

Indecent Practices and Erotic Trance: Making Sense of Tantra

by **John Ryan Haule**

Copyright © 1999

All Rights Reserved

<http://www.jrhaule.net/ipet.html>

Four

Serpent of Light

- Kundalini
- Jean Toomer
- Gopi Krishna
- Standing Waves in the Brain
- Kundalini and Sex
- Transcendence and the Human Organism

If the "glide" that overcomes our spasm reflex is due to an "erotic trance," an altered state of consciousness is clearly involved. In our ordinary state of mind, we are not able to transcend physiology. But eros elevates our consciousness leaving us less vulnerable to losing our arousal through an automatic bodily response. Our trance uses physiology as its own support, removes it from its narrow cycle of stimulus and response to achieve something new. Eros always involves the body. Whether it begins in a chaste but numinous encounter such as that between Muktananda's factory owner and his earthly Venus or through the physical activities of love-making, bodily alterations are as evident as changes in consciousness. Therefore, if eros is the key to the glide of carezza, it must involve at least three components: physiological changes, emotional charge, and the imaginal element whereby the realities of a "subtle plane" are revealed.

All three of these changes are implied in Evola's notion that carezza is made possible by an erotic trance. Merkur's definition of trance as a state of "involuntary belief" adds the essential notion that what is encountered on the subtle plane grips us so completely that we have no choice but to accept its reality. Despite these clarifications, however, "erotic trance" is still a rather vague notion. Indeed, it harbors at least two potential sources of misunderstanding; one lurks in the word *trance* itself, and the other has to do with imagination.

Most dictionaries of psychology link *trance* with "dissociation," implying that some sort of split has occurred in consciousness. Very likely the origin of this connection between trance and dissociation is to be found in the role hypnosis played in the discovery of the unconscious (cf. Ellenberger, 1970). Hypnotists of the late nineteenth century deliberately "restricted" the conscious field of their subjects by placing them in a state of "trance." The entranced subjects spoke from the reality of an unconscious "subpersonality" while being largely oblivious of the world around them except for the person of the hypnotist.[1] A good

deal of this history still adheres to the word *trance* as most people understand it.

But as we have used the term, following Evola and Merkur, trance clearly involves an *expansion* of the field of consciousness. In *carezza*, for example, I remain aware of myself and my partner, my arousal and hers. I may lose track of time, but this happens also when I read or write, and I am not inclined to describe those activities as "entranced." Once the glide of *carezza* has been reached, my clear impression is that nothing of importance has been lost from my awareness, but that a great deal has been added. Such a trance does not so much split things off as add things on. The erotic trance we are describing is "non-dissociative." We enter upon a subtle plane without losing our prior orientation.

When we say that non-dissociative erotic trance is physiological, emotional, and imaginal, we also court misunderstanding insofar as what is emotional and imaginal is generally taken in our society as evidence of irrationality -- an inferior state of mind. Imagination, particularly, is held in suspicion. We say: "It's only imaginary. It's just in your imagination." We mean whatever comes from the imagination is arbitrary, idiosyncratic, trivial, and easily dismissed. We think that what we see with our fleshly eyes is undeniably real but that what we imagine is quirky and of no consequence. Despite this common prejudice, when we have spoken of the "subtle plane," we have implied that imaginal realities may be more significant and "truer" than sensory realities. We have used the word *imaginal* rather than *imaginary* to suggest this difference. In doing so, we have been following the example of Henry Corbin, the French scholar of Sufism. For the "imaginal world" (*'alam al-mithal*) in Sufism is more "true" than the sensory world (Corbin, 1980: 74). It is available to anyone whose spiritual eyes are opened through "active Imagination":

Between the world of pure spiritual Lights . . . and the sensory universe, at the boundary of the ninth Sphere (the Sphere of Spheres) there opens a *mundus imaginalis* [imaginal world] which is a concrete spiritual world of archetype-Figures, apparitional Forms, Angels of species and individuals; by philosophical dialectics its necessity is deduced and its plane situated; vision of it is vouchsafed to the visionary apperception of the active Imagination (Corbin, 1978: 42-3)

Here the subtle plane of Evola is united with the "numinous *real*" of Merkur. Erotic trance opens our eyes to an imaginal world that grips us with its undeniable reality -- and moreover, is available to anyone. When Corbin, using the language of his Sufis, speaks of "archetype-Figures, apparitional Forms, and Angels of species and individuals," he uses capital letters to imply that these imagined realities are so invariable and essential that the same ones are available to all who venture onto the subtle plane of the imaginal world.[2] The "Angel" of a particular individual, for example, would be the higher, more essential and spiritual meaning of that individual's existence, the link that connects her with God.[3] From the Sufi point of view, what is available to our fleshly eyes is but a vague and superficial vision which, insofar as it holds our attention, distracts us from a fuller reality.

The imaginal world constitutes the subtle plane to which we have access through erotic trance. Eros, therefore, clearly manifests an energy surging up within us that is alien to the ego. It changes our physiology, fills us with emotion, and substitutes the larger and truer imaginal world for the smaller world of the senses. It has the power to enthuse us with extraordinary intimations of blissful union as well as to terrify us with the prospect of losing ourselves. It dissolves the world of everyday and the centrality of the ego and impresses us with a world of greater significance, making us aware of a larger, albeit unfamiliar, agency

within.

The great poet of Sufism, Jalaluddin Rumi (1207-1273) speaks of awakening the transformative power of love in many of his verses. One that is particularly suggestive for explicating the nature of eros is this:

You have the energy of the sun in you,
but you keep knotting it up
at the base of your spine
(Barks & Green, 1997:17)

This "version" [4] of Rumi's sentiments was constructed by Coleman Barks, a poet well versed in mysticism, but not a scholar of Arabic. The image Barks gives us resembles suspiciously well the Indian doctrine of kundalini; for kundalini is the energy of consciousness, represented as a serpent of light, coiled asleep (for most of us) at the base of the spine.[5] Barks may be an exaggerator along the lines of Vimalananda. But even if he has "enhanced" the comparison between Rumi's soul-energy and kundalini, the "emotional truth" of his translation may justify whatever liberties he has taken.

Kundalini

Many cultures speak of an energy that lies outside of the ego's direct control but which can be awakened with dance, meditation, chant: a large variety of techniques. The Chinese speak of *ch'i*; the Greeks of *eros*; Polynesians of *mana*; and the !Kung people of Africa's Kalahari Desert speak of *n/um*. [6] Although there are differences in these culturally diverse designations of soul energy, there are strong similarities. Each implies a power of physiological origin greater than and alien to the conscious will-power of the ego and revealing a mystic correspondence between that which surges up in me and that which moves the universe. The Hindu concept of kundalini is another such term; but it stands out from the rest as the most highly differentiated and imaginatively rich. Thus, if we wish to come to a fuller understanding of what we have been calling erotic trance, we can find no more well developed a notion to explore than kundalini. Not least among the advantages of our taking India's luminous serpent as the image for what we have described vaguely as eros and soul-energy is that kundalini's devotees have left us clear descriptions of what kundalini feels like, and what she does to our consciousness and our physiology.

Vimalananda says, "Any spiritual practice in any religion is basically some process or other of awakening Kundalini" (Svoboda, 1994: 32). I do not take him to mean that all religions are the same. Rather, he seems to be saying that kundalini is so fundamentally *human* an experience that it is available to everyone, and accessible by a wide variety of beliefs and techniques. Kundalini is the energy of the human organism, the life energy of the soul. It manifests in what we have called erotic trance, giving us subtle eyes, charging us with emotion, and altering our physiology. Mookerjee (1986: 10) cites this description of kundalini from the *Satcakra-nirupana*:

She is beautiful as a chain of lightning and fine as a [lotus] fibre, and shines in the minds of sages. She is extremely subtle, the awakener of true knowledge, the embodiment of bliss, whose true nature is pure consciousness.

Kundalini is a serpent, a goddess, comprised of consciousness, and resembles lightning. Although she resides in us and awakens us to the "true knowledge" and "bliss" of a sage, she herself needs to be awakened. Her arousal depends upon ours. Our body is the instrument by which she is stirred into action; and when she moves with the suddenness and brilliance of lightning, we become aware that what moves in us also moves the cosmos. Kundalini reveals the human body-mind as a microcosm, a reflection of the universe itself. "Tantrikas believe that the flesh must be 'awakened' from its dormancy. This gathering up is effected by cosmicizing the body and treating it as a 'tool' for inner awareness by taming it with yogic rituals, awakening zones of consciousness and activating its latent subtle energies" (Mookerjee, 1986: 32).

