

YOGA, SEX, KUNDALINI AND AWAKENING.

Yoga can be seen as a way of establishing harmony in our lives. Harmony between intention and action, structure and function, body and mind, spirit and matter, self and other. This can not be done if we are not willing, ready and able to engage ourselves fully. This means that we must encounter and engage our sexual nature and the energies it generates by way of our design, amongst everything else. Yoga gives us an opportunity to do this in a safe, gradual and effective way. Provided we are genuinely open to all the depths and subtleties of our being. Provided we undertake our practice as enquiry rather than acquisition. This means that we need to let go of all of our assumptions about sex in general, and its relationship to yoga in particular. Only when we let go of these assumptions, whatever they may be, can we encounter the natural qualities and significance of sexual energy, whatever they may be.

Sex is perhaps the most problematic of all human activities. Along with eating and breathing it is a natural precultural activity deeply embedded in our organic design. So deeply is it embedded that it is not easy to recognise and express its natural place in the complexity of our modern lives. Especially as, like eating and breathing, it is shaped and determined by cultural experiences, over which we have little or no control. The fact is that we have all been subject to very powerful, and often destructive, cultural forces of sexual conditioning. Few of us are not suffering the consequences, one way or another. Few of us understand the sexual forces that move

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within us. Fewer still integrate them into the full spectrum of our lives. Yet sexual energy is the root energy of our lives: touching and shaping everything about us.

Yoga and sex are inextricable. The practice of yoga reveals the single continuum of human nature. It is not possible to separate sexual energy from anatomical, physiological, emotional, mental or spiritual energy. Yoga can be understood as a process of transforming sexual energy into spiritual energy. But this transformation does not, and can not, involve the denial of sexual energy. To become truly comfortable in life, and in yoga we must enjoy a new, open, creative expressiveness of natural sexuality. The more truly at peace we are with life the less and less this creative expression resembles the compulsive, habitual patterns of sexual behaviour to which we have been historically conditioned.

As yoga posture practitioners we are constantly faced by the cultural divide between body and mind. Moment by moment, breath by breath we face a simple challenge, a single choice. Do we listen to our body, or do we listen to our mind. It does not matter how we conceptualise the differences and relationships between them: we have thoughts and we have sensations. They are not always in harmony. Yoga practice can be a way to bring them into harmony. It can just as easily be a way to extend the division that culture has placed between them. This depends on whether, moment by moment, we give our practice to ideas or to experience. Whether we are practicing in order to realise a cultural goal, or to encounter the deeper nature of our bodimind. Whether we

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are imposing or enquiring. Whether we are led by received knowledge or direct experience.

Yoga works because of the intrinsic unity of body, mind and spirit. This unity underlies the power of the physical practices of yoga. However it does not guarantee their potency. For body to reveal its nature and its relationship to mind and spirit it cannot be imposed on. It must be released from the distorting power of anxiety, ambition and intention. Only then can it reveal the depths and power of its innate intelligence. Only then can we encounter the wisdom of life, the guru within. There is only one way that this can happen. By being sensitive to the body. This is the fundamental requirement of yoga posture practice: ahimsa.

Being sensitive to the body is to give the flow and direction of our practice to sensation. First we need to feel sensations as clearly and deeply as possible (ahimsa). Then we need to be honest about the implications of these sensations (satya). This requires that we be open to our experience in the moment (asteya). This will allow us to flow with the wisdom of life (brahmacharya). It is only when we are consciously embedded within the supporting embrace of life's indivisibility that we are able to let go of self clinging (aparigraha). Without embodying the first limb of yoga within and through our practice the remaining seven limbs will remain nothing other than hopeful cultural ideals. Ideals that in being unrealisable without the diamond power of yama, can only too easily distort and diminish the power of our practice as we

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impose imagined ideas on the fibres of our experience, our life.

Life is consciousness. Without being able to discriminate between safe and dangerous stimuli amoebas would not have survived, life would not have evolved, we would not exist. The incredibly sophisticated intelligence of life is continually driving your breathing, cleaning your blood, regulating your body temperature and integrating the contraction of motor muscle fibres throughout the whole of your body. At its root this intelligence is that of consciousness discriminating organically between opposites in multiple and refined ways. Your body is an expression and vehicle of consciousness as life. This vital consciousness is infinitely intelligent. Three thousand, five hundred million years of evolutionary research and development has left the wisdom of life embedded in your every cell. This wisdom speaks only and always through sensations.

