Chapter 4.

KUNDALINI: ITS RELATION TO SAMĀDHĪ

Kundalini is one of the most important notions so far as samādhi is concerned. It is still a very mysterious notion, although recently a lot of interest is being shown about what it is, and how to make best use of it.

It may appear rather strange that there is no mention whatever of the kundalini in the Bhagavadgīta and the Yogasūtra of Patanjali, the two most authoritative books on samādhi. Was the Kundalini unknown to the authors of these two treatises, it may be asked. There is no doubt that the notion of kundalini was known to the ancient masters of samādhi since very early times. This we can say from an indirect reference in one of the ancient upanishads, namely, the Kathopanishad (II.3.16.). There it is said,

"There are one hundred and one nādis arising from the heart, one of them going toward the head. One can achieve immortality by going up through it, while the other nādis make for worldly life".

We shall explain what is meant by nādi later in this chapter. The Upanishad here is referring to the one important nādi, which is associated with the kundalini, and going up along it means taking the kundalini up along it after it is awakened.
Kundalini, it seems, is essentially a notion of Tantra and Hathayoga. And it may be said that its importance in both these disciplines is due to the fact that when aroused, the kundalini bestows upon the student an actual experience of the state of samādhi. Swatmarama, the author of the Hathayogaprādipika, has made this clear (III. 2 and 3) by saying,

"When the dormant kundalini is awakened by the grace of the guru, all the lotuses and the knots get opened up. Then the kundalini rises up along the royal road (leading to emancipation). Then the mind becomes completely still, without any support. Then one becomes immortal."

This state of stillness, which is the same as samādhi, is the goal of Hathayoga according to Swatmarama. That goal of samādhi has various names (IV.3 and 4.) like rājayoga, samādhi, unmanī, manomani, laya, parama-pada, advaita nirālamba, niranjana, jīvanmukti, sahajā, and turiya. Kundalini is said to be the key which opens the door to the state indicated by these words (III.105.). Swatmarama says,

"Just as a cupboard can be opened by a key of its lock, similarly, the student can open the door to mukti with the key called kundalini."

Every one of the words mentioned above indicates some special feature of the state of samādhi. We shall explain those special features by giving the meaning of each word one by one.
Rājayoga -- King of the Yogas, i.e., the highest state of Yoga.
Unmanī and Manomanaī -- The state which transcends mind.
Laya -- Deep absorption.
Parama pada -- The highest state.
Advaita -- The state which transcends duality.
Niranlamka -- The state without any support (of thought).
Niranjanā -- The state without any stain or falsity.
Jīvanmukti -- The state of emancipation in this very life.
Sahajā -- The state which is never disturbed or shaken.
Turīya -- The fourth state, the first three being waking, dream, and sleep, which are known to all of us.

All these words describing samādhi are rightly applied to what we have earlier called the samādhi of no return, which is the same as nirbīja-samādhi of Patanjali.

This samādhi, it is stated at many places in Yoga literature, marks the culmination of Rājayoga. Swatmarama has clearly said that "all the techniques of Hathayoga are ultimately aimed at attaining the highest siddhi of Rājayoga,"
(that is to say, the state of samādhi mentioned above)
(Hathayogapradipika -- IV.103.). Arousal of the kundalini being the greatest of the techniques of Hathayoga, is naturally the foremost among the practices leading to that state of samādhi.

This would mean that there is a very intimate relation between kundalini and samādhi.
The mysterious notion of kundalini described mainly in the texts of Hathayoga and Tantra has been attracting the attention of scholars and scientists during the past few decades. Perhaps the first attempt at explaining its nature was made in the beginning of the present century by Sir John Woodroffe + who wrote under the name of Arthur Avalon. He translated the work "Shatchakranirupana" of Poornananda from Sanskrit into English, and wrote a lengthy introduction to the principles of kundalini-yoga, describing in great detail the doctrines of bodiless consciousness, the lotuses, and the theoretical basis of the dormant power and its awakening. He, however, did not give his own view independently, apart from an interpretation of the text translated by him with the help of scholars.

The credit of giving an independent interpretation and explanation of the kundalini for the first time perhaps goes to Dr. Vasant G. Rele ++ , who was a medical graduate and a physician by profession. He discussed at length the science and philosophy of Yoga, and the tantric anatomy of the chakras, vāyus, and nādis, and came to the conclusion that kundalini is the vagus nerve in our body.

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After the publication of Dr. Rele's opinion about the kundalini as the vagus nerve, there seems to be a complete lull and calm about the notion of kundalini for nearly half a century, until Dr. Joshi gave his own neuro-physiological interpretation. As pointed out by him,

"The traditional explanation of the kundalini is based on what we may call ancient yoga physiology, which involved terms such as nādi, vāyu, chakra, prāna, apāna, shiva, shakti, susumna, hridaya, and so on. When we had a living tradition of yoga in our country, say, up to a few centuries ago, the meanings of these terms must have been quite clear. We have hardly any such tradition in existence now. No wonder, therefore, that the language of our ancient masters regarding the kundalini is almost like a treasure that is hidden and lost."