The serpent of light that sleeps at the base of the spine is said to rise through the body to the head like the semen retained in vajroli. Along the way, she reveals that within this fleshly body we take for granted resides a "subtle body" comprised of "wheels" (chakras) and passageways connecting them. As she rises along the vertical axis of the body, parallel to the backbone, these chakras open, one by one, like lotus flowers; and as each one opens, we are introduced to a new level of consciousness. Our subtle body amounts to an internal diamond ladder. Indeed, the name given to the "transubstantiated body," the body no longer comprised merely of flesh but made up of a "ladder" of chakras is the "diamond body" (*vajra-deha*). The Sanskrit word *vajra* is variously translated as "thunderbolt," "diamond," and "adamantine." Hard and brilliant as a diamond, kundalini moves with the suddenness of a lightning bolt; and the body she reveals is of like substance. "The *Mahabharata*[7] mentions a race of beings whose bones are like diamond . . . They are said to have a steady gaze, to live without eating, and to emit a beautiful scent" (Feuerstein, 1990).

This chapter will be limited to a discussion of kundalini as a transformative energy. We shall return to the topic of the subtle body in Chapter Eight. For now it will be sufficient to give only one indication that kundalini's rise through the several[8] chakras of the subtle body is by no means always a gratifying experience. Basing her account on texts from Kashmir, Lilian Silburn notes the following disturbing indications of kundalini's ascent.

If while freely moving up it stops for a few minutes at each wheel and causes it to vibrate, during the long period of preparation, and when a center is pierced for the first time, certain, often spectacular, disturbances do occur; under the terrific pressure of the ascending Kundalini and the extreme tension she generates, the body can react in unpredictable ways. Thus a violent tremor spreads from the heart; then the vault of the palate starts vibrating. And just as the yogin becomes omnipresent, he feels dizzy -- a stage indicating celestial sight (*divyadrsti*), which pierces through everything unobstructed. And again, under the influence of the pure mystic Science, the limbs oscillate at the joints, [9] the heart throbs when the yogin shifts from the individual to the universal state.[10]

. . . From certain symptoms it may be inferred that the energy is rising: a flood of tears,[11] horripilation, spontaneous half-opening of the mouth as at the time of death. Also it may happen that, while engaged in conversation, the yogin begins to stammer, to utter inarticulate words, to speak in a voice broken with sobs of joy (1988: 113-4).

Silburn cites these disturbing symptoms from a time and place where the kundalini experience was supported by an historical tradition. Such is not the case for us today in the West. For as Evola points out, the arousal of kundalini is "formless and hellish" and "involves a heavy risk." "The danger is less where such rites of sexual magic fit into the background of a sympathetic tradition and do not have recourse to the technique of

inversion" (Evola, 1983: 209). Geshe Kelsang Gyatso sees an even more fundamental problem, "Everyone is excited by copulation but few can transform that bliss into the spiritual path" (Gyatso, 1992: 4). The fact that kundalini is "divine" establishes only that she is infinitely more powerful than we are; it by no means assures us that her effects will always be felt as benevolent:

[Kundalini] is divine in the sense that it is invariably felt as vastly superior to all ego-effort or personal initiative. . . . It may suddenly appear like a thief at unexpected hours, steal your mind and heart with a thrilling touch, devour your sleep, decimate all lethargy and resistance and galvanize your total being into one soaring flame of divine passion. When unchecked in its advance, it is capable of swallowing up the whole ego-self, shattering the bonds of space-time awareness, and annihilating all landmarks of familiar cultural norms (Chaudhuri, 1990: 64).

From a modern psychological standpoint, kundalini represents the activation of "one's instinctual nature" (Jung, *CW 9i*: ¶667). This is why it is so much stronger than the ego and so dangerous. Nevertheless, in the 1932 seminar he gave jointly with the German Indologist, Wilhelm Hauer, Jung says that the activation of kundalini is essential if we are to overcome our lethargy and stagnation and move forward with our lives:

So there must be something peculiar in you, a leading spark, some incentive, that forces you on through the water[12] and toward the next center [chakra]. And that is the Kundalini, something absolutely unrecognizable, which can show, say, as fear, as a neurosis, or apparently also as vivid interest; but it must be something which is superior to your will. Otherwise you don't go through it. . . . The Kundalini in psychological terms is that which makes you go on the greatest adventures (Jung, 1996: 21).

Jean Toomer

The American writer Jean Toomer (1894-1967), who is famous for *Cane* (1923), an avant-garde collection of lyrical portraits of black rural and urban individuals, underwent an experience in 1926 which drastically changed his life. He never called it kundalini, but its effects surely resemble what the Indians claim for an awakening of the lightning serpent. The account that follows is based on Toomer's own words as collected in *A Jean Toomer Reader* (Rusch, 1993).

Toomer was a light-skinned black man who had lived among poor and middle class whites, growing up in Washington, D.C. After his initial success with *Cane*, he went to France to study with Georgei Ivanovitch Gurdjieff.[13] Thus he was by no means unacquainted with the idea of mystical experience when in April, 1926, he stood on the platform of the 66th Street "L" station in New York City. Having "an enjoyable feeling of being at large in the world, at peace with myself," (*Ibid.*, 33) he allows several trains to pass. Suddenly he is "startled by an uncommon inward event" that held him "suspended" and a voice inside said, "This Is It! . . . What *it* might be I could not imagine" (*Ibid.*, 34). He felt in the hands of a "Power," as though he were "a pod outgrown by a great seed" (*Ibid.*, 35). He beheld a process of "motion," "creating," and "awakening," though he was peripheral to "It."

I was being transported. *I* was. Not my body. It stood motionless on the "L" station. . . . I was taken into that-being, and instantly that-being became this-being, my being, and that-me ceased to exist, and I was one and whole . . . alive in a life so different from ordinary life that there seemed to be absolutely no relation between the two (*Ibid.*, 39).

I saw the same night-universe I had seen all the nights of my life. But how purely those stars shone, and what a quality in the darkness! No night had ever seemed so sheerly beautiful, so fresh, so *original* (*Ibid.*, 41).

He realized that he is not a body or an ego but a "being" that "precedes the birth of the perishable body and succeeds its destruction" and that this long existence enables real accomplishment (*Ibid.*, 43). Looking down from the platform, he saw people walking and driving and realized that they were not awake and did not know that they lived as "beings with bodies" (*Ibid.*, 44). He found he was experiencing "the stupendous reality" of the universe "with his whole being" and not just with his thought (*Ibid.*, 45). The people he saw below were "earth bound" but not "in touch with the earth"; they moved rigidly, had few expressions and no vital connections (*Ibid.*, 46).

After sleeping the night, he found that the experience continued. He enjoyed everything he did, the water of his shower, the taste of a modest breakfast, the washing of the dishes (*Ibid.*, 52-6). "A weight has been lifted. . . . Presently I asked -- What weight? All at once it dawned on me. The weight of that-me!" (*Ibid.*, 57). Outside on the street, he saw a drama of failed salvation:

Human beings, without their conscious minds knowing it, were putting themselves into situation after situation the real function of which was to make each individual meet and contend with, and in some measure overcome the very things in himself that blocked the way to his real being and proper consciousness (*Ibid.*, 67).

The experience lasted about two weeks (*Ibid.*, 31); and although it did not continue, it certainly changed his life. For it became the theme of his subsequent writings over a period of forty years -- most of which did not find a publisher.

Although Toomer says little that would encourage us to think that his awakening began in an arousal of the body, as is universally said of kundalini, it is well known that Gurdjieff employed hard labor, complicated dance techniques, and Sufi breathing exercises in his training (Guiley, 1991). Thus it is reasonable to think that what occurred on the elevated subway platform in New York had been begun through physical training in Paris. Toomer's initial "enjoyable feeling of being at large in the world and at peace with myself" appears to be a sort of premonitory state of heightened awareness which he refuses to interrupt by boarding any of the trains passing through the station. In short, he was cultivating a condition of preparedness as he unconsciously waited for that "uncommon inward event."

