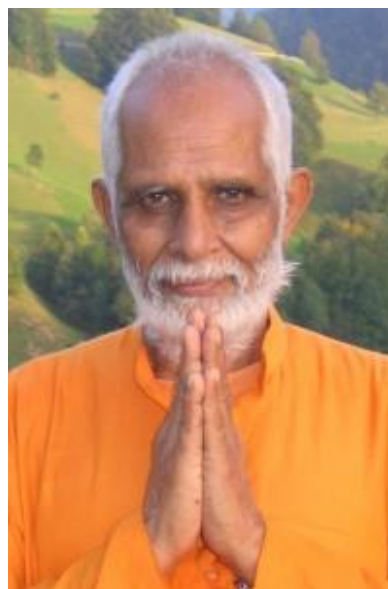




Spontaneous Risings Part One: Joan S. Harrigan, Ph.D., (Designated Successor of the Traditional Kundalini Science lineage) talks with Jaime Stover Schmitt about Kundalini and Spontaneous Movement



Dr. Joan (Shivaripta) Harrigan, a licensed psychologist practicing in Knoxville, Tennessee, runs the U.S. branch of the spiritual direction service, [Patanjali Kundalini Yoga Care](#). Dr. Harrigan is the designated successor of H.H. Sri Swami Chandrasekharanand Saraswati, Kundalini master and ordained monk in the Adi Shankaracharya order.

As the sole apprentice to the living holder of this specialized lineage of Traditional Kundalini Science, Shivarpita assists individuals along the path of spiritual development by helping them understand how best to cooperate with their indwelling spiritual power.

Jaime: Authentic Movement is based, in part, on Jung's technique of Active Imagination. Through it, he believed unconscious content from a person's individual unconscious, and well as from the collective unconscious, is brought into consciousness. Typically in Authentic Movement, a mover waits with eyes closed for movement to arise spontaneously. This is done in the presence of an external witness. Spontaneous

movements, called *kriyas* in Sanskrit, are recognized by Kundalini Vidya. What is their value, and what do they signify?

Shivarpita: *Kriyas* are spontaneous movements of the whole body, or specific parts of the body, like the head or hands, or specific breathing patterns. They could include locution, spontaneous vocalizations. They can be as subtle as feeling an inner “hum,” like a motor idling, or feeling an actual vibration coming from inside, or jerking of the body in a more dramatic way. They can be gorgeously exquisite and subtle. They can move us in a way we could never move ourselves. I have seen spontaneous *kriyas* flow in a way that moves the host in graceful, and at times, extreme stretches that go beyond the conscious ability of the physical body to stretch that far with that amount of strength and balance. And yet, in a subtly altered state, this spontaneous flow is like a gorgeous dance. It goes beyond Martha Graham, although I think Martha Graham was informed by *kriyas*.

All individuals have their own idiosyncratic style when a *kriya* flow starts. With some people, it’s very subtle. With some people, it starts when they get into a still mode, or meditative mode. Some people have them when they are in the presence of a holy sacred person, or at a holy sacred place.

Kriyas have various purposes. For one thing they’re thought to really clear out subtle toxins from the subtle body system, and this means from the energy sheath and the mental sheath.

Jaime: So if someone had a traumatic experience, for instance, could a *kriya* could be a clearing of something like that?

Shivarpita: Absolutely. Sometimes people in a post-traumatic experience will go into a shaking. Some of the shamanic traditions encouraged shaking. Now something like shaking medicine is not actually a *kriya* because it begins volitionally, but it may flow into an actual *kriya* state in some people.

Jaime: And the value of it?

Shivarpita: To purge and purify the subtle system from toxins. I'm not talking about MSG (mono-sodium glutamate), I'm talking about negative thought patterns. In a time of trauma or life shock, what we experience around that goes deep into our system. It is stored in our molecules; it is stored in our muscles; it is stored in our organ systems. If someone says a phrase to us when we are in one of these very vulnerable, traumatized, stark, open states—if they say something to us, it sticks in there at a deep, deep level—not just in the mind, but in the energy system, and in the physical system. And if it was a negative statement, or we took it in a negative way, it must be purged for us to be fully healed.

