yes, the external world is real and is there whether I happen to think of it or not, but what I see as being the world depends on my level of mind: that is, which Kosa my consciousness is functioning through.

The Kosas can be thought of as a set of five filters that only register or permit the passage of a certain range of vibrations from the Cosmos.

Thus if our consciousness functions predominantly through the lower Kosas, the range of vibrations of which we are aware is by necessity restricted to the material and the intellectual part of the vibrational spectrum. If, on the other hand, our consciousness is solely associated with, say, the Hiranamaya Kosa, then all we are aware of are the most refined and Blissful vibrations that exist.

The Hiranamaya Kosa is specifically attuned to the top (spiritual) end of the vibrational spectrum, and does not even register material or intellectual impulses. Thus a spiritually evolved person can, while totally conscious, be oblivious to what we call the real world — the world of phenomena. This is because even though s/he is observing the world which has buildings, plants, people and so on, all that s/he is conscious of is the spiritual vibration pervading and permeating them all. All that the realised being is aware of is the fundamental underlying unity of all creation.

Kundalini & Chakras

Consciousness is expressed through the mind, and the mind in turn expresses itself through its vehicle: the physical body. How the mind and body are connected has long been a subject of debate and speculation. An integral part of the Tantric theory of mind and consciousness is an explanation of the workings of the human psyche in association with the body, through the mechanism of the psychic nervous system or system of chakras (psychic nerve centres). Within the psychic nervous system is the psycho-spiritual energy of the individual known as kundalini.

In order to grasp the significance of the kundalini and chakras it is necessary to have some understanding of the phenomenon of prana – the vital energy or life force that flows throughout the body and constitutes a medium between the physical and mental planes. Just as a body has a physical nervous system consisting of neuron pathways through which information and stimuli are passed back and forth between different parts of the body, so there is an approximately parallel system of 'nadiis' (lit: 'rivers') or pranic channels through which vital energy flows throughout the body, and a series of psychic glands or nerve centres (chakras), which form a bridge between the layers of the mind and the body.

A possible means of detecting prana in the body is Kirlian photography – a technique developed in the USSR in the 1950's. When photographed by this method, people's bodies are shown to have an aura of coloured light surrounding them. This aura

varies in its shade and intensity not only from person to person, but on the same individual in different moods.

Ancient Chinese medical science also recognises the existence of prana and bases its system of acupuncture on the principle that the flow of prana (or 'chi' in Chinese) in the body is directly related to the condition of one's health, and that this flow can be stimulated or inhibited through the application of massage, or needle insertion at particular points. This method is being used all over the world today to cure a variety of bodily ills, with remarkable effect. It is interesting to note that the acupuncture points from Chinese tradition show up consistently in Kirlian photography.

Amongst the complex system of nadiis are three major channels which run up the spine: one directly upward and two weaving back and forth, forming points at which the chakras or psychic nerve plexuses are situated (see diagram). At the bottom of the central nadii, at the base of the spine, the kundalini resides in its dormant state.

Due to misunderstanding, Kundalini Yoga has been looked upon as a deeply mysterious phenomenon. However, once properly approached, kundalini can be seen in its true perspective: as simply another aspect of human existence. Kundalini is simply the expression of human spiritual potentiality within the psychic being of the individual.

The kundalini's psychic form in its dormant state is said to be like a coiled serpent, thus the name kula-kundalini (meaning coiled serpentine force'). At initiation the kundalini is 'struck'

by the spiritual power of the Guru. Instantly it is awakened. The unleashing of the energy of the kundalini may affect the newly initiated person in many ways. S/he may become overwhelmed by feelings of extreme bliss, or alternatively unhappiness (depending on the individual's unexpressed mental tendencies – 'samskaras'). On the other hand, the person may not notice anything till much later, after long periods of meditation. In any event, it is due to the awakening of the kundalini that initiation is said to be the spiritual rebirth of the truth seeker.

As explained in Chapter 3, initiation involves receiving a word or group of words with a particular sound vibration, known as 'mantra', from a qualified teacher. The mental repetition of this sound further facilitates the spiritual expression of the kundalini, keeping it awake. If the mantra is not used properly, then the kundalini will return to its dormant state. Each repetition of the mantra has the effect of striking against the kundalini. This, along with the spiritual idea associated with the mantra, helps to maintain the aspirant in a spiritually awakened state.

Our patterns of thought, inexplicable as they may seem, do not result from random processes, rather they are influenced by our basic feelings, emotions and desires (collectively known as 'vrttis' meaning 'mental tendencies'). These mental tendencies are common to all human beings – we all feel fear, hunger, love, shame, and so on, at different times. The vrttis are 50 in number and are controlled by the six lower chakras. If permitted, the vrttis will take the mind in many different directions, scattering one's mental energy. But through meditation, control is gained over the chakras, thereby controlling the vrttis, enabling us to free our minds from their influence.

Is He moving? No, no, He is not. He lies motionless like the stump of the tree. Is He far away? No, no, He is not. He is very close. He is the life of my life. He is within you, within me. He is within and without all and at all places. When a spiritual aspirant gets adequately acquainted with His Blissful Entity, we say that he is established in God. At that stage both inside and outside attain unity. Mind then remains aloof from the attraction of trifles and real acquaintance is made with the Supreme Being. While the body remains in the mortal world, the soul is merged in the Supreme Soul.