What happens next is the upsurge of a power far greater than his ego. An alien voice from within says, "This is It!" Apparently he has had an unconscious familiarity with this power and has been expecting it. No doubt he had learned of its existence in a theoretical way from his association with Gurdjieff. But the fact that an unconscious voice announces it suggests that he had felt a bit of this kundalini surge in the past, subliminally, and remembered it somewhat the way the smell of a certain brand of soap or the flowering of a particular plant can bring back scenes from our childhood. In Toomer's case, the "memory" is fragmentary, and he is hardly prepared for the magnitude of what faces him. The ego that remembers the struggle of his racial identity, that has crafted the well-received *Cane*, and that has sought out Gurdjieff is revealed as merely a secondary player in his life. The "that-being" that surges into existence before his eyes and that he knows pre-existed his bodily life and would survive his death appears to have much in common with what the Indians call atman or

"self." He even employs the Upanishads' formula, "Thou art That." "I fulfilled the first stage of the ancient testimony -- 'Thou art That'" (*Ibid.*, 39). A huge "eternal identity" places his temporal ego in a context wholly unfamiliar to his own habitual awareness and that of his contemporaries.

What surges forth in him is as much a cosmic as a personal vision. "My very being was at the disposal of the Power that had come" (*Ibid.*, 34). "I beheld that other being as a stranger entering my life" (*Ibid.*, 35). "Living waves" traveled from the base of his spine to his head and beyond, revealing a "veritable body," a "second body" that "opened the creature to the creator within" (*Ibid.*, 37). All of this he sees as an "awakening" from a former state of sleep, along the lines of Gurdjieff. His experience exemplifies Vimalananda's statement of the goal, "Tantra aims to replace the limited personality with an unlimited, permanent one" (Svoboda, 1986: 9). The aim is to be "self-functioning" (*sva-tantra*), "free of all limitations, especially the limitation of his or her own personality" (Svoboda, 1994: 21).

Toomer's observation of the robotic life of his contemporaries on the street placing themselves in situations designed to awaken them from the devices that were keeping them unconscious also recapitulates the doctrine of Vimalananda.[14] Svoboda's guru says that ego (*ahamkara*, "the sense of me and mine") employs the same energy as kundalini, actually steals that energy in an effort to maintain the sense of who I am right now as the outcome of my past memories and prevents me from discovering what I might become (Svoboda, 1994: 18).

It takes tremendous energy to remember things. This is why Kundalini never gets an opportunity to wake up in most people, much less to rise. So long as your memory is strongly committed to your own karmas, all of Kundalini's energy will be taken up just in the act of remembering who you are (Svoboda, 1997: 135).

Toomer insists that his experience did *not* take place in a state of trance: "This was no trance I had entered, but a higher state of consciousness in which many of my ordinary faculties were retained" (*Ibid.*, 40). It is clear that he understands "trance" to be a limited sort of awareness, perhaps a condition of "dissociation"; and his assertion that his experience not be so demeaned as to be termed a "trance" comes from his conviction that limitations were shed, not taken on. His awakening amounts to an enlargement, not a restriction of the conscious field.[15] This is not a problem for our understanding of non-dissociative trance, namely a heightened state of consciousness in which one is so gripped by the reality of the subtle plane that it cannot be doubted. We see no doubt in Toomer. He knows without question that he has been introduced to a larger reality and a larger mode of being than what is available to his unaided ego; and he observes his contemporaries fighting this discovery, all unawares. Still, it is a dangerous discovery that Toomer has made. Others have been destroyed by it. We can only think that his association with Gurdjieff has not only made the experience possible but given him a mindset for utilizing it.

A different rhythm is established in every intense experience of eros, which invests and transports or suspends the normal faculties of an individual and may open vistas onto a different world. But those who are the subjects of such an experience almost always lack the discernment and sensibility to comprehend anything beyond the emotions and feelings that affect them; they have no basis for self-orientation (Evola, 1983: 2).

Evidently the vistas opened by erotic trance were not too much for Toomer, but they were

too much for those who refused to publish his subsequent writings -- or at least they were judged to be too much for his potential readers. His experience surely validates Vimalananda's observation that once our eyes have been opened to this larger reality there is no going back: "For after the initial crisis abates, one discovers that there is no way to return to one's previous comfortable mindset" (Svoboda, 1994: 20).

Gopi Krishna

The best known individual to have experienced a spontaneous arousal of kundalini was also unable to deny the reality of what had occurred to him -- though in his case it was by no means as gratifying as Toomer's experience. The chain of events that changed Gopi Krishna's life began on Christmas morning, 1937, as he sat comfortably in meditation, concentrating on the image of a lotus in full bloom at the crown of his head. What happened next caused him great suffering and was eventually diagnosed as an "imbalance in the arousal of Kundalini." When it all began, he was a clerk under the Director of Education for his local state in India. He had no interest in his career, apart from its providing him a livelihood. He was more interested in yoga (Krishna, 1993: 140-1).

His sophisticated father had shut himself away from the family and the world so as to be free to meditate. But his son thought that "the irrational and vagrant tendency of [his] mind toward the occult and the divine," combined with his suffering, demonstrated his father, too, had had an imbalance in kundalini (*Ibid.*, 18).

His peasant mother had had a dream at a point when the infant Gopi Krishna was unable to swallow and could not nurse, in which a certain saint had touched the little boy's throat. The next day, her son was again able to take nourishment. Years later she visited that hermit, and he greeted her by asking if her son had regained the ability to suck after his visit to her in the dream (*Ibid.*, 9). At the age of eight Gopi Krishna himself had a momentous dream after being shaken to his depths by the question, "What am I? . . . What does all this mean?" (*Ibid.*, 10). In the dream he "saw a heavenly spot, peopled by god-like, celestial beings, and [himself] bodiless . . . in a gloriously bright and peaceful environment" (*Ibid.*, 11).

He says he was a dreamy adolescent, reading stories of the exploits of Krishna and filled with a sense of the injustices of the world. He neglected his studies and failed his university entrance examination. The failure woke him from his daydreams, and he formed a resolve to live a life of greater discipline. From then on, exposure to the extraordinary exploits of gurus and their disciples left him uneasy and suspicious (*Ibid.*, 40-63). Having been exposed to his father's capacity for precognition and other psychic phenomena, he could not understand why people were so impressed (*Ibid.*, 75).

Thus his conscious mindset regarding the reality and significance of the subtle plane was quite confused as he sat meditating on the lotus of his crown chakra, December 25, 1937. The first sign that something unheralded was about to occur was the realization that he had lost touch with his body and surroundings and for several minutes at a time felt himself floating in midair (*Ibid.*, 1). Suddenly a strange sensation appeared at the base of his spine that ceased as soon as he directed his attention to it. But when he was able to fix his attention on the lotus, the sensation grew in intensity and rose upward through his body. "Suddenly,

with a roar like a waterfall, I felt a stream of liquid light entering my brain through the spinal cord" (*Ibid.*, 2). As the illumination and roaring intensified, "I experienced a rocking sensation and then felt myself slipping out of my body, entirely enveloped in a halo of light" (*Ibid.*, 3). Awareness of his body vanished completely: "I was now all consciousness . . . immersed in a sea of light simultaneously conscious and aware of every point, spread out, as it were, in all directions without any barrier or material obstruction" in which "the body was but a point, bathed in light and in a state of exaltation and happiness impossible to describe" (*Ibid.*, 3).

When he returned to himself, he felt "dazed and bewildered." His legs "tottered"; his mouth was dry; he had little appetite and could not concentrate at the office. He was indifferent to his surroundings, became depressed, and could not sleep. When he tried to meditate the next morning, he was again filled with roaring and light, but "the feeling of exaltation was not so strong . . . I felt my heart thumping wildly and there was a bitter taste in my mouth. It seemed as if a scorching, blasting hot air had passed through my body. The feeling of exhaustion and weariness was more pronounced than it had been yesterday" (*Ibid.*, 6). He found that he "had to live suspended by a thread, swinging between life on the one hand and death on the other, between sanity and insanity, between light and darkness, between heaven and earth" (*Ibid.*, 7).

After this second experience, he found his keen desire to sit in meditation was replaced by a horror of the supernatural as well as a distaste for work and conversation. As soon as his head touched the pillow at night, "A large tongue of flame sped across the spine into the interior of my head" (*Ibid.*, 144-5). While awake, he would become fascinated by an awful, weird circle of light that moved rapidly from side to side. "Sometimes it seemed as if a jet of molten copper, mounting up through the spine, dashed against my crown and fell in a scintillating shower of vast dimensions all around me" (*Ibid.*, 145). He lost all feeling of love for his wife and children as well as confidence in his own mind and body, "I . . . lived like a haunted, terror-stricken stranger in my own flesh" (*Ibid.*, 148). He tried to regain control of his mind by counting his steps and fixing his eyes on one object after the other. He could not eat; his starving body grew weak, and his memory was affected. Although "only a thin line separated me from lunacy," he did his best to conceal it from everyone (*Ibid.*, 151).