The spontaneous shaking, or even the shaking medicine sort of practice, where we volitionally start a shaking mode, or even a very subtle spontaneous movement, or a delicate shift in our breathing pattern, can have a tremendous effect on dislodging these implanted injunctions and thought patterns that may have come from outside us. They can also come from inside our own mind, from what Freud would call the superego that hopes its implants will last forever. We have to work hard to examine, “is this an archaic superego belief I really need to purge? Or is it a helpful thought, I need just to move a bit, so it's not off kilter. Then in a balanced way, I can understand it afresh, and make good use of it.” As far as what's in the mind, a lot of discernment is needed as to what we would do well to purge, what we would reframe, and what we really need. According to Kundalini Vidya, this purging process starts at the deepest level, at the level of the Divine within. The Holy Spirit is the maker of the organism. It has the template from the very beginning, and forms the organism around the subtle template of mind and energy-pattern that we come in with. It knows which movements will help us let go of the flotsam and jetsam, and the barnacles in our way, so we can have a clear, pure environment conducive to our highest potential.

I once was at a workshop where each participant in this relatively small group was asked to just stand comfortably and let a movement start to come. Most of the room started

flailing about, and even though I'd opened the sluice gates and invited, "let come whatever shall come," what came was actually that the physical body didn't move as such. But my stance became so enlivened. It was vibrant. I can well imagine there was energy radiating outward, because I felt it inside. My head moved just a bit, tilted back, my hands assumed a gentle position, with placements of the fingers. My breathing became very smooth and regular and diaphragmatic. I just stood there in the most lovely state, perfectly still. That was my *kriya*. It doesn't have to be dramatic to be a *kriya*. Sometimes, I hear that people think that to be a *kriya*, someone has to be flappin' around on the carpet like a fish out of water. And that is not at all the case. *Kriyas* run full spectrum. A *kriya* truly is a spontaneous movement. We are not willing anything to happen. And if the will gets into it, it's not a *kriya* anymore. I think that's an important difference.

Jaime: That's very important.

Shivarpita: We're not actually using Active Imagination to make *kriyas* happen. Active imagination is more like what an artist does with a brush. In the graphic arts, it is my experience that I can volitionally draw a figure. I know where I want my pencil to go. Then, there are times when something deeper than my mind takes over my brush, and it must go exactly where it goes. The mind doesn't decide where that is. The hand just moves there, and the image comes forward. There's a big difference between rendering the figure of an object, and letting the spirit express itself with a paintbrush in your hand. That to me is the difference between an instruction one would give a client as to a helpful therapeutic movement, as compared to what the Holy Spirit within that person would have them do spontaneously from inside.

And there's also, as always, the gray zone where you start with a thought of, "I feel like moving this way"—it comes from an emotion, it come from an image—then as you get into that rhythm or feeling of the movement, something else takes over and moves you. That's more tapping into the collective unconscious, or even the level beyond, to the Holy Spirit.

In the Yoga tradition, *kriyas* are highly valued as divinely manifested movements that are healing on a physical-emotional-psychological level, as well as informative on the wisdom level, which is another aspect of the subtle body, the discernment level of mind—the higher mind.

And *kriyas* can bring us into a state of awareness. For example, during that vibrant, standing, motionless *kriya* that happened to me at that workshop, I was actually being taught something very useful about an ongoing presence in my vital system I am much more conscious of since that experience. That level of vitality was saying to me, “I am here within you 24/7, 365. You can tap me on call. I’m yours. I am a source within you that is connected to the universal vitality.” It never goes away.

