

Physio Kundalini Syndrome: A Case Report

Alexandre Jose Carvalho Ramos*

*Independent researcher and psychologist, Portugal

***Corresponding author:** Alexandre Jose Carvalho Ramos, Independent researcher and psychologist, Portugal, Tel: +351214575447; E-mail: alexandreros@campus.ul.pt

Abstract

With the spread of yoga, meditation, and other Eastern spiritual practices in Western countries, clinical cases of “physio kundalini syndrome” have begun to emerge. In this article I presented a case that, despite having common elements with a psychotic disorder, can be considered a typical clinical case of awakening of kundalini, since the patient was apparently able to solve his health problems without any medical intervention and says he is perfectly integrated into the community.

Keywords: *Kundalini; Yoga; Eastern spiritual practice; Mental health*

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Background

Kundalini is a Sanskrit word that means “coiled-up” and is related to the practice of all kinds of Hindu yoga [1], Hindu tantra [2], Tibetan Buddhism [3], Chinese Qigong (Chi Kung) [4], and at least some Eastern martial arts [5]. Although virtually unknown to most Westerners, we can also find the word kundalini in the Western secret societies [6].

According to the yoga tradition, kundalini is like an energy, a serpent or a goddess that lies dormant at the base of the spine of all human beings [1,7]. Kundalini is also called bhujangini (serpent power), because it has three and a half coils like a serpent, and when it is awakened, it makes a hissing sound like that of a serpent beaten with a stick. Kundalini is something very important in yoga practice, because is considered to be the key to the state of samadhi, some kind of illumination or super consciousness state, achieved when kundalini unites with Lord Shiva at the top of the head (sahasrara chakra). But before reaching the top of the head, it is said that kundalini has to go through six other spiritual centers (chakras), called muladhara, svadhishthana, manipura, anahata, vishuddha, and ajna. These six chakras have been identified with the following nervous plexuses, commencing from the lowest (muladhara chakra): the sacrococcygeal plexus, the sacral plexus, the solar plexus, the cardiac plexus, the laryngeal plexus, and lastly the cerebellum. When the yoga practitioner attains the state of samadhi, it is

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said that he/she no longer needs to be born again, he/she is free of the wheel of death and birth, called samsara-chakra in Hinduism [1].

According to the opinion of the ancient yoga masters, the human reproductive system works in two ways: (1) as an evolutionary, and (2) as a reproductive mechanism. The ultimate goal of this evolution is to have a higher state of consciousness. Kundalini can be awakened by means of spiritual exercises such as prayer, worship, meditation [8,9], devotion, breathing exercises, yogic postures, recitation of mantras (holy words), selfless works, etc. [1], but also through maithuna or tantric sex [2].

Sivananda says that the awakening of kundalini manifests itself through various physical and psychological signs and symptoms, such as feel currents of prana (vital energy) rising up to the sahasrara chakra, feel vibrations of prana in different parts inside the body, feel electric-like currents flow up and down the nerves, experience bliss, have divine visions, get inspiration and insight, etc. When kundalini is at one chakra, intense heat is felt there, and when it leaves that center for the next chakra, the former chakra becomes very cold and appears lifeless [1].

Eastern spiritual practices have been spread throughout the Western world in the last decades. Yoga and meditation are the best known of those practices. Practicing yoga or meditation safely involves a specialized diet (essentially vegetarian), but also an intensive purification of the various human bodies: physical body (sthulararira), astral body (sukshmararira), and causal body (karanasarira). These three bodies can still be subdivided into five koshas: annamayakosha is the physical body; pranamayakosha, manomayakosha, and vijñanamayakosha are in the astral body; and anandamayakosha belongs to the causal body [1,10]. However, the majority of people who seek yoga practice in the West have no spiritual or consciousness-expanding goals. They think yoga is like a kind of therapy. They seek only to improve physical fitness, find a way to manage daily stress, or cure some kind of disease. Due to this disinformation and the lack of preparation of the yoga and meditation teachers, the cases of physio kundalini syndrome [11,12] or pranic (energetic) disorders [13] multiply in the West. The experience of kundalini awakening can be altered or misinterpreted by the concomitant use or abuse of psychoactive drugs [12], and the psychological symptoms resemble those of schizophrenia or other psychosis [11,14]. So, it is very important that mental health professionals learn to make the differential diagnosis between this kind of “psycho-spiritual crisis” and psychosis [15]. This might be a difficult task, because there is still a lack of research about mental disorders related to Eastern spiritual practices. For example, we do not know if “physio kundalini syndrome” is the same clinic entity as “Qigong deviation syndrome” [16] or “qi-gong psychotic reaction” [17], and “Zen sickness” [18].

The purpose of this article was to present and discuss a clinical case of a person who have contacted the online service “Kundalini Emergency - Portugal” (<https://emergenciakundalini.blogs.sapo.pt/>), founded by me in 2007. In order to protect his identity, data concerning his nationality, current age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, level of education, socioeconomic status, and occupation were omitted.