By giving our practice to the presence of sensation, we encounter, and can be guided by, the wisdom of life. Doing this makes our practice not only physical, but sensorial to the point of sensuality. We are carried forward, we are taken inwards, on the flow of sensation. Sensations being intimately encountered, deeply felt. Eventually we begin to encounter and experience the inner qualities of sensation itself, of awareness itself. Then we find ourselves in the pulsating, throbbing ocean of subtle delight known as anandamayakosha. We do this by tuning in to what we actually feel. In doing so we are encountering the very same energies we experience, even though very differently,

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in sex. Meeting them with the openness of honest internal enquiry (svadhyaya), we are enriched by their subtleties rather than driven by their intensities. This makes our yoga practice, in effect, internalised sex. The honest sensitivity of our conscious, encounter with our internal energies harmonises and resolves them. This can only happen if they are encountered in a spirit of genuine enquiry which is always open to whatever may actually be happening.

The sex drive is a powerful, natural and necessary force of nature: it creates sexual appetite as a matter of course. It cannot be healthily denied, but must be embraced and navigated consciously. On each of the different paths of yoga the means to do this are different: the ends also. While some yogis abandon sexual activity altogether, tantricas enjoy it as the cornerstone of their practice and life. This is not a matter of right and wrong, better or worse. It is a question of conditioned disposition and possibilities: or in other words, of karma and dharma. To pursue either extreme as an idealised concept is dangerous and bound to be harmful. By becoming sensitive to the depths of one's being the most honest and authentic expression of our sexual nature can and will be found.

Yoga posture practice is a tantric practice. It takes place in and through the body as an expression and vehicle of the wisdom of life. The body is not only our tool and our temple, but also our guru. Through it we can encounter not only our finite, physical nature, but our infinite, divine nature also. And most significantly that these two, finite and infinite, divine and mundane are not separate. Yoga

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posture practice uses the body to reveal the spiritual, divine nature of all phenomena: not least the body itself. This is tantra. Yoga is solo tantra. Tantra is yoga for two.

The tantric nature of yoga posture practice means that it is about meeting not denying, embracing not controlling. This allows a deep intimacy with what is actually happening in and as our bodies which can support no exceptions. Not even the power of sexual energy as desire and pleasure. Instead they are embraced within the broader sweep and delight of physical sensation: overt and subtle.

In yoga posture practice sexual energy is embraced methodically, but without direct reference. Our intentions are not sexual. We do not target or make deliberate contact with our sexual energy. Yet sexual energy is the source of life, of the life force in our body. As we encounter our body more deeply, we consciously engage the life force in its many forms and expressions. In doing so sexual energy is transmuted spontaneously by the integrating power of awareness itself. No special technique is required.

This encounter starts with sensitising our mind to the needs and capabilities of our body, as they are. Yoga posture practice can not be deeply satisfying if it is based on imposing heard of and hoped for goals on the reality of our body. It must respect and honour the needs and capabilities of our body as they are, moment by moment. This respect expresses itself as sensitivity to sensation.

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Sensation is the language through which the intelligence of the body expresses itself continuously. Our practice must sensitise us to this flow of information coming from the body. This means that as we engage our muscles and bones we start to feel more of the body's sensation. We become more sensitive to its voice, and its intelligence. We become aware of more and more subtle sensations: most of which are usually completely unconscious. We become more conscious of our body simply by being sensitive to its overt, obvious presence.

This is a process of sensitising the mind, rather than the body. The human body is by necessity and design intrinsically, exquisitely sensitive. Any cell in your body unable to discriminate with precision between different stimuli is already dying. Your body does not need to be made sensitive. Yoga posture practice is an invitation to sensitise our mind to the inherent sensitivity, intelligence and wisdom of your body. Only then can you encounter and enjoy the only guru who will not and can not abandon you. The only guru on whom you can totally depend: the guru within.