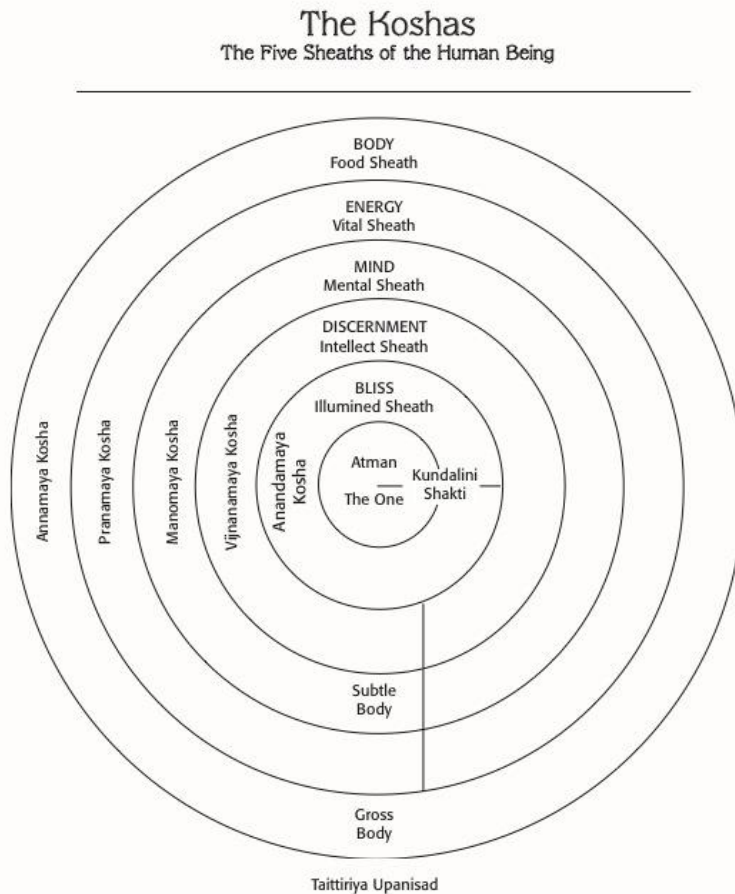
So *kriyas* actually can teach us philosophy even. And they break through blocks in the subtle system that limit our spiritual development. In the Yoga system, this is what they are most praised for. They open up possibilities for the Holy Spirit—in Sanskrit, it’s called Kundalini Shakti—to progress and advance spiritually. Not everybody requires *kriyas* for that to happen. But as people advance spiritually, I think they usually experience at least a few of the subtler *kriyas*, if not a full-blown *kriya* flow. And that would be something akin to my stillness *kriya* where you feel the vitality within you. You feel the vibrancy and your breathing is made to flow in a gentle, calming, yet vitalizing pattern that’s correlated with a very pleasant emotional state. That’s a *kriya*!

Jaime: In holistic approaches to health, self-understanding, and personal growth, the western Cartesian splitting of body, mind and spirit is often pointed to as a conceptual stumbling block. In Traditional Kundalini Science, what is the relationship between mind, body, and spirit? Is there a model used to show this?

Shivarpita: Yes, there is. First, I’d like to say, I’m not sure that Descartes himself was as split as commentators on Descartes feel he was.

Jaime: Thanks for saying that. I wasn't sure I wanted to use Cartesian as a descriptor there.

Shivarpita: It is commonly used vernacular, that these difficulties are laid at the feet of Descartes, but he was really more open than just that black-white comparison. The western outlook of, "let's go from the gross to the subtle" got some justification there. In the East, science starts at a subtler level and goes out from there. One of the great models of the human being, of human experience, and of the developmental process of the human being, is found in the Upanishads, in the philosophy called Vedanta. This model is called the *pancha kosha*, the five sheaths, that make up a human being. Human beings are on a continuum from gross to subtle, or from subtle to gross, wherever you start. The *koshas* describe these levels of experience. The outermost would be the gross physical body with all of its sensory experiences through the five senses, and all of the body's locomotor abilities, and the somatic functions we experience. In our own sense of, "I am this body," "this body is comfortable", "this body is a burden", "this body brings me delight and pleasure," more subtle, not separate, but informing that gross physical body, is a three-layered subtle body.



The first layer is the energy system. And this basically is the sense of our own vitality. I feel tired. I feel energized. When we more sensitivity open to awareness of that level, some of us can actually feel our energy flowing, and it can be localized. I feel energy in my head. I feel energy in the tips of my toes. Wherever it may be, it may be experienced as current, tingling, as pinpricks—something like an electrical touch. Or it may be of warmth, or a restlessness in the body that isn't quite physical.

This energetic level has many aspects. It may feel a little mysterious, because in the subtle body realm, we're getting into what is sometimes called "dreamtime." In the physical body, we're definitely in the waking state, material reality. In the subtle body, we are in a realm of a true reality that is not confined by the gross physics of material reality. It has its own separate reality. These subtle shifts in energetic vitalizations or dissipations interface with brain functionality. Yoga's study of the energy system is comprehensive and precise, and informs the entire science of human development. The next subtler sheath from the vital energy sheath is the mental sheath, the mind. The mind has various aspects. Observably, there's the chatterbox mind we're all too familiar

with, that goes twenty-four-seven with this and that, and what about the other thing. It also is constantly commenting. And commenting on our commenting, so there is a level of “the critic,” “the judge,” in there, which creates self-esteem and emotions. There is a whole cluster of thoughts that make up who we think ourselves to be, the personae, the personality, the self-concept.