Gurus and holy men were of no use. He found them little better informed than the disciples who followed them (*Ibid.*, 124). He obtained his first assistance from his brother-in-law, who had studied with a sadhu^[16] and subsequently experienced very disturbing and debilitating symptoms that had caused him to give up his practice of meditation for the sake of his peace of mind. He informed Gopi Krishna that his symptoms resulted from the arousal of kundalini and that it was necessary for kundalini to rise through the central channel (*sushumna*) of the subtle body. If kundalini were to rise through one of the side channels (*ida*, left; *pingala*, right), it could cause great destruction (*Ibid.*, 32-3). Because the *ida* channel of the left side was associated with cold and the *pingala* with heat, Gopi Krishna determined that kundalini was rising in him through the hot *pingala* channel. Hoping to correct the imbalance, he mentally tried to force an imaginary cold current from the left side through the middle of the spinal cord:

There was a sound like a nerve thread snapping and instantly a silvery streak passed zigzag through the spinal cord, exactly like the sinuous movement of a white serpent in rapid flight, pouring an effulgent, cascading shower of brilliant vital energy into my brain, filling my head

with a blissful luster in place of the flame that had been tormenting me for the last three hours. . .
. For the first time after weeks of anguish [I] felt the sweet embrace of restful sleep (*Ibid.*, 162-3).

He awoke with what turned out to be the most useful information of all: the idea that he should eat -- a slice of bread and a cup of milk every two hours -- whether he wanted it or not. By this means he began regaining his strength. "From now onwards I must eat not for pleasure or the mechanical satisfaction of hunger but to regulate the intake of food with such precision as not to cause the least stress on my oversensitive and overstimulated nervous system" (*Ibid.*, 179).

Awareness of the subtle body became nearly constant for him, as well as the perception that the earth itself has its own supply of energy (*prana*) which pervades every atom and molecule (*Ibid.*, 195). He did not, however, experience the chakras of traditional kundalini doctrine (*Ibid.*, 254).

The living fire, invisible to everyone else, darted here and there as if guided unerringly by a mastermind which knew the position of each vein and artery and each nerve fiber and decided instantly what it had to do at the least sign of a hitch or disturbance in any organ. . . . I could, by directing my attention toward my interior, discern clearly the outlines of the vital organs and the network of nerves spread all over my body. . . . At times, turning my attention upon myself, I distinctly saw my body as a column of living fire (*Ibid.*, 188).

By April of 1939, some sixteen months after the first manifestation of kundalini, he reports, "No change in the constant movements of the radiant current or the glow in my head" (*Ibid.*, 204). In fact, the energetic sensations had intensified, but his strength, endurance, and poise had partially returned. His love of his family was reviving, and he had an appetite again. Still he could not sustain his attention for long periods and had to alternate spells of work and relaxation (*Ibid.*, 204-5). He experienced his familiar ego as "encompassed by a shining conscious globe of vast dimensions." There were two centers of consciousness, a large self and a small ego, "side-by-side, both distinct yet one" (*Ibid.*, 225). Continually during waking hours it was, "as if a thin layer of extremely fine dust hung between me and the objects perceived" (*Ibid.*, 226-7). He suffered relapses whenever he tried to return to his regular meditation practice.

After the passage of several years, his health and vitality were restored and his diet normal, except for the cup of milk and slice of bread first thing each morning. The luster within and without had become more perceptible; his illnesses were milder; he found he was not able to tolerate medication; and extraordinarily vivid dreams had become habitual (*Ibid.*, 232-3).[17] In general, however, he found that the suffering he had undergone was "out of proportion to the results achieved" (*Ibid.*, 241):

Nothing can convey my condition more graphically than the representation of the God Shiva and his female power Shakti, . . . in which the former is shown lying helpless and supine while the latter in an absolutely reckless mood dances gleefully on his prostrate frame.

The self-conscious observer in me . . . found himself utterly at the mercy, literally under the feet of an awe-inspiring power indifferent to what he thought and felt, proceeding impassively to deal with the body as it chose, without even conceding to him the right to know what he had done to merit the indignity. I had every reason to believe the pictorial representation was designed to depict a condition exactly similar to mine by an initiate who had himself passed through the same ordeal (*Ibid.*, 238).

It is more than ironic that Gopi Krishna chooses this image to characterize his misery and humiliation. He writes of the painting as though it were the idiosyncratic vision of a single artist. Can it be true that the image of a supine Shiva -- sometimes described with symbolically rich word-play as *Shava* (corpse) -- under the feet of a grisly and untamed Shakti was completely unknown to Gopi Krishna? It is certainly the most ubiquitous depiction of the nature of kundalini-realization. A variant of this icon has already been described as the cover scene designed by Vimalananda for Svoboda's *Aghora* (1986). We can only wonder further why Gopi Krishna has nothing to say about the very obvious sexual imagery in the painting. The Shiva/Shava is often depicted as dead or asleep but with an erect phallus, and the Kali figure is naked, her sexual attributes emphasized and her hair unbound. Other variations on the theme show the wild, naked goddess astride her corpse-like partner, copulating with him. What has Gopi Krishna not told us about his own sexual arousal?[18]

Although it would be a distraction to enter too deeply into speculation about the kundalini doctrine of the three channels through which the energy may rise (left to right: the cold *ida*, the balanced *sushumna*, and the hot *pingala*), it is clear that the central notion has to do with some sort of organic balance. Kundalini was "too hot" for Gopi Krishna, and he felt this literally as a scorching blast of hot air or fire. Evidently Toomer was fortunate enough to have had the lightening serpent choose the correct channel (*sushumna*). Does it all have to do with "mindset"? Did Gopi Krishna need a guru like Gurdjieff to establish a proper attitude? Vimalananda thinks so:

Because when the goddess Kundalini awoke in him, She had a form and a personality that he could interact with, Kundalini spared Vimalanada the sort of anguish that She awarded Pandit Gopi Krishna. Had Panditji perhaps concentrated on a god or goddess instead of a lotus he too might have found a haven in which to rest when the tempest tossed him. To Vimalananda Kundalini was not a wild unapproachable force that batted him about according to Her whim. She was instead his Beloved Mother, in whose lap he sat, allowing her to protect him from all dangers with her irresistible clout (Svoboda, 1994: 22).

In his ignorance and fear Gopi Krishna sought to escape the power that had been aroused in him, and its force took on demonic overtones. His experience is not unlike that of the psychedelic experimenters of the Sixties who took LSD not knowing whether they were going to have a "good trip" or a "bad" one. The research of Masters and Houston (1966) shows that "mindset" and diligent work on one's own psychological issues make all the difference. Expressed all too simply, we may say that those who reacted with terror to a force that exceeded the powers of an ego incapacitated by the drug induced their own "bad trip" by trying to fight the imagery and emotions that were unleashed. In contrast, those who accepted the fact that the powers of their ego had been arrested physiologically for an indefinite but limited time sat at the feet of that power and sought to learn from it. Nearly all of them reported having had a "good trip." Vimalananda's attitude of treating kundalini as a Kali-like goddess who had his own best interests at heart enabled him to accept her as terrifying but benevolent. She is the ultimate test for the Aghori as the "non-terrified," the individual whose training prepares him to encounter the goddess whose outward form terrifies but whose inner nature effects a benevolent transformation: "Whenever trouble increases during your *sadhana* [spiritual practice], you can be sure that you're getting closer to your deity" (Svoboda, 1994: 126).

Evidently Gopi Krishna was resisting his deity, portraying her as a hostile and destructive

demon out of fear of losing his "sense of me and mine" (ahamkara). His mind had been "set" by his father's unbalanced existence and the gullible disciples of ostentatious gurus. The great failure of his early life, the university entrance examination, had taught him the lesson that "dreaminess" and lack of ego-oriented discipline was so dreadful a lapse that he clung to his ego with all his might. His love of yoga had to have been rather naive if he did not know that its techniques are designed for the very revelation that he found so terrifying. As an Indian citizen who lived in a culture steeped in yoga and the lore of kundalini, "Panditji" ought to have been far better prepared for his experience than any of us in the West. The fact that he was not serves as a sobering warning for any Westerners who aspire to "Tantric practices."

