

## ICR's 2021 Zoom Conference

ICR's 36<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Conference was again held this year as a Zoom meeting. Although all of us at ICR very much missed the in-person format of past conferences, the Zoom method allowed us to offer presentations by speakers from all over the world, including India, England, Portugal and the U.S., as well as Canada. Attendance was considerably higher than last year, and we have again posted all the videos of the presentations on Youtube, for those who could not attend the actual meeting (see below for the Youtube links).

The theme of this year's conference was 'Spiritual Transformation and Health in a Changing World.' By now we are all well aware of the additional pressure and stress that dealing with COVID-19 has brought into our daily life. We know, too, that the world is constantly changing and has now become, in many ways, more uncertain. It is therefore paramount that we do all we can to maintain our health – physical, emotional, mental, and especially spiritual.

At this year's conference, our goal was to explore how our lifestyle impacts the evolutionary process of Kundalini. When our actions, thoughts, and environment do not conform to the requirements of healthy evolution, a Kundalini process tends to go wrong, or is slow or distorted. But when these factors are favorable, it is more likely to be healthy and proceed on the right lines. Thus, the importance of lifestyle in managing a Kundalini process cannot be overstated. Usually, the enhancements that Kundalini is trying to bring about in the individual cannot happen without substantial changes in lifestyle. Failure to make the necessary changes will often cause the process to be more difficult, prolong its duration, and affect its outcome.

During the time a Kundalini process is very active, it is imperative that the body be able to provide the quantity and quality of vital energy that the evolving brain requires. This ability is impacted by numerous factors, of which the following are primary: diet, sleep, physical fitness, stress, smoking, alcohol, recreational drugs, concentration, sexual activity, and relationships.

A greater degree of harmony within ourselves and our environment can be created by becoming aware of, and living according to, Nature's rhythms, which govern all living organisms and much of the physical world as well. When we recognize and accept that the cosmic creative Power – Kundalini-Shakti – is in control of all life processes in our body, it becomes easier to adopt a more holistic approach to our health. We are then more inclined to make good nutrition and exercise a regular part of our daily life, eliminate negative habits, and learn how to relax and interact with the external world as it is. These changes will also greatly enhance the Kundalini process.

Our presenters each explored various ways in which they made changes in their life that allowed Kundalini to manifest in a more positive way. We are grateful for their willingness to share many of these experiences with us.

The first presentation, by Teri Degler, was entitled "Gopi Krishna and Kundalini: His Awakening and Yours." Teri began by discussing why she decided to write a biography of Gopi Krishna, and how she collected information about him from his family, friends, acquaintances, and those who worked for him. Teri then reviewed Gopi Krishna's account of his first Kundalini experience and events that happened in the years after, which brought him to the profound conclusion that Kundalini was the controlling intelligence behind evolution. Teri described why Gopi Krishna felt so strongly that it was imperative for us to study and understand the biological aspects of Kundalini.

She then discussed how the teachings of the great spiritual masters throughout history were actually intended to enhance this biological process through methods such as self-discipline, Yoga, meditation, and adherence to a virtuous life. She also emphasized the importance of these practices for those who are attempting to awaken Kundalini through intense methods, such as some of those that can be found in Hatha Yoga. She concluded her presentation by showing how Gopi Krishna put these guidelines into effect in his own life by devoting his time and energy to doing service work in his own community – especially through helping women who were disadvantaged by the outmoded social customs of the time. She concluded that it was this devotion to social justice that allowed him to make the final transition to the *jivan-mukta*, or perennial state of illumination, in which he lived for the rest of his life.

The next presentation, by Archana Sahni, was entitled "Reflections on my Kundalini Awakenings." After an opening invocation to Shakti, Archana revealed that although she was born and raised in a culture steeped in spirituality, she took no interest in this aspect of her heritage. She also emphasized that her initial Kundalini experience in 1994 was totally spontaneous, and not the result of any kind of spiritual practice. Even after this profound experience, she simply accepted it and did not seek to understand it through any of the spiritual traditions of India or elsewhere. It was only after her second Kundalini experience in 2020 that she began to learn more about Kundalini, and to search out other individuals and organizations to share her experiences with.

Archana then went on to describe how the expression of her thoughts and feelings through poetry enabled her to transcend the cultural and societal limitations that had been placed on her throughout her life. She emphasized that the driving force behind all her searching was an intense desire to

understand and experience Divine Love, and candidly related this quest to the challenges and difficulties she experienced in her personal life.

Archna concluded her presentation by sharing a video of a poem she created about Toronto for an event there called "A Hundred Thousand Poets for Change." She then played the video, posted on Youtube, entitled "Love Poem for Toronto / Tkaronto".

The third presentation of the conference, by Ann Mathie, was entitled "Kundalini: The Lived Experience, Psychology and Eastern Metaphysics." Ann began by emphasizing that her goal for many years has been to make Kundalini more understandable and acceptable to the Western mind by explaining it in terms of various Indian spiritual traditions such as Tantra, Yoga and Sankhya.