These put little blinders around what we will allow ourselves to see and experience. We think, “I am a person who thinks this and does that, and believes this, and looks at things that way.” We’ve cut off the two extremes of our awareness. We’ll only take what fits into our comfort zone in the middle. So any altered state that would say, “There’s a reality other than just the gross waking state,” would be protected against by the persona with statements like, “Well, that’s ridiculous. Where’s your proof for that”? But human beings all over the planet for millennia have experienced these more subtle realms and documented them. Carl Jung made it his life’s work to try to describe these realms. So we’re not talking about the realm of idiots here. We’re talking about people who open their awareness to greater possibilities, and who are able to sit still while they take in data that doesn’t match, nor is it confined by the limitations of the reigning paradigm of western scientific empiricism.

Mind, as I was saying, has this non-stop chatterbox. It has the cluster that identifies itself with, “this is who I am”, and it has a vast reservoir of impressions of everything we have ever felt or thought, or done—particularly those things around which we did not get closure. And those keep wanting to press to the forefront of our awareness so we can understand them, come to resolution, get closure, and let them be. But long ago, the persona developed defense mechanisms that keep our awareness of those deeper things deep inside us. We’ve always got stuff in the attic and the cellar that we know not about. There may be a stench coming from somewhere now and then that we know has a source, and it’s not the parlor. So we may decide, for the sake of finding out where that unpleasantness is coming from, to start investigating the farther reaches of our home. We realize there are hidey-holes here and there that may have some stuff in them we need to find out about and even fix.

Striving for self-development and inner growth often begins with discomfort, as we try to ferret out “why am I having this emotion,” which is ego-dystonic. Where is it coming from? It feels like a foreign intrusion, but it cannot be, because it came from inside. Is it an injunction, a thought-implant from my past? Even so, I must ferret that out as well, and disown the injunction, which did not come from my true self, but was imposed upon me by my family, or society, or some not quite mature religious idea.”

So the self-exploration that may start with just a physical or emotional discomfort, or an intrusive thought, really can catapult us into a vast world of mysterious new things. The grounding, as we go on this exploration, is the awareness of our physical body, an awareness of the in-and-out regularity of our breathing. An awareness of our true thought of, “this is where the ‘I’ sits inside me,” gives a safety zone for us to be open to a lot of other, as yet unseen, material that can come forward, if we feel safe enough to allow it.

Not everybody is stable enough in their physical, respiratory, and mental awareness to allow these unknown things to come forward safely. But those who are, are in for a true adventure. And any adventure has fascinating perils and awesome insights, and can be ultimately transforming.

Jaime: How might someone experience the subtle body as compared to the physical body? Is there a way to know the difference?

Shivarpita: That’s a good question. Sometimes it’s difficult to discern. Is this an energetic experience or a physical experience? Is it in my energy system, or is it in my gross physical body? Subtle body energy experiences can feel as if they are physical because they inform the physical. I think the question is not an either/or question because the two overlap so much.

Jaime: So, it’s this problem with dualism again, the way we split things. We want to say, “something is this, or it is that,” and you’re saying there’s an overlay.

Shivarpita: Yes, an overlay. If we've injured ourselves, or a bacteria has taken hold and we feel ill, that's certainly a physical experience. There are energetic components. We know that the experience of pain is relative. If we think pain has a good purpose, it hurts less. If we think it is unjust and cruel, it hurt more. The mind itself can change our experience of pain. It's all relative, so it may not be so important that we this figure out, but rather become aware of the whole experience.

Jaime: When might it be important to know the difference?

Shivarpita: I sometimes get questions from people in some process of spiritual development who ask, "Is this a physical malady I should go to a doctor about, or is this the Holy Spirit working in my energy system?" Sometimes subtle sensations, not really having their source in the physical body, but at a much subtler level, emerge, you might say, toward the physical. So this would be a time when it may be important to know if something is strictly a physical malady. You may need to take some action to maintain health. I always say, "when in doubt, check it out." Go to an M.D. for a diagnostic, and if they say, "Oh, this is a little strange," or "It doesn't quite meet the criteria," or "I've never seen it manifest in this way," or "It looks like it could be this kind of syndrome, but I'm not sure," chances are, it has its origin in the energy system and not in the physical system.