Standing Waves in the Brain

Although his agnosticism apparently did not serve Gopi Krishna well as a mindset for dealing with his disturbing experiences, it has turned out to be a boon for the study of kundalini itself. If he had managed to transform his physiological arousal into "bliss" and used it to become a "saint," Gopi Krishna would be easy to dismiss as just another crazy Indian guru. The fact that he has struggled with madness, however, and insisted on the physiological basis of his ordeal has grabbed the attention of quite a few academics.[19] Two of his books were published by Harper and Row in its prestigious "Religious Perspectives" series, along with such authors as Erich Fromm, Martin Heidegger, Paul Tillich, and Margaret Mead. The volume I have been referring to (Krishna, 1993) is a compilation of his autobiographical writings and essays arranged in biographical chronology.

Perhaps the most useful overview of kundalini arousal as a naturally occurring physiological mechanism that effects striking changes in consciousness is to be found in American physician Lee Sannella's book *Kundalini Experience* (1992). Sannella argues that "a single physiological mechanism is at the root of the wide diversity of Kundalini phenomena" (Sannella, 1992: 9). He does not believe that kundalini should be called an "altered state of consciousness" -- as though there were not a physiological process underlying it -- for two reasons: the experience can last for months or years; and there is no single state of consciousness that characterizes kundalini but rather a variety of states that can occur during sleep as well as wakefulness (*Ibid.*, 10). He illustrates his thesis with some twenty-two examples from the lives of Americans from all walks of life which show a great deal of similarity with the experiences of Toomer and Gopi Krishna (*Ibid.*, 52-91).[20] He believes that many more people are currently experiencing the spontaneous arousal of kundalini than any time in the past -- a phenomenon they may never have heard of, much less tried to evoke -- "because [people today] are actually more involved in disciplines and life-styles conducive to psychospiritual transformation" (*Ibid.*, 18). Among these, he notes experimentation with psychedelic drugs, Transcendental Meditation, schools of Buddhism, channeling, and many other activities associated with the new age and the occult revival.

Sannella lists the following "archetypal factors" of the kundalini process: itching, fluttering, tingling, intense heat and cold, photisms (perceptions of inner light), perception of "primary sounds," spasms, and contortions (*Ibid.*, 24).[21] He speculates that perhaps a significant proportion of the forty million Americans suffering from periodic tension headaches may also be affected by a partial kundalini arousal (*Ibid.*, 97). Two paradigmatic examples

include the !Kung people of the Kalahari Desert (*Ibid.*, 37-9), who dance for hours to arouse an energy they call *n/um* that generates altered states of consciousness and facilitates healing. One tribesman describes the experience this way:

In your backbone you feel a pointed something, and it works its way up. Then the base of your spine is tingling, tingling, tingling, tingling, tingling, tingling . . . and then it makes your thoughts nothing in your head (Katz, 1982: 140).

The other example concerns the French Catholic nun, St. Thérèse of Lisieux (1873-1897), whose symptoms began with headaches and uncontrollable shivering unaccompanied by fever, hallucinations, comas, and convulsions. Sometimes she was thrown out of bed or sprang from her knees to stand on her head without benefit of her hands. None of this caused her any physical harm, and she reports remaining lucid throughout -- even when she appeared to be in a dead faint or babbling in delirium (*Ibid.*, 39-40). Such symptoms are not at all uncommon in the traditionally oriented literature of kundalini (cf. Vishnu Tirtha, 1990).

Sannella is particularly concerned that the kundalini phenomenon be recognized as a distinctive physiological mechanism and not confused with schizophrenia or other mental diseases, lest misdiagnoses lead to treatments that cause more harm than good. Sannella offers no theory of his own devising to explain the kundalini mechanism but rather recommends the research of Itzhak Bentov (1992) who argues that the meditative state itself can generate a standing wave in the aorta which eventually entrains other oscillators in the body, resulting in a fluctuating magnetic field around the head. It is this magnetic field that causes the symptoms.

Bentov employs a ballistocardiogram to gather his data, a highly sensitive platform on which the subject lies or sits in meditation. It can move in all three spatial directions (east/west, north/south, and up/down), its "micromovements" recorded by sensitive instruments. The heart-beat of a subject lying absolutely still on the platform will be recorded as movements of the platform.

According to Bentov, the whole kundalini process begins in the aorta, which balloons out to accept blood pumped from the heart. A "pressure pulse" travels along the aorta until it reaches the bifurcation in the region of the pelvis, where part of it rebounds and starts traveling back up. When the wave traveling downward and the rebound traveling upward are "in phase," they produce a "standing wave," a sine wave that does not "travel," as in the strings of a guitar. This causes the body to move ever so slightly in rhythmic fashion (Bentov, 1992: 133) -- not unlike the soundboard of the guitar.

The aortic wave causes the skeleton and skull to oscillate. Movement of the skull causes the brain to vibrate up and down, resulting in acoustical waves that move through the brain. These in turn produce standing waves in the third and lateral ventricles. The waves in the ventricles of the brain cause a stimulation in the sensory cortex that moves progressively through the region governing sensations felt in the body. The movement of this brain stimulation, as it is experienced in bodily sensations, corresponds exactly to what kundalini subjects report, namely that "vibrations" travel upwards through their body: up from the toes, through the legs, trunk, and neck to the top of the head, thence down the front of the face -- brow, eyelids, nostrils, lips, tongue, to the larynx (*Ibid.*, 139).[22]

By meditating in a quiet sitting position, we slowly activate five tuned oscillators. One by one these oscillators are locked into rhythm. This results in the development of a pulsating magnetic field around the head. . . . The noise level in the nervous system is thus reduced, and the system becomes more effective and permits a fuller development of the person's latent physical and mental capacities (Bentov, 1992: 141).

Thus Bentov has discovered a mechanism reproducible in the laboratory which accounts point-by-point (a) for the bodily vibrations reported by those who have experienced an arousal of kundalini and (b) for the manifestation of "psychic" and imaginal changes in consciousness. Bentov has rooted the kundalini experience in the natural capacities of the body and brain, revealing that, however mythological the traditional descriptions of kundalini may be, all are based on a physiological foundation. He has established that kundalini is a natural phenomenon of the human organism. Furthermore, it is reasonable to think that the *n/um* of the !Kung people, the *eros* of the Greeks, as well as similar conceptions found elsewhere in the world all correspond to aspects of kundalini -- less developed to be sure, but built on the same foundation.

Kundalini and Sex

One factor that Sannella and Bentov do not discuss is sexuality. We have no laboratory evidence for asserting that sexual arousal generates a similar standing wave in the aorta, though we do know from modern sex manuals that orgasm can be defined in terms of heart beat. Nevertheless I find it more than coincidental that long before I had encountered Sannella's book I was aware of my own sexual arousal beginning in my feet and surging up through my legs, just as Sannella and Bentov have demonstrated for the arousal of kundalini -- although it is not spoken of in the accounts of Tantric experience I have found. Indeed, the surge of power that begins in the feet seems to run into an obstacle in the pelvis during an explosive orgasm, and becomes almost painful. In the case of a non-ejaculatory "implosive" orgasm, the surge goes beyond the pelvis and fills the trunk, drawing attention to the chest and finally seems to exit through the head.[23]

The reader may wish to dismiss my account as idiosyncratic -- even to disbelieve my claim that I was aware of these bodily sensations before encountering Sannella and Bentov and therefore not due to my gullibility in the face of suggestion. Because sexual arousal is a universal human experience, however, I am inclined to believe that this sensation is not unique to me.[24] In fact the surge through my legs was plain to me thirty-five years ago, and it was not until I reached my forties that I began to notice that the energy did not have to pool up painfully in my pelvis. "All pain is caused by ignorance by staying intentionally blind, when experience has already told us something different" (Sivananda Radha, 1990: 50). My attention had to be *drawn* to the fact that the energy could -- and in fact already did -- go further. An American Bhairavi who had received part of her training in India reported feeling my energy in *her* body, surging through her trunk and up through her head. At first this caused me no little confusion. But because she had been right about everything else, I was induced to give some credence to her account.

The powerful sensations in our genitals arrest our attention so successfully that we often need to have more subtle experiences pointed out to us. The situation is analogous to observing the evidence of wildlife in the woods. The trained eye can see things that simply

do not exist for the casual urban hiker. But once they have been drawn to our attention, our observations will quickly grow sharper and more differentiated. We will become aware of a whole world of activity that had formerly escaped our notice. It is a matter of attention. More precisely stated, it is a matter of interrupting the habitual internal monologue by which we maintain the world of the ego and persona field. In Vimalananda's view, the ego has to stop stealing the energy of kundalini for its own efforts to "remember."