Eventually our sensitivity becomes so subtle that we bridge the divide between the physical and the energetic. We experience the presence of subtle energies just as clearly as we do overt sensations. Yet in our descent into the body there are no signposts. There is nothing to tell us where we are, what we are experiencing, but our mind. Our mind can only speak to us of what it already knows. If it only knows of the physical it can only speak of the

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physical: it can only give us physical terminology, physical interpretations.

The culture of yoga is rich with its own signposts, its own language and terminology: chakras, nadis, grantis, kosha and more. Albeit much of it metaphorical, and some even clumsy representations of the subtleties of matter only recently clarified in nuclear and quantum physics, but easily accessible to deeply internalised awareness. Nevertheless there is much more to body than skin, marrow and mitochondria. What this is can be encountered and uncovered only by a mind ready to go into the dark, ready to cross the limits of its knowing. This is what yoga posture practice invites and teaches us to do.

As we go deeper into our bodies, we are going deeper into sensation. After a while we find less and less certainty about where we are, about what we are feeling. Our experience becomes less and less concrete. All this really means is that we have run out of terminology to categorise and interpret our experience, the sensations that rise into our awareness. Everything becomes very uncertain, vague and indefinable. Yet something is still, quite clearly, happening. We are still awake and know it. We still exist and know that too. Even if we are not actually thinking it.

If we are uncomfortable with all of this, if uncertainty makes us nervous, we will reach for some support, some comfort. We will either pull ourselves back out to safer ground, where we can clearly recognise and explain what we are feeling in concrete, physical terms. Or we

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encapsulate it, and insulate ourselves, in thoughts of nadis and chakras. We retreat into the safety of mind and its love of certainties however unverifiable.

However if we are not disturbed by uncertainty this need not be the case. We can settle into the fog and find ourselves well at ease. In fact we can encounter a deep delight within this oceanic miasma of uncertainty. A delight that is actually there, actually here, deep within the presence of sensation, the presence of awareness. Eventually we encounter the most subtle qualities available to us. The deepest, most subtle possibilities of human experience. We encounter the inherent quality of sensation itself.

This is not the inherent quality of a particular sensation, or kind of sensation. It is to be encountered within any sensation, within any experience. The twitching of muscle fibres, or pricklings of sensory receptors deep beneath the skin can lead us to it. As can the dapplings of light on our retina, or the swirl of sounds in the auditory canal. Within them all the same presence lurks. A presence that is simultaneously delightful and satisfying. The presence of awareness itself revealed in the presence of delight and satisfaction. This is matter yielding its inner nature. The physical body deeply encountered reveals itself as the body of bliss: anandamayakosha. Satcitananda is the inevitable destination of yoga posture practice.

Whatever we call this it does not belong to yoga posture practice. It does not belong to Yoga, to Tantra to Indian culture. It belongs to human nature, to the human design.

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It can be accessed in many ways. The most popular are sex and drugs. Yet these forms of access are deeply problematic. Legally, socially, morally, and consequentially. Yoga has an advantage over all of them, even Tantra. It can be done, it must be done, alone. Yet all of them draw their power to attract and fascinate us from the same source. The delightful, even blissful, nature of awareness itself. Satcitananda is the inevitable destination of any intimacy that fulfils itself.

To sensitise mind to the wisdom of the body is to simultaneously awaken and develop the deeper capacities and nature of the body. Not only as energy and consciousness, but also as cell and tissue. As our muscles and bones reintegrate, our organs are revitalised. For this to happen the whole body must be being released from physical, energetic and psychic blocks. Then each organ is able to perform its psychosomatic functions more easily and effectively. This includes our kidneys which are the source and seat of the life force. It also includes our sexual organs themselves where the life force becomes overt and active sexual energy.

We live in a toxic world. One in which our bodies are being constantly undermined by toxic input. This includes food, water and air: the very resources by which we maintain and energise ourselves. This toxic load weakens our organs, and depletes our energy. At the same time our minds are invaded by toxic ideas and beliefs. Some of which are so deep and universal that we do not recognise their toxic nature. Not least amongst these are distorted and damaging notions about sexuality. Yoga posture

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practice can help us to release all these toxins. Not only from every organ and every cell, but from our mind and thoughts. Then the life force can flow more freely and fully from and through our organs and into our actions, reactions and behaviour.