Pandit Gopikrishna ++, who has recently become famous as a Great Guru of the science of Kundalini, is a striking example of an individual who has actually experienced an awakening of the kundalini. He has described his experiences in a book, and has argued therein that the kundalini, when awakened, can turn an ordinary man into a genius.

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++ Gopikrishna, Kundalini, Delhi: Orient paperbacks, 1976, pp. 204.
In another book Gopikrishna + has described the phenomenon of kundalini arousal and how it differs from the drug-induced states. He has also discussed at length the tremendous possibilities implicit in the awakening of the kundalini. Our main concern in this chapter is with the awakening of kundalini as a precursor to the state of samādhi. We shall try to explain the relation between the two from various references in ancient texts, and their interpretation as offered by Joshi in the paper cited above.

We shall first locate the kundalini according to the descriptions in ancient texts, then examine the techniques mentioned by them for its arousal, and then see how it leads to samādhi. Wherever the ancient descriptions are to be interpreted in modern terms, we would follow the interpretation offered by Joshi.

The location of the kundalini is given very clearly in Shivasamhita (II.21 to 23.) in the following words:-

Two fingers above the anus and two fingers below the genital organ there is an area four fingers in length and breadth. This is called the adhāra lotus. In the pericarp of this lotus there is the triangular Yoni, which is kept secret in the books of Tantra. Inside the triangle there is the thrust of kundalini.

lightning-like super-goddess kundali situated inside the passage of the susumā, making three and half coils."

These facts are confirmed in the Goraksha-Paddhati (I.18-25.). It says,
"In the ādhāra at the anus there is the lotus with four petals. In it lies the Yoni called Kāmakhyā, which is praised by the adepts. Inside the Yoni, there is the Great Linga with its head turned to the back side, and shining like a gem. The triangle, which is the seat of Fire shines like lightning or molten gold. Its apex is situated below the genital organ. The kanda or Yoni, which is tapering on one side like the egg of a bird, extends from the genital organ up to the navel. Seventy two thousand nādis arise from there."

The kanda, which is supposed to be the seat of the kundalini, is described in the YogaYajñavalkya (IV.14-21.) as follows: -
"The centre of the body is situated at a point two fingers above the anus and two fingers below the penis. The kanda extends up to nine fingers from the centre of the body. It is four fingers in length and breadth. Upon the kanda is the seat of the kundalini."

The Hathayogaprādipika (III.107.) also speaks about the location of the kundalini in the same terms. It says,
"The kundali power sleeps on the kanda for emancipation of the adepts and bondage of others."
There are many other texts which have mentioned the kanda and the muladhara lotus as the place where the kundalini is located. As there is no disagreement among the ancient references, and as all of them point to the same location, it is needless to multiply examples. Yet, we shall quote from one more reference which has given all the facts about the kundalini very clearly and without any ambiguity.

It is a famous book of Tantrashastra, called Shatchakraniroopana, composed by Poornananda. We have referred to it already earlier. It says about the kundalini (Verses 1 to 10) more or less the same facts as noted above. But there are many more details which are of great value in understanding the relation between kundalini and samadhi.

Following is a free translation of the relevant portions of the verses.

"Outside the nemi there are two channels, one on the left and the other on the right side, respectively called Jnaniranadi and Suryanadi. Between them is the Susumnā going from the middle of the kanda up to the head. Inside it lies the Vajra nadi from the penis up to the head. Inside it is the Chitrini, fine as the thread of a spider. It passes through the lotuses situated inside the nemi. And within the Chitrini is the Brahmanadi which extends from the hollow of the mouth of हरा up to the seat of First Lord inside the brain."
The text continues,

"At the beginning of the Vajrā nādi there is a triangle shining like lightning inside which is the place of the phallus like Swayambhu with the head turned back, there being a depression on its head. On this phallus like structure lies the kundalini, curling its body with three and half coils, and holding the opening to the Brahmādvāra in its own mouth."

The most crucial fact about all these references to kundalini in ancient texts pertains to the proper understanding of the terms used in the context of our knowledge of modern physiology. Joshi (as mentioned on page 82) has made a careful study of all the references to kundalini and mentioned the parallels between ancient references and modern physiology as follows:

- **Meru or Merudanda** —— vertebral column
- **Mūlādhāra** —— perineum
- **Trikona, kanda, or yoni** —— the sacrum
- **Susumna nādi** —— spinal cord, more precisely — dura mater
- **Vajrā nādi** —— arachnoid
- **Chitrini nādi** —— pia mater
- **Brahma nādi** —— central aanal
- **Swayambhu linga** —— the coccyx

Awakening of kundalini —— sensitization of the filum.
If these meanings of ancient terms given by Joshi are correct, then it may be possible to explain the most crucial phenomenon of kundalini arousal as the starting of nervous impulses from the filum terminale which is completely inactive in all of us. And if those impulses could be started experimentally by electrical stimulation, their pathways found out, and their effects studied, then a wholly new chapter in our knowledge of the kundalini shakti will be opened.