The average person ignores the dictates of the divine prana's[25] inner guidance. This is because modern man has allowed his pranic energies to be dissipated indiscriminately in sense and ego gratification. When prana dictates sleep, man will say, "I'd rather go to the movies." Where prana gives the signal for elimination, man will respond after he has finished some work. Thus he ignores and insults God's power that tries to function for his well being. Kundalini's awakening re-establishes these natural promptings and hence the higher natural disciplines become a way of life in a most effortless manner (Desai, 1990: 74-5).

Therefore, although Sannella and Bentov have not explored the sexual component in kundalini arousal, this does not mean it is not present. David Gordon White's research into the bodily experience of medieval Indian alchemists, *The Alchemical Body* (1996), serves us as the observations of a naturalist in our quest to open our eyes to a world that has long escaped our notice. The language is mythological. But its foundation resides in the physiology of the human organism.

Mythologically, the sleeping kundalini serpent is represented as coiled around an internal *linga* (phallus) at the base of the body cavity with her mouth over its opening; and as long as she sleeps, she drinks the semen that is lost by those -- both men and women -- who do not know how to waken her. She thereby is simply a "receiver" of pleasure and is "identified with the fire of time (*kalagni*) because the mortal who allows her to drain away his semen is doomed to be consumed by the fire of time and die" (D. G. White, 1996: 219). She is capable of *giving* pleasure only when awakened: "The yogin, in rousing her from her slumber, finds in the rising *kundalini* a vehicle by which to raise himself from mundane existence to a god-consciousness that renders him a second Siva" (*Ibid.*, 220). In this sense, kundalini is identified with the yogin's partner, and visualized as Shakti dancing on the supine Shiva. The wine, semen, meat, and fish (forbidden substances) that the yogin consumes feed the kundalini and wakes her up. Her arousal reverses the entropic processes of the profane universe, those of aging and death, and enables the yogin to "experience liberation and bliss" (*Ibid.*, 220).

The awakening of kundalini corresponds to "the yogin's own withdrawal into yogic sleep or trance" (*Ibid.*, 221).[26] This is the erotic trance that opens our eyes to the subtle plane and reveals to us that the transformation realized in our own body and consciousness (the microcosm) parallels a macrocosmic process: "the universal resorption of all mundane existence into the primal and primordial essence that is the Absolute, God" (*Ibid.*, 221).

These two poles of the *kundalini*'s mode of being -- sleeping and waking, taking and giving pleasure, allowing the body to be consumed by the fire of time and consuming the fire of time -- these mundane and transcendent poles are identified as her "poison" and her "nectar." The *kundalini* is poison when she remains asleep in the lower abdomen; she is nectar precisely when she rises up through the medial channel of the subtle body to reunite with Siva, the Absolute, in the yogin's cranial vault. In the hatha-yogic sources, this union is in fact accompanied by an outpouring of nectar, which renders the yogin immortal (D. G. White, 1996: 221).

When the medieval Indian alchemist claims that kundalini transmutes raw semen into nectar in the cranial vault, he means that the sexual arousal he feels in his body, surging up through his legs, does not have to pool up painfully in the pelvis to be released in the intensely pleasurable explosion of ejaculation. The natural ejaculatory response can be transformed through carezza. In this sense, carezza is a factor in the awakening of kundalini; for it is kundalini, alone, who "siphons upward the semen that had previously remained inert and subject to loss in the yogin's abdomen" (D. G. White, 1996: 233). Lilian Silburn's study of later texts from Kashmir reaches the same conclusion: "Actually the gap between the energy of pure Consciousness and sexuality remains unbridgeable as long as the 'sinuous bodied Kundalini' lies motionless in the ordinary human being" (Silburn, 1988: 138). Furthermore, it did not escape the attention of those Indian explorers of kundalini and sexuality that women are more naturally endowed with an ability to raise kundalini and to be capable of implosive orgasms than are men (D. G. White, 1996: 200).

The concept and imagery of kundalini, therefore, is the most comprehensive and highly differentiated source of information regarding what we have called, following Evola, "erotic trance." Based on a universal physiological mechanism that can be demonstrated in the laboratory, it accounts for the transmutation of the natural spasm response into an "implosive" orgasm which is experienced as a surge of energy that rises at least from the base of the spine to the cranial vault, and very likely begins in the feet. In doing so, kundalini transforms our awareness and opens our eyes to the subtle plane whereby we experience our own microcosmic identity as a reflection of the subtle reality of the cosmos at large:

If then the preservation of the universe depends upon -- indeed, is nothing other than -- the endless cosmic orgasm of the divine, and if the bliss of orgasm is that human experience which is closest to the very being of the godhead, then the stuff of orgasm -- male semen and the female sexual emission and uterine blood -- will, of necessity, play a vital role in the tantric quest for divine autonomy, immortality, and power. . . . The guiding principle here remains one of controlling a universe that is understood to be a *body*, the body of the divine consort of Siva, the body of one's own consort, and the feminine in one's own body. . . . This body is at once a divine, human, and alchemical body, to be perfected through yogic, alchemical, and erotico-mystical practice (D. G. White, 1996: 138-9).

The idea that the cosmos itself is nothing other than the eternal love-play or orgasm of the gods is fundamental to most schools of Tantra, some of which will be discussed in later chapters. The follow example is selected from the myriad myths discussed by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty in *Siva: The Erotic Ascetic* (1973). In this example the gods fear a transformation of the universe they cannot begin to contemplate as Shiva's lust (kama) is mixed with ascetic generation of heat (tapas). [27] The love-play between Shiva and his consort Parvati lasts for a thousand years because ejaculation does not occur. The great danger feared by the gods is that eventually Indra will be replaced as king of the gods by the offspring of the union between Shiva and Parvati. This symbolizes the unthinkable transformation of the world that such an "implosive" and "continuous" orgasm can effect. At the level of human experience, it means that once Shiva and Parvati are eternally united in the implosive orgasm of the cranial vault the world of everyday experience will never be the same again. The realities of the subtle plane can effect unthinkable changes.

Siva made love to Parvati for a thousand years, disregarding dharma [the basis of morality and ethics], and the worlds trembled and the oceans shook. The gods were afraid, thinking, "Let us do something so that this act of love is not completed, for if it is then the son who will result from it will surely steal away Indra's place as king of the gods." . . . Indra, knowing that the union of the

passionate Siva and Parvati might produce a child, and fearing the child that might arise from two so great in sexual powers, was frightened and sent Agni [the god of fire] to interrupt them (O'Flaherty, 1973: 269).

Transcendence and the Human Organism

Although the doctrine and imagery of kundalini did not emerge in Indian civilization until the beginnings of Tantra in the early centuries of the Common Era, the essence of the doctrine was known long before:

The enigmatic *kundalini* may have been hinted at already in the *Rig-Veda* (X.189) under the name of Vac Viraj ("Voice Resplendent"), who is described as a "serpent queen" (*sarpa-rajni*). In view of the fact that the *kundalini* experience is claimed to depend on universal structures of the body, we must assume that it was encountered by mystics throughout the ages. However, it was only with the body-positive esotericism of the Tantras that this experience was elaborated into a full-fledged conceptual model that even then served practitioners as a road map in their efforts to systematically awaken the *kundalini* power (Feuerstein, 1990: 189).

Georg Feuerstein, who presents this argument in his *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Yoga*, is one of several researchers into the history of Indian civilization who do not accept the usual academic view that an Aryan race invaded the Indian subcontinent somewhere around 1500 b.c.e. to impose a patriarchal religion over a goddess religion. *In Search of the Cradle of Civilization: New Light on Ancient India* (1995), Feuerstein collaborates with Subhash Kak and David Frawley to present the evidence for a view of Indian civilization that reveals a continuous development from perhaps 7000 b.c.e. to the present, "the oldest known civilization on earth" (Feuerstein, Kak, & Frawley, 1995: 12). Their research is founded on a new picture of the ancient world that is emerging through several sources [28]: "a world thoroughly imbued with sacred traditions -- traditions that have by and large been forgotten and ignored but that contain vitally important insights into the human condition" (*Ibid.*, 55).

They begin their argument, as everyone else does, with the oldest written document of Indian civilization, the Rig Veda. They set a "lower limit" for its composition at 2000 b.c.e., some five hundred years earlier than mainstream theories built on the notion of an Aryan invasion (*Ibid.*, 105). Attending to the stellar configurations referred to in the Rig Veda, they note that verses 18-19 describe a star pattern that could only have occurred between 4500 and 2500 b.c.e., due to the precession of the equinoxes -- that wobble of the earth on its axis that accounts for the fact that we are today about to leave the Age of Pisces and enter the Aquarian Age, when the constellation of Aquarius will be seen behind the sun on the first day of spring (*Ibid.*, 106). Another passage in the Rig Veda mentions a stellar configuration that corresponds to 6000-7000 b.c.e., the Age of Gemini (*Ibid.*, 107). Thus internal evidence suggests a tradition much older than 2000 b.c.e. Furthermore, the intellectual sophistication of the Rig Veda is prodigious: those sages had names for numbers as large as one trillion; their geometrical designs for fire-altars were too intricate to have been calculated in the head; and they had the most extensive grammatical science that existed before twentieth century linguistics (*Ibid.*, 129-30).