Ann began by showing some of the spontaneous ways in which Kundalini can manifest in terms of various Yoga practices, such as *kriyas*, *mudras*, *bandhas*, etc. She then presented some of the metaphysical aspects of Kundalini, as given by the Indian spiritual tradition, as a background for understanding how it works in the physical body. This was followed by a brief summary of how the many different spiritual traditions of India, starting with the Vedas, viewed the phenomenon.

Ann then focussed on the Sankhya philosophy as being one of the most comprehensive and understandable traditions describing Kundalini. She discussed various aspects of Sankhya, such as the order of creation, the three *gunas* or qualities of matter, the 25 *tattvas* or layers between pure consciousness and solid matter, and the five *koshas* or bodily sheaths. She then discussed *samskaras*, or psychological tendencies, and showed how the attachments they cause lead to the various forms of suffering of embodied existence.

The final section of Ann's presentation was on the anatomy of Kundalini, including explanations of *prana*, the *nadis*, the *chakras*, and *bindu* (point), and how they are involved in the Kundalini process, relating these concepts, as much as possible, to the physical body as understood by modern medicine.

Frances Morgana Stephens, the fourth presenter, had an experience of Samadhi at the age of 18. The insights she gained from that experience, and others she has had since, were the basis for her presentation, entitled "Stepping up to Co-Creat – Left-Handed Tantra Leading us into a Co-Creational Future." Her talk centered around the 'soul lessons' that we as individuals, and as a species, have to learn to reach the next stage of human evolution.

Frances spoke about the need for each individual to learn what their own particular soul lessons are in this lifetime, and how we can use this

information to advance our own evolution, and the evolution of the human race as a whole, in the most effective way. She then spoke of the effect that the pandemic has had on many individuals, forcing them to pause in their life and re-evaluate their goals, priorities, and purpose in this life. After we discover what our particular soul lessons are for this life, she explained, then we can work towards co-creating a framework of behavior patterns that allow us to learn these lessons in the most effective way.

Frances then talked about the 'left-handed Tantra' tradition of India, and how it was oriented towards making us more aware of the effect that what we eat has on our spiritual development. At its core, it also speaks to a profound reverence for the Divine Feminine or Shakti – the Universal Power that creates and sustains the phenomenal universe we exist in. Another aspect of left-handed Tantra is its emphasis on not accepting the status quo, but rather to always be aware when the goals of business, government and society are inimical to the learning of our soul lessons. We must instead use our own inner guidance to determine how we live our life.

The fifth presentation, by Neil Bethell Sinclair, was entitled "Kundalini and Sacred Poetry." Neil talked about how sacred poetry has formed the basis of religions, has been embraced by world cultures, and seems to come from a mysterious source. He used Gopi Krishna's accounts of how he wrote poetry to show that it is not possible for a normal human mind to create such works, and that many who have the experience claim that it is coming from a source of Divine Intelligence much greater than their own.

Neil then gave an account of his own Kundalini experiences and how they led to a life-long practice of writing poetry of both a mystical and mundane nature. He also gave examples of how poetry came into his mind which included words that he did not know the meaning of, but which were totally consistent with the meaning of the poetry. Another aspect of his poetry writing that he discussed was the role played by meter in the process, and how the flow it created aided him in its writing. He made it clear that his poetry comes from another source, and that he is only revealing what is coming from an intelligence vastly superior to his own.

Neil then talked about the poetry of historical figures like Rumi, Shakespeare, and William Blake, giving some excerpts from their most profound works. He finished his presentation with a discussion on where he believed sacred poetry comes from, and concluded his talk with an excerpt from a poem by Rumi.

The last presentation of the conference, by Dani Antman, was entitled "Transforming Difficult Emotions as a Gateway to Health and Wholeness." She began with a discussion of how the repression of negative emotions can lead to health issues if continued over time. For those experiencing spiritual

transformation, these emotions tend to come to the surface spontaneously and have to be dealt with before the transformation can proceed in a healthy way.

Dani then focussed on some modern research on the nature of emotions and how they manifest and affect the body, brain, nervous system, and immune system. She also talked about the ability to recognize emotional states in others, and how this relates to our ability to deal with our own emotions.

This was followed by a discussion of how emotions relate to the subtle body, in particular the second chakra, and how they can, if not dealt with, disrupt the Kundalini process. The role of our belief system and how it relates to our ability to deal with emotions was then considered.

This was followed by an experiential somatic exercise designed to help us recognize a particular emotion when we experience it, and how it feels in the body. This was done first with a strongly positive emotion, then with a strongly negative one. The exercise concluded with a technique to help accept the existence of the emotion without judging oneself for having it, and to heal any negative effects it might have. Dani then opened up the session to get feedback from some of the participants on how they experienced the exercise.

She concluded by giving a list of resources for people to access if they wished to explore these ideas and techniques further.