

PRACTICE

Kundalini: What the Tantras Teach and What Is Practised Today

The coiled power in the Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā, the Ṣaṭ-cakra-nirūpaṇa and the yoga Upaniṣads, the documented history of modern Kundalini Yoga, and a safe practice of forty minutes



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yoga

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Before you begin

Type the word kundalini into a search engine and you will be promised an "awakening" in seven days, a "rising energy" that will change your life, a playlist, a crystal, a course. Walk into a studio on a Tuesday evening and you may find a class called Kundalini Yoga, with mantras, rapid breathing, people dressed in white and a gong at the end. Open a fifteenth-century Sanskrit manual of haṭha yoga and you will read that the coiled power, Kuṇḍalinī, is "the support of all the practices of yoga", that she sleeps at the base of the body, and that she wakes "by the grace of the guru".

These three worlds use the same word. They are not the same thing. This book separates them, gently and precisely, so that you know what you are reading, what you are practising and what you are being sold.

What you will find here

- **The texts, in their own words.** The Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā (हठयोगप्रदीपिका), chapter 3, where Kuṇḍalinī opens the teaching and the ten mudrās exist to rouse her; the image of the key that opens the door of liberation; the Ṣaṭ-cakra-nirūpaṇa (षट्चक्रनिरूपण) of 1577 and its description of Kuṇḍalinī's ascent and return; the Yogakuṇḍalī Upaniṣad and the Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad; the hymn Saundaryalaharī. Every verse in Devanagari and IAST, with our own translation.
- **The cosmology behind the image:** Śiva and Śakti, consciousness and power, and why the goddess sleeps coiled in the body.
- **The knots and the central channel:** the three granthis and the suṣumnā, as the texts place them, and where they disagree.
- **The documented history of modern Kundalini Yoga:** Yogi Bhajan, 3HO, Los Angeles in 1969, the method he built, and the independent investigation published in 2020. Facts, dates and sources; no gossip.
- **What this path is not,** in one clear chapter.
- **What you can practise alone, and what the texts reserve for a teacher,** with the reasons they give.
- **What published research says about "kundalini experiences",** with every study checked on PubMed, warning signs, and when to see a professional.
- **A gentle 40-minute practice,** timed minute by minute, and a 40-day log.
- **Where to meet this tradition in India today,** from Rishikesh to Munger, with published facts only.

What this book will not do

It will not teach you to "awaken" anything. No serious text promises that, and no honest book should. It will not teach, step by step, the practices that the texts themselves reserve for transmission by a teacher: the cutting of the tongue for khecarī, the forceful stirring of the power (śakticālana), long breath retentions combined with the three locks. We describe them from the published sources so that you understand the texts, and we tell you why we stop there.

It will not repeat two books it completes. The centres themselves (petals, letters, elements, seed-syllables, deities) are described in Chakras, from the Sources; the locks and seals, with their full progressive technique, are taught in Mudras & Bandhas. When you need them, we point you there.

Read this first.

The practices in this book are gentle, but intensive breathing and long meditation are not harmless for everyone. If you live with a psychiatric condition (including a history of psychosis, bipolar disorder, severe depression, panic attacks or dissociation), epilepsy, a heart condition, uncontrolled high blood pressure, or if you are pregnant, talk to your doctor before any breathing practice beyond calm, natural breathing. If at any time you experience lasting insomnia, panic, voices, a feeling that the world or your body is unreal, thoughts of harming yourself, or alarming physical symptoms, stop and seek help: Chapter 9 tells you how. In an emergency, call 112 (European Union and India), 911 (United States and Canada) or 999 (United Kingdom). In the United States you can call or text 988 (Suicide and Crisis Lifeline); in the United Kingdom, Samaritans answer on 116 123; in India, the national mental health helpline Tele-MANAS answers on 14416.

Our principles

Our translations. Every Sanskrit passage is translated by us, unless we quote Arthur Avalon's *The Serpent Power* (first edition 1919), which is in the public domain; in that case we say so and give the verse. Sir John Woodroffe, who wrote as Arthur Avalon, died in 1936; his editions of 1919 and 1924 were published before 1931 and are in the public domain in the United States as well as in countries where copyright lasts seventy years after the author's death. We checked the wording we quote against the 1924 second edition held by the Internet Archive.

Verse numbers. For the *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā* we use the numbering of the electronic text published by GRETIL (Göttingen), as in our book *Hatha Yoga Pradīpika Explained*. The public-domain English translation by Pancham Singh (1914) numbers the end of chapter 3 differently: the section on stirring the power begins at 3.104 in GRETIL and at 3.97 in Singh, a difference of seven verses that runs to the end of the chapter (3.130 in GRETIL is Singh's 3.123). When it matters, we give both.

When the texts disagree, we say so. They often do: on where Kuṇḍalinī sleeps, how many times she is coiled, where the knots are, and even on which element sits in which centre.

No health promises. The texts were written for liberation, not for wellness. Where we mention research, we give its size and its limits.

How to read the Sanskrit

Each key word is given in Devanagari and in IAST transliteration, for example कुण्डलिनी (kuṇḍalinī). In IAST, c is said "ch", ś and ṣ are "sh" sounds, a dot under ṭ, ḍ, ṇ means the tongue curls back, and a line over a vowel (ā, ī, ū) makes it long. Kuṇḍalinī is said roughly "koon-da-lee-nee", with the stress on the first syllable. The usual English spellings (kundalini, sushumna, chakra) appear where they help.