The Aryans (*Arya*) who produced the Rig Veda were not a race or linguistic group. They named themselves *Arya* to indicate a "moral quality or mental disposition -- that of nobility -- uniting those of like mind into a felt kinship with one another" (*Ibid.*, 46). The noble *Arya*

distinguished themselves from *Dasyus*, people characterized by materialism and cunning (*Ibid.*, 113-5).

The standard theory of an Aryan invasion between 1500 and 1200 b.c.e. assumes racial differences between the *Arya* and *Dasyus* that Feuerstein, Kak, and Frawley do not accept. Furthermore, they document the continuity of city-based civilizations on the Indian subcontinent from Mehrgarh (6500 b.c.e.) through Bakalot and Amri (4000-2000 b.c.e), Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa (2700-1900 b.c.e.) and the forest settlements along the Ganges around 1000 b.c.e. (*Ibid.*, 152). In the Harappan Age (2700-1900 b.c.e.) there were 2500 settlements extended over 300,000 square miles, bigger than the State of Texas and the combined area of Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations (*Ibid.*, 62-3). The end of the Harappan era along the seven rivers flowing from the Himalayas to the northwest coast of India was caused not by invasion but by a series of floods, earthquakes, and volcanoes evidenced in the archaeological record (*Ibid.*, 85). Extreme flooding was followed by desert conditions that drove the survivors from the civilization of the seven Sarasvati rivers in the West to the jungles of the Ganges in the East (*Ibid.*, 93). The authors give seventeen reasons why the alleged Aryan invasions never happened (*Ibid.*, 153-61).

The writings and artwork that were produced after the displacement of Indian civilization around 1900 b.c.e. show a distinct decline in artistic achievement and religious inspiration (*Ibid.*, 85):

When we pass from the *Rig-Veda* to the *Yajur* and the *Sama-Vedas* and the *Brahmanas* [produced in the Ganges region], we feel a change in the atmosphere. The freshness and the simplicity of the former gave place to the coldness and the artificiality of the latter. The spirit of religion is in the background, while its forms assume great importance. The need for prayer-books is felt. Liturgy is developed. . . . The religion of the *Yajur-Veda* is a mechanical sacerdotalism (*Ibid.*, 34).[29]

The priestly religion (sacerdotalism) of the Gangetic civilization reflects a mechanical and rational approach to the divine, a loss of the direct and unmediated experience that is evident in the hymns of the Rig Veda. Pursuit of mystical consciousness through yogic disciplines went underground, and the revealers of the Vedic tradition became mythologized.

According to the traditional, religious view, the Vedas were revealed by seer-sages (*rishis*) in a heightened state of consciousness (*Ibid.*, 127). Feuerstein, Kak, and Frawley do not dispute this notion, believing that the Vedic seers received their knowledge through intuitive "flashes" that enabled them to "see" certain realities beyond the world of the senses -- i.e., realities that exist on the subtle plane. "This higher awareness is *dhi* [in Sanskrit] -- a word related to the later term *dhyana*, meaning 'meditation' or 'contemplation'" (*Ibid.*, 28). The Vedas were produced by "a mature introspective culture, which, unlike our own postmodern civilization, was firmly grounded in the direct perception of and interaction with the unseen world of numinous beings and forces" (*Ibid.*, 25). The hymns that constitute the Rig Veda, therefore, do not represent the beginning of a tradition but its culmination. Feuerstein, Kak, & Frawley refer to a tradition that was already ancient at the time the Rig Veda was written down (*Ibid.*, 24). They cite the work of British Vedicist, Jeannine Miller, with approval:

The ancient *brahman* [pervasive force that dwells within everything, including the human psyche] of the Rig Veda is a drawing forth out of the subconscious layers of the *psyche* of that power, creative in the widest sense and dynamic, which lies latent in each human being, and which is directly related to the spirit or *atman*. The plunge into the depths of consciousness -- a

subjective action which is the essence of absorption (*dhyana*) and marks a step further than thinking -- with mind completely stilled and in a poised, receptive state of awareness, results in revelation (*Ibid.*, 188).

The implications of this historical overview of Indian civilization for our purposes is very significant, indeed. For when, around 500 c.e., "a wave of genius began to sweep over India, a wave that has yet to be stilled" (D. G. White, 1996:1), the earliest forms of the Tantric tradition found voice, and the doctrine of kundalini began to be elaborated. A very ancient tradition that had been largely silent for 2500 years had re-emerged. The doctrine of kundalini, although already 1500 years old, is a relatively recent exploration of the mystical potentials of the human body-mind that was responsible for the vision that lies behind the Rig Veda and therefore stretches some 9000 years back into pre-history. The ancient seers (*rishis*) responsible for the Rig Veda, who had long been mythologized as superhuman beings, half-way to divinity, were rediscovered as exemplars for contemporary individuals. "Mere humans could, through their tantric, yogic, and alchemical practice, climb the ladder of being and accede to the ranks of the semi-divine Siddhas"[30] (D. G. White, 1996: 3). Five hundred years after the Tantric tradition began, Abhinavagupta reformed it, and the earlier sexual practices took on a new meaning, "It was in the bliss of sexual orgasm that one [now] realized god-consciousness for oneself" (D. G. White, 1996: 4).

The arguments of the present book, *Indecent Practices and Erotic Trance*, are based on Abhinavagupta's reforms. Fully pursued and adequately explored, sexuality is itself a ladder of divine ascent. Its practices are based in a body-mind which is in all important respects identical for all human beings in all cultures and at all times. Employment of the forces of physiology and awareness tie together the mystical and physical experiments of the Tantric tradition over the past 1500 years with the far-reaching pre-history which made that tradition possible. For example, Feuerstein, Kak, and Frawley distinguish four levels of meaning in Indian notions of the divine: (a) spiritual beings with whom mystical communion is possible, (b) the forces in Nature's spectacles, (c) psychological aspects of the human organism, and (d) the mighty forces of the celestial vault (*Ibid.*, 230). The doctrine of kundalini reveals that these four manifestations of the divine are nothing other than four aspects of a single experience. It is the human capacity (c), through kundalini, to elevate consciousness through erotic trance and (a) interact with the gods imaginally, (b) see through the material effects of Nature's spectacles to the brahman or shakti moving within them, as well as (d) in the starry spheres. The human body is the microcosm; the serpentine Ganges of kundalini makes it possible for me to transcend my ego. It identifies me with the earth itself, which is fertilized by the sacred River Ganges; and with the sky whose Ganges is the Milky Way (Feuerstein, Kak & Frawley, 1995: 217).

The universal technique in this entire tradition lies in "reversing the flow." The flow of time, as we have seen, is likened to the fire that consumes us in aging and death as long as kundalini sleeps and drinks the semen wasted at the bottom of the body cavity. It is evident in the decline of history, which has produced the materialism and superficial cunning of the *Dashyus* of a contemporary world that has forgotten the Vedic rishis. Yoga is based in the principle of reversal: the natural flow of the mind into inconsequential distractions is reversed to one-pointedness; the breath that speeds up and slows down during those distractions is held constant; semen is not allowed to flow downward and out through ejaculation but held in and made to flow upward to the brain. The fifteenth century mystic poet Kabir instructs the yogin to "reverse the [flow of the] Ganges, and dry up the ocean" (D.

G. White, 1996: 233). The Western Gnostics knew this principle 1200 years earlier, when they spoke of reversing the flow of the Jordan; for its downward flow results in animalistic procreation, while its upward flow generates gods and "a race without a king" (Evola, 1992: 146).