Shrii Shrii Anandamurti

The use of mantra in meditation is based on the principle that sound can directly affect one's state of mind in a subtle and powerful way. This can be appreciated through recall of the emotions evoked by powerful music, and is because the vrttis of the mind each have a particular sound associated with them — a particular sound that creates a resonance in that part of the mind. There being 50 vrttis there are 50 associated sounds which can be perceived in a state of deep meditation. The yogis of ancient times developed the Sanskrit language from these very sounds. Each of the 50 syllables of the Sanskrit alphabet is a phonetic expression of one of the vrttis. The language itself is intimately connected to the most deep seated feelings within a human being.

The mantra used in meditation is made up of these root sounds and given additional power by the Guru. It is chosen on the basis of certain vibrations within the meditator.

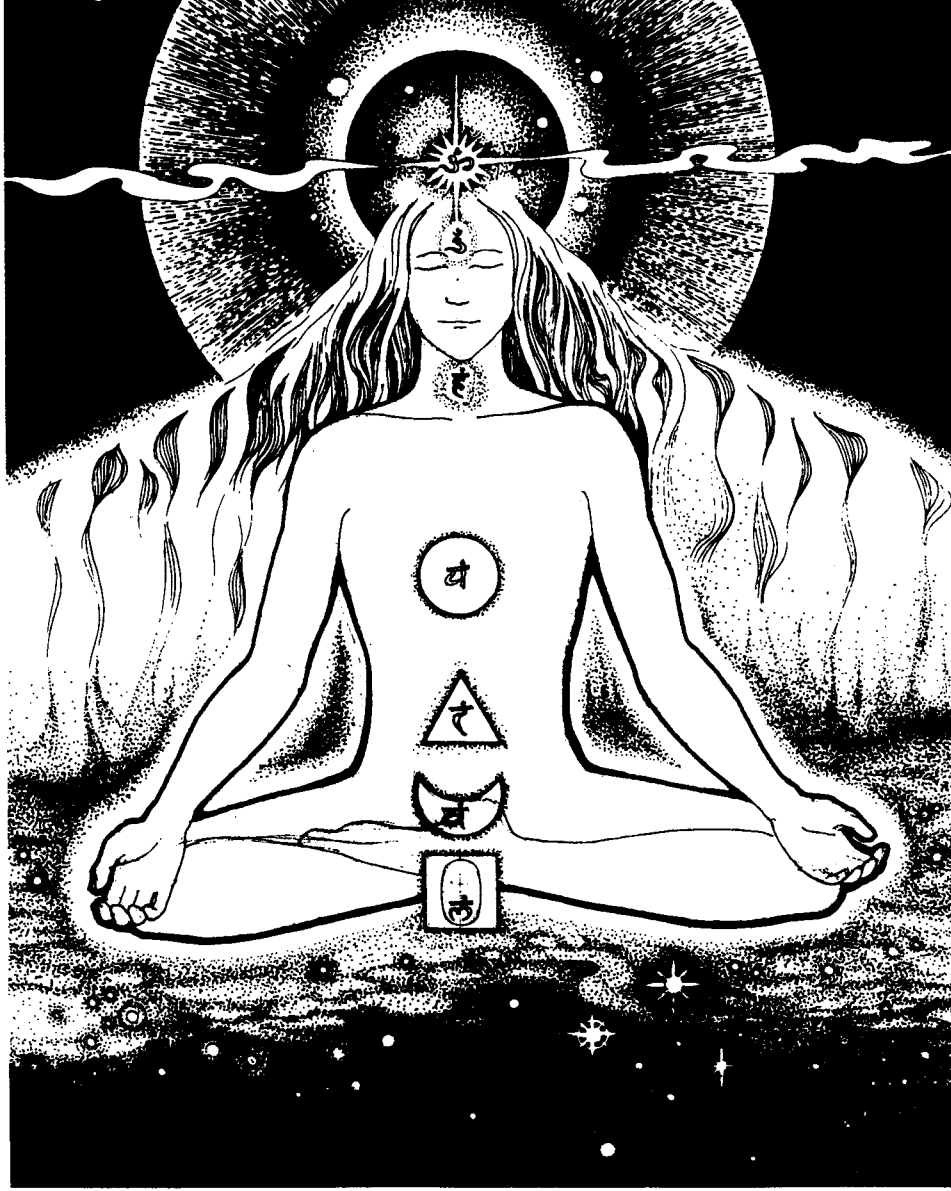
In a similar way an individual's predominant chakra is prescribed for use in meditation. The lower 3 chakras are never given as they are controlled by the static and mutative forces, and may precipitate undesirable effects if the mind is fixed upon them.

The first five chakras correspond to the first five layers of the mind as described earlier in this chapter. As the kundalini moves up the spine the chakras are 'opened' and their associated layer of mind revealed. Gradually each level of mind is conquered and controlled by the adept yogi.

Tantra is a science where all the practices given are designed to help us go deeper into ourselves, thus releasing our spiritual potential. By incorporating these practices into our personal lives we are attempting to reach that state of spiritual awareness that is all-blissful and essential to our very existence. This effort is known as 'sadhana' — the effort to attain completeness.

That which makes the mind soft and strenuous, so that it may keep itself in a balanced state even in the condition of pain; that which perpetually creates a pleasant feeling within, is called love. Devotion is identical with love. The moment devotion is aroused, the love of God comes.

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