This can have a profound effect on our sexual energy. Though not in ways we might expect. It is quite likely that we will start to experience 'kundalini'. This deeply misunderstood energy is nothing special or supernatural. It is the very basis of embodied individuation. It is as an expression of the organic power of life itself. It is the essence of the life force necessarily present in every human organism. It does not need to be conjured up or even awoken. If you are alive it is awake and functioning. For it to function freely, for your life to express its deepest potential, is another matter: one that yoga has been designed to address.

Kundalini is the life force. The life force begins as sexual energy, which is the most basic, continual and universal expression of it. Sexual inhibition, compulsion and obsession are nothing other than expressions of blocked kundalini, however that may have come about. When our sexual conditioning has been unnatural and distorted, as it always is within hierarchical, competitive, patriarchal societies, then the natural expression of the life force becomes blocked. This can manifest in so many ways, most of which are familiar to any psychiatrist. These range from overwhelming sexual obsession to complete sexual shutdown. All of which are expressions of the life force being blocked: not least through unhealthy sexual

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conditioning. These blocks must be released if the life force is to be able to flow freely and fulfil itself. This recovery of the free flow of the life force is esoterically known as 'kundalini rising'. This is a completely natural event. Yet it is one that very rarely happens because of our cultural conditioning and its damaging effect on our sexual energy.

Life always seeks to express and fulfil itself as fully and authentically as possible. This is no less true of the human being than a blade of grass, amoeba, tree or pack of wolves. Kundalini rising is the natural course of events. Tantric (Hatha) Yoga systems can be productively seen as nothing other than profound invitations to kundalini rising. This is not done by targeting the kundalini and forcing it to rise. Its nature is to rise, to express itself to enliven and enrich itself through a deepening of human potential. It is done by releasing the blocks life has left in the bodimind.

Yoga posture practice simultaneously frees muscles and joints from blocks as it revitalises the vital organs. This is more than a physical process. There is no intrinsic separation between body and mind. The softer tissues of the body function as a storehouse for the left over traces of unfulfilled experiences (samskaras). Energies are stored in the tissues as psychosomatic blocks that harden the tissues and inhibit the free functioning of our organs as both somatic and psychic organs. This is in effect our personal unconscious. As our muscles are released and organs revitalised we are in effect releasing our unconscious. The life force, our sexual energy, is no longer

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blocked and distorted by these energetic deposits. As this releases us from our obsessions and compulsions, it also activates our subtle, deeper capacities. Capacities which become distorted, lost, denied and mythologized by those whose social and cultural conditioning masks them.

Kundalini rising, or the integrated release of the life force,, can have powerful and remarkable effects on our energy and presence. We become more focussed, more present, more available. This has nothing to do with any intention to be this way. It is a natural result of psychosomatic debris being dissolved. What is left behind animating the bodimind is the uncompromised energy of life itself. No longer caught in old patterns of self assertion the mind is able to focus on actual events and unfolding actions. Grounded in the pragmatic richness of the present, it has no need to speculate about the future or agonise about the past.

Kundalini rising, or life's recovery of its innate integrity, can have powerful and remarkable effects on our perception. We start to see more clearly. We start to feel more clearly. Our senses awaken, our perceptions clarify, our understanding deepens. We discover that there are more means or organs of perception than allowed by a materialist world view. We find ourselves more and more in harmony with the flow of life as a whole. We spontaneously become more and more intuitive: needing to rely less and less on information and decision making. We find ourselves more often in the right place at the right time. Eventually we discover that we are always in the

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*right place at the right time thinking the right thing,
feeling the right thing and doing the right thing.*

Awakening to deep pragmatic wisdom is the result of Kundalini rising. It is the fruition of human potential. It is not a special, spiritual event. Yet Kundalini rising is often an uncomfortable, even painful and harmful, experience. This is because it has not been prepared for by cleansing practices such as hatha yoga. The life force is powerful. Sexual energy is powerful. When sexual energy is seen and treated as unhealthy, unspiritual the power of the life force is blocked and compressed. It accumulates within this compression until it breaks out through the unconscious and into compulsive and obsessive behaviour. Even though this behaviour may have nothing overtly to do with sex, and even seem quite harmless, it nevertheless reinforces harmful unconscious drives originating in sexual repression.