Chapter 1. Kuṇḍalinī: the word, the image, the texts

The word

कुण्डलिनी (kuṇḍalinī) is a feminine word built on कुण्डल (kuṇḍala), a ring, a coil, an earring. Kuṇḍalinī is "she who is coiled", "she who has the form of a ring". The texts also call her कुण्डली (kuṇḍalī), with the same meaning. She is not an organ and not a nerve. She is a power, शक्ति (śakti), and in the tantric traditions that power is a goddess.

The Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā gives her other names, which already tell a story (3.104, our translation):

"The crooked-bodied one, the coiled one, the she-serpent, Śakti, the Sovereign, Kuṇḍalī, Arundhatī: these words are synonyms."

Name	Devanagari	Meaning
kuṭilāṅgī	कुटिलाङ्गी	she whose body is crooked, curved
kuṇḍalinī, kuṇḍalī	कुण्डलिनी, कुण्डली	the coiled one
bhujaṅgī	भुजङ्गी	the she-serpent
śakti	शक्ति	power, energy, the Goddess
īśvarī	ईश्वरी	the Sovereign, the Lady
arundhatī	अरुन्धती	name of the faithful wife of the sage Vasiṣṭha, and of a small star

You already know one of these words from the mat: bhujaṅgāsana, the cobra posture, is "the posture of the serpent". The serpent is everywhere in this imagery.

The image

Three images recur in the texts.

A serpent asleep. Kuṇḍalinī sleeps coiled at the base of the body, her mouth closing the door through which one should rise. The Pradīpikā says (3.106) that "the Supreme Lady sleeps, covering with her mouth the door of the path by which one must go to the abode of Brahman, free from pain".

A support. The opening verse of chapter 3 compares her to the serpent Śeṣa, on whom, in Indian cosmology, the whole earth rests. Kuṇḍalinī is the support of all yoga.

A thread of light. In the Ṣaṭ-cakra-nirūpaṇa, when she rises she is "lustrous like lightning and fine like the lotus fibre" (Avalon 1919, verse 51). The Yogakuṇḍalī Upaniṣad uses the same comparison: when the first

knot is pierced, she "flashes at the mouth of the central channel like a streak of lightning" (1.67, our translation).

Where she sleeps: the texts do not agree

This is the first lesson of this book, and it will come back: the texts describe the same power with different maps.

Text	Where Kuṇḍalinī lies	How she is coiled
Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā 3.107, 3.113	above the kanda, the "bulb" in the lower trunk, "a span high and four fingers wide, soft and white, like a wrapped cloth"	coiled "like a serpent" (3.108)
Ṣaṭ-cakra-nirūpaṇa 10-11 (Avalon)	in the Mūlādhāra, around the self-born liṅga	"three and a half times"
Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad, chapter 1	around the navel region, "across, below and above the navel"	"eightfold, in the form of the eight aspects of nature"
Saundaryalaharī 10	in the "hollow of the kula pit", at the base	"three and a half coils", "like a serpent"
Gorakṣaśataka (Kūvalayananda and Shukla, v. 30)	above the kanda	"coiled eightfold"

Three and a half coils, or eight. At the root, or near the navel. No text is "wrong": each belongs to a lineage with its own visualisation. When someone tells you that "the" kundalini is coiled three and a half times at the base of the spine, they are quoting one text, beautifully, and leaving out the others.

The voice of the sleeping power

The Ṣaṭ-cakra-nirūpaṇa gives Kuṇḍalinī a voice, and it is worth reading slowly. In Avalon's public-domain translation of verses 10-11:

"Her sweet murmur is like the indistinct hum of swarms of love-mad bees. She produces melodious poetry [...] in Saṃskṛta, Prākṛta and other languages. It is She who maintains all the beings of the world by means of inspiration and expiration, and shines in the cavity of the root (Mūla) Lotus like a chain of brilliant lights."

Two things are said here that modern summaries forget. Kuṇḍalinī is the source of speech and poetry: the power of language itself, the same power that the tantric texts see in the fifty letters of the alphabet (see Chakras, from the Sources, Chapter 5). And she is the breath: even asleep, she keeps every creature breathing. She is not a dormant battery waiting to be switched on; she is what is already keeping you alive.

The texts of this book, at a glance

Text	Devanagari	Date (prudent)	What it brings
Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā of Svātmārāma	हठयोगप्रदीपिका	15th century	Kuṇḍalinī as the key of haṭha; the ten mudrās; the stirring of the power
Ṣaṭ-cakra-nirūpaṇa of Pūrṇānanda	षट्चक्रनिरूपण	1577 (sixth chapter of his Śrī-tattva-cintāmaṇi, completed that year)	the ascent through the six centres and the return; translated by Avalon in 1919
Yogakuṇḍalī Upaniṣad	योगकुण्डल्युपनिषत्	late "yoga Upaniṣad", second millennium	a manual of rousing the power, close to the Pradīpikā
Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣad	शाण्डिल्योपनिषत्	a late yoga Upaniṣad	the channels, the breaths, the place of Kuṇḍalinī
Saundaryalaharī, attributed to Śaṅkara	सौन्दर्यलहरी	date debated	a hymn to the Goddess; Kuṇḍalinī's journey in two verses
Gorakṣaśataka	गोरक्षशतक	early haṭha text	the kanda, the eight coils

The Yogakuṇḍalī and Śāṇḍilya Upaniṣads belong to a group of texts called Upaniṣads but composed long after the Vedic Upaniṣads. The Yogakuṇḍalī is attached to the Black Yajurveda and is number 86 in the traditional list of 108 Upaniṣads. We cite them prudently: their editions differ, their verse numbering varies, and their dates are uncertain. We quote the Sanskrit from the edition of sanskritdocuments.org and checked the sense against the public-domain English translation by K. Narayanasvami Aiyar, *Thirty Minor Upanishads* (Madras, 1914).

End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

The full book has 42 pages.

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