People from spiritual traditions, some of them, and people from tribal shamanic cultures, some of them, didn't really care to differentiate the way the western mind likes to do. It was just, "This is my experience." And as the experience was described, the practitioner, whoever they may be, would understand the deeper level meaning in the experience, as if real life experience was also on the level of dream experience. The archetypes, metaphors, and symbols they used truly indicated an illness, whether it was an illness of the gross physical body, or of the energy system, or of the mind, wasn't as significant as, "What is the need of this human being? What has settled a discomfort upon the person's experience of being in the moment?"

A healing would have to happen on all levels. Modern research on how thoughts affect our physiology indicates even physical healing of a diagnosed disease can be treated through this mind-body continuum. Positive thinking changes our physiology. It changes our biochemistry. It changes our neuro-electrical circuit functions, and that changes the gross physical body. Healing is also on a continuum.

Jaime: It sounds like compartmentalization actually is the problem.

Shivarpita: Modern western doctors are tremendously skillful in dealing with the gross physical body. They are not given a whole lot of training in something even as clearly important as nutrition, much less in how the mind and energy systems affect the health and well-being of the gross physical body. They are specialists of the gross physical body. When they say to their patient, “There is nothing more we can do,” they literally mean there is nothing western medical science can do. They do not mean there is nothing more that can be done. They’ve just reached the edge of their training. But if the patient hears it as, “Now I’m a hopeless case,” then there’s a negative effect on their healing process, because the mind has become hopeless. The neurotransmitter flow is affected; the neuro-peptides are affected.

Jaime: I see there’s a question of training. But the larger issue I see in the western mind-set regarding the embodied exploration that Authentic Movement and Somatic Inquiry undertake is a prejudice. A wall of disbelief in things that are non-material has been built—against things that cannot be proved through some scientific, empirical method.

Shivarpita: That, unfortunately, is a big prejudice in our modern western culture. Ancient societies, of course, didn’t have that prejudice. They didn’t have that tight specialization. But since the establishment of the scientific method as the proof-of-truth has become the test for what is real, we’ve really limit ourselves. Scientific inquiry, as the scientific method describes it, is limited to observable, measurable data, or at least it should be easily inferable with logical, rational thought from a perspective of the waking

state, which is directly correlated with the *kosha* level of the gross physical body. So it discounts the four other sheaths. It's a different paradigm.

Jaime: As part of Pantajali Kundalini Yoga Care's service, you assess someone's Kundalini process by gathering data through accounts of that person's health, life, and spiritual history. What else is involved in your assessment process?

Shivarpita: When we receive an application from someone who wants an assessment, it includes their autobiographical report of their personal history, their health history, and their spiritual history, so that we understand on those levels, what that individual has experienced in their life. We also ask for a photograph so we can see the vehicle—see the body. The face tells us a lot. The stance tells us a lot. We ask for a photocopy of the palms of their hands. The look of a hand, just as the look of a face, tells something about what's going on inside of a person, what they've been through, who they are.

I read the histories the person sends and send a copy to my teacher who is often mostly in India. I contemplate, I read between the lines, I underline, and I let come forward a knowing, on a subtler level, of what is going on with this person as far as their Kundalini process is concerned. Ninety-nine out of one hundred times, the people who send in their histories have process. That said, a lot of the people who send in their histories, may not be aware they have process. They just want to know what's going on with this thing that felt strange.

In our culture, the word Kundalini, by colloquial definition, means there's something wild and weird and dramatic happening. It might even meet the criteria for some sort of medical or physical pathology that may need to be cured through treatment. That's not the way we view it. My teacher told me long ago, if you try to figure this out with your mind, you will never understand it. You have to contemplate scripture. You have to have your own experience. You have to observe case studies that I explain to you. You have to contemplate what a person conveys to you. Then a knowing comes.

And that, in fact, has been my experience. So I come to understand, not necessarily through the mind. And I always check it out with my teacher to be sure, because I'm still his apprentice, and it's a long learning arc. We come to understand the kind of Kundalini process an individual has. That means we see if they have a rising through Sushumna nadi, or Saraswati nadi, or Vajra nadi, and what blocks are still there—what is going on with the rising. Is it urgently trying to get the person's attention? Is there simply a karmic ripening, and this is their time to become aware that, "I actually am a seeker. I am a spiritual being. I yearn because I have not become one with the One, and that is my destiny. I must proceed consciously toward that ultimate awareness." Then I talk with the individual, usually on a phone consult, as I work all throughout North America. (Swamiji work with Europeans and such.) I explain the kind of rising they have, any other situations in the subtle body that might be affecting the rising, and they ask questions. I try to put the whole thing in a context like, "Why me? Why now?"