Sometimes this break out is painfully dramatic. It takes place as a powerful psychosomatic event. The distorted power of pent up sexual energy bursts through the structures of the mind. The boundaries between our perceptions start to blur, weaken and dissolve. It becomes less possible to tell the difference between a memory, a desire, an intention. The mind becomes lost in a confusion of impressions it can no longer clearly categorise. It becomes lost in a world where the imagined is no less compelling and powerful than the real. At the same time uncomfortable, even painful, currents of energy can be felt in the body. All of these symptoms, and more, are

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indications that the life force is ricocheting chaotically against the blocks and restrictions in the bodimind.

It is the purpose of yoga posture practice to release these blocks. Little by little. Step by step. To establish a vinyasakrama of kundalini rising. One in which body and mind open to the full power of the life force gradually and gently, safely and effectively. In doing so they are enriched rather than traumatised. They are fulfilled rather than compromised. This can only be done by being sensitive to the sensations being generated by cellular intelligence. Our practice needs to be based on respect for life as it actually is. As our body. As our mind. As our sexual energy. Any denial of anything that actually exists and moves within us is an invitation to the discomforts and dangers of precipitous Kundalini rising. Just as is insensitive use of the psychosomatic techniques of hatha yoga.

Kundalini rising can have powerful and remarkable effects on human sexuality. However, if attempts are made to force kundalini to rise, without the body having been effectively opened, it can create new patterns of sexual distortion and obsessiveness to add to those embedded through the conventional forces of social conditioning. Often the powerful energy techniques of hatha yoga are used unconsciously in a way that makes this happen, and the increased energy of the life force unable to circulate freely can become trapped in many different forms of neurotic and manipulative tendencies: not only sexual.

The tantric yogas were designed to approach this problem head on. Through asana, bandha, pranayama and

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meditation the subtle energies of the bodimind are explored. Within the tranquil clarity of these practices, which open and balance body and mind, the full spectrum of the life force is released and encountered. Kundalini is invited to rise gently and harmoniously, and to reveal the layers of deep and subtle pleasure intrinsic to the bodimind. Without any crises it is able to undertake its natural journey towards awakening. Eventually prolonged, effective yoga practice brings about a deep rechanelling of sexual energy. Sexual energy becomes less and less a defining, motivating force. It becomes more and more a true and honest expression of intimacy, humanity and love.

Becoming free from the deeply destructive effects of our sexual conditioning is not easy. Yet yoga practice can help us to do so. But not if it is undertaken as an extension of the manipulative moral and spiritual conditioning by which we have been so deeply and devastatingly imprisoned. If our practice is undertaken, especially if unconsciously, as a whipping stick, or even a self improvement technique, it will only drag us further down into confusion and self deception. Yoga is only yoga when it is genuine enquiry: never when it is an attempt to make anything happen. Now matter how richly it may be dressed up with borrowed values.

Lurking behind so much of the self righteousness, moralising, and judgementalism so common amongst yoga practitioners is fear. It is a short hop from fear of death to fear of life, resulting only too often in fear of sex, the organic source of life. This thread of fear has long been

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shaping the dogma within which even tantric yoga practices have been made to conform to life denying religious ideals and power dynamics. The only way that yoga practice can become free from this fear is if it is given directly to the indestructible authority of life itself. This is as simple as it is obvious. All we have to do is become intimate with sensation, and the rest will be an irresistible homeward journey guided by the wisdom of life itself.

Spiritual freedom does not mean becoming lost to our human nature. It does not mean becoming sexually apathetic or repressed. It does not mean never feeling concern, attachment, intensity or love. It means something much more alive, positive and irresistible than any amount of "thou shalt nots". Sexual freedom does not mean license, Nor is it represented by the exhibitionist/voyeurist dynamic of contemporary media manipulations. Genuine and lasting freedom does not depend on any special technique, does not have a special uniform. It can only be found and expressed through the lenses of yama and niyama. Within which we encounter the nature and wisdom of our bodimind in all of its depths and subtleties, and find ourselves to be exactly where, who and what we are. Then perhaps we can rediscover the joy and delight that being in a body can provide through intimacy with ourselves, or with another.