Case presentation

Mr. X, a Caucasian adult male in his twenties, has been a tantric yoga practitioner for four years. During the 1990s, he was on vacation alone and decided to intensify yoga practice. One morning he was sitting on the bed with his legs crossed in siddhasana, pressing the anus carefully with the left heel, and he repeated several times the breathing exercise called bhastrika. A rapid succession of forcible expulsions is a characteristic feature of this breathing exercise [1]. Then he filled his lungs with

air and held his breath (kumbhaka) as he performed the maha bandha (sometimes called bandha traya), contracting the anus and the abdomen, and pressing the chin against the chest. Then he decided to add yet another yoga technique. While he remained with his lungs full of air, he began to mentally repeat the six bija mantras, the sounds that intend to awake the six chakras (LAM, VAM, RAM, YAM, HAM, AUM or OM). Suddenly she felt a kind of sting with a giant needle, as if they were opening a hole in the base of the spine toward the brain. He interrupted the exercise, but when he repeated it, he felt the sharp sting and suddenly something like a current of energy and intense heat began to rise up the spine toward the brain. He then stopped practicing yoga, but this feeling of having something like an erupting volcano inside him remained for several days. About a week later he found that the body began to tremble, especially the limbs. And then he began to have severe headaches, especially in the space between his eyebrows, as if someone was hitting that area with a pickaxe, trying to open a hole. Then he began to feel very tired, with no energy to do anything, spending his days watching television. Sometime later he began to have terrible nightmares. They were very lucid dreams, in which he participated in countless battles, mostly in the middle ages, and woke up almost in panic and all sweaty after watching his own death on the battlefield. Then he started to think he was going crazy and started looking for information in yoga books to see if there was anything that would help him. A book especially caught his attention: “Kundalini: The evolutionary energy in man” by Gopi Krishna [19]. Then he felt some relief and decided to start being a vegetarian. Until that moment he had thought that this dietary prescription had only to do with Hindu beliefs. A few months later, his physical symptoms subsided, and he slowly felt more energy to work. At this time, he also experienced an increase in sexual desire above normal. Another strange thing he noticed was that although he felt enough warmth throughout his spine, he felt very cold on the body surface and had to wear winter coats during the summer. His physical health continued to improve and he felt that it was important to carry out long walks and gardening. These activities allowed to spend the excess of energy and increased the sensation of well-being. Until one day something happened that made him question his mental health and have the need to talk to someone. He began to wake up at night, as if he were sensing something strange, and then he felt himself attacked by beings who were not of this world. They seemed to have bodies made of wind and the intensity of the wind was so strong that he could not open his eyes. The episodes became more frequent and this alarmed him. One day he was reading the book “Concentration and meditation” by Sri Swami Sivananda [20], who says that sometimes the yoga practitioner undergoes attacks during meditation from inhabitants of another sphere (loka) called Bhuta Loka. They are thought to be servants of Lord Shiva and have the function of testing the strength and courage of the yoga practitioner. Thus, the next time that this attack occurred, he filled with courage, mentalized that he was inside a kind of globe of golden light, and gave orders for these beings to disappear from his life, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, while he made the sign of the cross with his right hand. (He did this because he had Catholic education during childhood). They disappeared and did not bother him again. A few years later he noticed that he could see things he had never seen before. He said that he saw ghosts many times and said that when he looks at people, he sees like three bodies of light that expanded beyond the physical body. Nowadays, he no longer has unpleasant physical symptoms and he says that is perfectly integrated into the community. There was no family history of mental illness, and no use or abuse of any psychoactive substance. He does not even smoke cigarettes and does not drink alcohol and coffee.

Discussion

According to the DSM-5, the schizophrenia spectrum and other psychotic disorders include schizophrenia, other psychotic disorders, and schizotypal personality disorder. They are defined by abnormalities in one or more of the following five domains: (1) delusions, (2) hallucinations, (3) disorganized thinking (speech), (4) grossly disorganized or abnormal motor behavior (including catatonia), and (5) negative symptoms, such as diminished emotional expression, avolition, alogia,

anhedonia, and asociality [21]. Thus, it would not be surprising that many mental health professionals considered this clinical case to be an example of a case of psychotic disorder. An online help service has the advantage of being able to meet people from anywhere in the world. Since 2007, I have received letters from four different countries: Portugal, Spain, Brazil, and France. But, since there is no face-to-face interaction, it is very difficult to establish a correct diagnosis. Apparently, this person has managed to solve their health problems without any medical intervention, and all the psychological symptoms that he presented are described in the yoga literature. According to Rama, kundalini is thought to contain not only latent energy but also latent memories, both personal and transpersonal. The modern way of understanding this latent power is in terms of the unconscious mind [22]. Saraswati says that some people who have awakened kundalini get in contact with their unconscious body and see inauspicious, ferocious elements, such as ghosts, monsters, etc. [2]. This could explain his strange dreams, and the feeling of being attacked by entities from another sphere called Bhuta Loka. We do not know if these lokas actually exist, but they are described in Hinduism. According to Khuntia, the whole cosmos of life is divided into many spheres or lokas. As life evolves from lower to higher forms, consciousness becomes more individualized and expansive. The main lokas are 21 in number. The inhabitants of Bhuta Loka are people who have taken their lives by poison [23]. On the other hand, sensations of heat are common in kundalini awakening but are rare in psychosis [14], and becoming “totally changed into fire” is also a goal of meditation and prayer in the Eastern Christian tradition [24]. Thus, this clinical case was considered a typical case of physio kundalini syndrome.

Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interests.

Patient Consent

Obtained.

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