Most of the people I talk to came into this lifetime with a rising. That's another reason why they didn't realize they had a Kundalini rising. They didn't have the classic experience described in modern western books on Kundalini about something starting at the base of the spine and erupting in a rushing flow of light and energy upwards to the head and exploding into fireworks. You don't have to have had that to actually have Kundalini process, although that may be one way a certain kind of release of Kundalini Shakti can happen. Rather, it may be a ripening of a Kundalini process that's already been going on, but not so dramatically. And lots of Kundalini processes don't include that particular experience, but rather some combination

of the things I mentioned earlier. A Kundalini rising is a blessed event. Even an incomplete rising that may have some uncomfortable side effects is still, in a way, a

blessing, because the release has happened, and the improvement of that process can be made as long as the person is living a healthy spiritual lifestyle, and is really focused on their spiritual life and its improvement. The rising can be improved and elevated to a stable, aware state where lots of good things can happen. And gradually over time some of the discomforts the person may have been experiencing can be ameliorated.

There's always the possibility of the overlay of an actual biochemical imbalance in the brain, or an actual illness in the body; those things have to be taken into account.

Improving a Kundalini rising doesn't necessarily mean you're going to get a cure of your withered arm, or of your bipolar disorder. But you will get an improvement in your spiritual life.

Jaime: And lifestyle habits that support your health in general do improve your state of being, your state of mind.

Shivarpita: That's true. When you know that improved spiritual life requires improved lifestyle, it's like when a woman is pregnant. She tries to have a healthier lifestyle for the sake of her baby. Likewise a person that understands, I have a living spiritual process, that wants to improve itself for my benefit, happening within me. My behavior supports that or thwarts that. And I want to support it. And that means there are certain things in my lifestyle I am going to try to really get myself to do. And there are other things that I want to let atrophy. And I'm not going to make a big fight about it within myself. I have set my goal as improved spiritual life, and I know that a good diet and some amount of peaceful time everyday helps that happen. So I'm going to request of myself that I will cooperate with at least that much right now. I know some other behaviors drain my energy and make me anxious. So I'm just going to give myself a statement about how that's not good for me, that I don't need to go there. And I'll watch that atrophy over time.

So in this way, we really improve our life situation. And that improves our spiritual life as well. They cooperate with each other. Improving spiritual life, improves our everyday

life-as-lived, and improving the actual way we live our life, improves the capacity of our spirituality to advance.

Our service is designed to help people who have a strong yearning. They may not be real clear on what they yearn for, but they have a strong yearning, and know it has something to do with self-improvement and a deeper, broader awareness. And, they have the willingness to make some changes and do some practices that will improve the likelihood of this self-transformation program they're trying to put themselves on.



Our specialty is that we put all the clues together. We have a way of interpreting the data they present. We come up with a custom-designed, individualized set of practices just for them, given in the context of a two-week retreat. The retreat is given in a container with a beautiful natural surrounding and Ayurvedic cuisine. The initial retreat is certainly not more than six people, the follow-up retreats, no more than eight. There's small group instruction for spiritual education, and individual consultation sessions. During the retreat we look to see the spiritual improvement of the individual during that two-week period. Afterwards, we offer follow-up consultations to continue spiritual education, and give support and advice for what might be helpful in their spiritual life. There's the opportunity for follow-up retreats after the initial retreat, to have more intensive times for spiritual practice, consultation and education.

Jaime: So is enlightenment a physical experience?

S: We are, after all, embodied angels. On the full continuum, you cannot say the human developmental process is an experience that has nothing to do with the gross physical

body, because the experience I just described actually begins to change how our brain functions. It changes our neurotransmitter patterns, which change very subtle things about life-as-lived according to us. It is transformative on that level where wave becomes particle in the brain. And changes in the brain effect changes in the hormonal system, which affect changes on the organ level. So changes can happen in the gross physical body from spiritual development. So we can't say it's not a physical experience; it can cause *kriyas* to happen. And as we've seen, we cannot say it is only a spiritual experience.

We are full-continuum beings; change happens in all the *koshas*. Ultimately, after purifying the outer sheaths, we are able to be increasingly aware at the subtler levels. For example, we may become aware—beyond feeling our energy function, and being able to be aware of what's going on in the mind—of the higher mind, where we have wisdom and discernment and insight, and even beyond that level of mind to where we are peacefully conscious of the beyond-mind stillness of the celestial realm.



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