Dr. Joshi's findings appear quite plausible when we consider the techniques advocated by our ancient masters of samādhi for the awakening of kundalini.

In the Hathayogapradipika (III.5.) it is said that,

"for awakening the Goddess sleeping at the opening of the brahmādvāra, one should devote all attention to the practice of mudrās".

Mudrās are special techniques for the awakening of kundalini. There are ten mudrās mentioned in the above text (III. 6-7.). They are:

1) Vaṃśamudrā 2) Vaṃśābandha
3) Vaṃśavedha 4) Khecharī
5) Uḍḍīyāna bandha 6) Ṛlu bandha
7) Jālandhara bandha 8) Viparīta karani
9) Vajroli 10) Shakti chālana
It would take us rather too far afield to describe the techniques of these mūdṛās individually. But it would be very useful to point to certain essential features common to all the mūdṛās, and to examine the effects they are expected to have on the body.

First of all, the mūdṛās exert a pull on the spine. This is achieved by bending the body forward as in Mahāmūḍrā and Jālandhara bandha, in which the chin is lowered in front and set below the throat. They involve a great increase in the internal pressure around the floor of the pelvis by holding the breath inside, and by Uddiyāna bandha. Direct stimulation of the lower end of the spinal cord and the filum may be achieved by pressing the heel against the perineum as in Mahāmūḍrā, Mahābandha, and Mahāvedha, and by contracting the anus as in Mūlabandha. This stimulation is much pronounced in the Śaktichālana mūḍrā.

There are other techniques especially recommended for an awakening of the kundalini, for instance, Pascīmatāna āsana, Matsyendraśana, and Bhāṣtriṅa prāṇayāma. In the two āsanās there is a stretch on the sacrum while the abdomen is pressed, increasing the internal pressure on the parts below the navel. In Bhāṣtriṅa prāṇayāma the pressure and pull on the kundalini and the adjoining parts is greatly increased due to an increased intensity of kumbhaka and the bandhas.
All these techniques, when practised without break for a long time, arouse the dormant kundalini. It then gives up its coiled form, becomes straight, and enters the central canal of the spinal cord. This is described in the kathayogapradipika (III.68-69.) while explaining the importance of mūlabandha.

When the kundalini is thus aroused, it rises up through the central patha leading up to the brain. Behind it, the prāna also enters that path and becomes completely steady. Normally, in all of us, the passage of the susumnā is clogged and closed. Hence the prāna normally flows along the īḍā and pīngalā, i.e., the left and the right nostrils only. When it enters into and stands still inside the brahmānādi, breathing stops completely. That is the state of kevala kumbhaka, which is very highly spoken of in literature about samādhi. Joshi, as we have pointed out earlier (page 73) has argued that this kevala kumbhaka is what Patanjali means by the word "chaturthah" in the sūtra II.51 of his Yogasūtra. We find a very clear description of kevala kumbhaka in the Yogataravali of Shankaracharya. (6 and 8.) He says,

"When the kundalini awakens by an impact of the three bandinas, and enters the susumnā, prāna becomes steady, there being no inhalation and exhalation. This great art of kevala kumbhaka steadies the mind by taking it away from the objects of experience".
Anāhata heart twelve
Vishuddini throat sixteen
Ajñā between the eye-brows two

The seventh lotus is called Sahasrāṇa.
It is located in the brain. It is said to have one thousand petals.

When the kundalini opens the lotus at the heart and prāna becomes standstill inside the Akṣara there, the student of samādhi starts hearing the divine sounds called anāhata dhvani. These sounds, as explained in the nāthayogaprakāra (IV. 84-86.), are loud and gross in the beginning. As the practice of applying the mind to the hearing of these sounds grows, the sounds become progressively subtle. In the beginning," says the text, "the sounds resemble those of the ocean, the clouds, the kettle-drum, and the drum cymbal. In the middle one hears the sounds of conch, bell, and the horn, while in the end, sounds of tinkling bells, flute, string instrument, and the bees are heard by the student".

These sounds are produced inside the body. The mind gets absorbed in the hearing of the subtle sound. As the sound grows subtler, the absorption of the mind is more and more intense. In the end the sound fades away, and the mind becomes completely still in the state of samādhi.

The relation between kundalini and samādhi may thus be said to proceed through the following six stages: -

1) Arousal of the dormant kundalini through practice of mudrās
and prānāyāma.

2) Ascend of the awakened ānudalini through the central path, and stabilisation of prāna in kevala kumbhaka.

3) Opening up of the lotuses one by one.

4) Hearing of the subtle sound, called nāda or anāhata-dhyāni by the opening up of the heart lotus.

5) Absorption of the mind in the hearing of nāda.

6) Silencing in the state of samādhi, with the cessation of nāda in the end.

This last stage of simultaneous silencing of nāda and the mind in the state of samādhi is described in the Kathayogaprādipika in various ways. In the end it is said (IV. 98 and 100),

"Just as fire originating from fire wood becomes silent when the wood is consumed, so the mind becomes still with nāda. That state of samādhi is a state of laya or dissolution of the mind. It is, indeed, the highest state."