The ultimate reversal is turning back the flow of time, for the hallmark of ego-consciousness is to be found in the linearity of past, present, and future. The present moment is constantly devouring the future and turning it into the past. The techniques of the Vedic tradition, from the rishis to Tantra, all have sought to reverse this flow and open our eyes to eternity. Here, in the abolition of history, is where yoga and shamanism meet (Eliade, 1969: 339). Yoga, old as it is, is a relatively recent development compared with shamanism. Indeed, the emergence of kundalini within the history of Indian civilization parallels the emergence of the Vedic tradition within a shamanic climate. Nine thousand years back to the earliest point that Feuerstein, Kak, and Frawley trace the Vedic tradition, all observers note that its similarity with shamanism is remarkable. Thus the Vedic tradition itself appears to be a specialized development that emerged out of shamanism, which is at least as old as the last Ice Age and the cave paintings of ithyphallic shamans and their animals. All histories of yoga refer to a sculpted image of a Shiva-like god, ithyphallic, sitting in yogic meditation, and surrounded by animals that was recovered from one of the Harappan archaeology sites (2700-1900 b.c.e.).

If, then, shamanism is the natural religion of the human body-soul, and if the Vedic tradition is the oldest continuous development of the human psychological and religious potential originally discovered in shamanism, and if kundalini represents the most highly differentiated exploration of the psycho-physiological foundations of the Vedic tradition, our diamond ladder of sexual ascent is planted on firm ground, indeed. Kundalini is not only the most thoroughly and richly developed notion that is analogous to erotic trance, it also belongs to the oldest and most humanly natural pursuit of transcendence, "ascent," or the subtle plane. We shall continue this discussion of kundalini in Chapter Eight, when we take up the subtle body.

-
1. Two of the most influential of these researchers were Pierre Janet in Paris (cf. Janet, 1889) and Morton Prince in Boston (cf. Prince, 1929)
 2. The idiosyncratic expectations of the individual will, of course, color these invariable realities.
 3. Here, I invoke the "angelology" of Ibn al-'Arabi (cf. Corbin, 1969).
 4. Barks prefers to call his renditions of Rumi's verses "versions" rather than "translations."
 5. Green's visual images that make Barks & Green (1997) *The Illuminated Rumi* explicitly link Rumi's words to the Hindu iconography of kundalini. Thus the reader's concern over the accuracy of the poetic images may well be justified.
 6. Marks such as "!" and "/" in the !Kung language refer to distinctive "clicks" that are part of their speech.

7. With the *Ramayana*, one of the two great epics of India. Composed between the fifth century, b.c.e., and the second century, c.e. (Fischer-Schreiber, 1989).
8. The number of the chakras specified in the various traditions varies widely from four to twelve or more, although seven seems to be the number most frequently mentioned. Evidently the number of rungs on any ladder of ascent is somewhat arbitrary, a function of the author's own experience and predilections.
9. St. John of the Cross also mentions this (Silburn, 1988: 114n).
10. A favorite image of the mystic poets, especially Ramprasad Sen (McLean, 1998), is of a bird caught in the "bamboo cage" of the ribs. Silburn: "One feels as if a bird is flitting inside one's chest, but there are no heart palpitations" (114n).
11. Ibn al-'Arabi's accounts of the Sufi masters he knew in Spain contains many accounts of such a "gift of tears" (Austin, 1977). The Spanish Catholic St. Ignatius of Loyola was so afflicted with this "gift" every time he tried to say mass, that eventually he had to quit trying (Ignatius, 1974).
12. "Through the water" is a reference to the second chakra, *svadisthana*. Jung argues that falling into that "water" is really a disaster from the viewpoint of the ego, and no one would do so unless pushed from behind.
13. G.I. Gurdjieff (1866?-1949), born on the Russo-Turkish border, widely traveled, his teaching "systematized" by P. D. Ouspenski as "The Fourth Way": "the way of the sly or cunning man" who works on himself, "trying to harmonize all paths and using every cunning trick [he] can to keep [him]self 'awake'" (Guiley, 1991).
14. This vision, too, agrees with the experience of many of the "New Age Pioneers" I have described in *Perils of the Soul* (Haule, 1999).
15. The research of Pierre Janet was well known in English and French speaking countries in the early decades of the twentieth century. (Clearly Toomer had mastered both languages.) For Janet, hysteria and hypnosis are characterized by a *rétrécissement*, a narrowing of the field of consciousness, a state of dissociative trance (cf. Haule, 1984).
16. A naked, wandering holy man, an antinomian saint who has renounced the world.
17. These results closely parallel the reports of American out-of-body journeyer Robert A. Monroe (cf. Haule, 1999).
18. The American out-of-body journeyer Robert A. Monroe reports not only kundalini-like vibrations as essential to his leaving his body but devotes a good deal of attention to the problem of his uncontrollable sexual arousal, which he believes is the unspoken secret of mystical states (cf. Haule, 1999).
19. For example, John White's massive collection of essays, *Kundalini, Evolution and Enlightenment* (1990).
20. These individuals are: W. Thomas Wolfe, Flora Courtois, male professor of humanities, female high school teacher, female artist/teacher, female psychologist, male computer scientist, female artist, male scientist, actress, female psychologist, female librarian, male writer/psychic, male artist/healer, male engineer/healer, female secretary, two housewives, male psychiatrist, female artist/writer, male psychiatrist, female health-care worker.
21. A much more complete, traditionally informed, and experientially based list may be found in Vishnu Tirtha (1990: 94-7) in eighteen numbered paragraphs. Each paragraph suggests a progressive stage in the awakening of kundalini. I have selected two of them to provide a sense of the traditional distinctions Sannella ignores: "6. When different kinds of *nad* [subtle sound] become audible, in your spinal column you experience vibrations, feeling of bodily existence for the time being is lost, in other words you feel as if there is no body, everything looks vacant, your eyelids become closed and open in spite of your

efforts, electric-like currents seem flowing up and down the nerves and you have convulsions, know that *mahamaya kundalini* [the kundalini of great illusion] has come into action." "14. While walking, when your mind is filled with an impulse to walk faster and your feet begin to run, you feel your body light like air and do not feel fatigued even having walked long enough, you feel buoyant and joyful, you are not unhappy even in your dreams, you can keep the balance of your mind undisturbed in all ups and downs, and you acquire an inexhaustible energy for work, know that *brahma shakti kundalini* has come into action."

22. Once it reaches the shoulders, it also travels down the arms to the hands -- though I am not aware of these sensations having been reported in the literature on Kundalini. The movement of the energy up the backbone to the head and then down over the face to the larynx is a prominent element in the descriptions of Tibetan Buddhism (cf. Gyatso, 1992). Some of the Western sex manuals also advert to this dimension of Kundalini experience when they emphasize the importance of touching the tongue to the palate in order to "complete the loop" from the face to the larynx (cf. Chia & Arava, 1996; Anand, 1989).
23. Another Westerner who reports mystical arousal beginning in the feet is the philosopher and comparative religionist, Huston Smith. He reports that in 1948 Aldous Huxley recommended he attend a study group led by Swami Satprakashananda in St. Louis. Smith bought a copy of the Katha Upanishad that the swami was explicating: "When I began to read it on the street-car ride home, I experienced an epiphany from the soles of my feet up. I immediately saw that the mystical wisdom of the Upanishads was head and shoulders above the dogmatic theology of Protestantism and the philosophy of Western religion that I had studied in college" (T. White, 1998: 22).
24. Several readers of this manuscript have confided that they, too, have felt sexual arousal beginning in the feet and surging up the legs.
25. Desai uses the terms *prana*, *shakti*, and *kundalini* more or less interchangeably. All are cosmic powers that may be felt in the body.
26. Recall Bhattacharya's phrase, "awake while sleeping and sleeping while awake."
27. The yogic importance of generating heat (*tapas*), which Eliade (1969) develops at some length, perhaps sheds benevolent light on Gopi Krishna's torment through the heat he believed to have been caused by kundalini's rising through the right-hand channel (*pingala*) instead of the medial channel (*sushumna*).
28. Timothy Taylor (1996) would be one of these. Another is Julian Jaynes' *The Origins of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976), which I discuss in Haule (1999). Jaynes holds that before the development of a dependable ego, marked by memory and cunning (cf. the *Dasyus*, as defined by Feuerstein, Kak & Frawley, two paragraphs below), people had access to Cosmic Consciousness through a "Voice" that proceeded from the non-dominant hemisphere of the brain. Jaynes' evidence comes from the ancient Middle East, but he might have strengthened his argument by referring to the "Voice Resplendent" of the Rig Veda. Another rather different source is Mavor and Dix (1989) who present evidence for a highly developed Native civilization in New England far older and more astronomically and technologically astute than is generally believed.
29. Quoting S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1951: Vol. 1: 123.
30. *Siddha*, an enlightened adept deemed to have reached perfection, who can be recognized by his possession of paranormal powers (*siddhis*) (Feuerstein, 1990).