

The Toronto Blessing and the Kundalini Experience: a Comparative Perspective

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Samevatting

Hedendaags word die korrekte benadering jeens ander godsdienste gepropageer as dié van verdraagsaamheid. Daarmee word gepoog om aan elke godsdienste bestaansreg te verleen. Verder word gepoog om elke godsdienste in eie reg te verstaan, dus sonder vooroordele. Die benadering het egter 'n ander moontlik onverwagte aspek na die voorgrond gebring, naamlik dat daar ook ooreenkomste tussen verskillende godsdienste bestaan. Wat die saak meer interessant maak is dat van hierdie ooreenkomste sake is wat vroeër as eksklusief behorende tot die Christendom beskou is. Een so 'n interessante ooreenkoms word aangetref wanneer die sogenaamde geestelike ervarings wat gepaard gaan met die 'Toronto Blessing' in die Charismatiese beweging vergelyk word met die gepaardgaande ervarings van die 'Kundalini Awakening' in Hinduíisme. Hierdie ooreenkoms bring onvermydelik 'n skaduwee oor die aanspraak van sommige van die Charismate dat die ervarings van die 'Toronto Blessing' verklaar kan word as uitsluitlik die werk van die Heilige Gees binne 'n Christelike konteks. In hierdie studie word dit ondersoek of hierdie ervarings wat deel vorm van die Toronto Blessing, beskou kan word as eksklusief behorende tot die Christendom, of is dit ervarings wat aangebring word deur die toepassing van sekere menslike tegnieke. Die konklusie waartoe in hierdie artikel gekom word, is dat die ervarings van die Toronto Blessing nie eenvoudig allesinsluitend toegeskryf kan word aan die werk van die Heilige Gees nie.

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1. Introduction

Most Charismatics believe that the Toronto Blessing that swept through the Charismatic Movement recently is the result of Godly intervention. These charismatics also confirm the authenticity of this so-called ‘blessing’ by the quotation of certain passages from the Bible. It is further believed that these experiences accompanying the Toronto Blessing belong exclusively to the Charismatic Movement in the Christian domain. On the other hand a religious practice known as Kundalini Awakening in Hinduism is also accompanied by physical manifestations similar to those of the Toronto Blessing. It is thus problematic to claim that the experiences accompanying the Toronto Blessing belong exclusively to Charismatics. If these manifestations do not belong exclusively to one religion, how should it be understood? One suggestion, the one that will be investigated in this study, is that it could be viewed as a universal force active in all people of all religions. That is exactly what White (1990: 21) believes. He is of the opinion that the primal cosmic energy is akin, if not identical, to *chi* (Chinese), *ki* (Japanese), the Holy Spirit (Christian), and various other terms from cultures that identify a life force that is the source of all vital activity. Through this life force a psycho-physiological transformation, a ‘rebirth’ process, as natural as a physical birth, takes place. Earliest references to this transformative process can be found in the most ancient scriptures of India, the Vedas. This archaic knowledge formed the basis of the later esoteric teachings as expounded in the Upanishads, Agamas, Tantras, and Samhitas, and especially in the many texts belonging to the Hatha Yoga tradition. Knowledge of this ‘rebirth’ process was by no means confined to India. It was also an integral part of the esoteric teachings of Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese Taoism, the spirituality of certain American Indian tribes, and even of ‘first people’ such as the Bushmen of Africa. It was, however, in Hindu India that the process was most carefully studied and conceptually elaborated. There it became known as *Kundalini-bodhana* or the ‘awakening of the Kundalini’ (Sanel-la, 1987:8). St Romain (1994: 115) points out that a strong convergence can be noted between Hindu and Christian spirituality when comparing the Kundalini Awakening with Pentecostalism/Charismatic Movement.

Similar experiences to those of the Toronto Blessing are found in other religions and specifically in Hinduism. This makes it difficult to conclude that firstly such experiences are exclusive to the Charismatic Movement and secondly, that it can be viewed as an outpouring of God’s Spirit.

2. Problem statement

Taking into account the similarities between the experiences accompanying the Toronto Blessing and the Kundalini Awakening, can the Toronto Blessing be seen as an outpouring of God's Holy Spirit? In other words: can this be seen as an exclusive Christian phenomenon? Furthermore, by looking at the similarities of the Toronto Blessing and the Kundalini Awakening, is there sufficient evidence to concur that they are both in essence the same phenomenon?

3. Kundalini awakening

3.1 Kundalini awakening and its purpose

Briefly, Kundalini can be described as the personal aspect of the universal life force named *prana* by the yogic tradition. According to Tantric literature², there is a very mysterious and powerful force in the human body called *Kundalini* power or serpent power (Viswanathan, 1992: 193). The meaning of the word Kundalini must be considered in its proper context along with the word *shakti*, therefore the concept is also frequently referred to as *Kundalini-shakti*. Kundalini comes from the Sanskrit word *kundala*, which means literally coiled up like a spring or a serpent. *Shakti* comes from the root *shak* that means to have power or to be able. Taken together, these two Sanskrit words might be translated as the coiled up power or the resting potential. Kundalini implies latent power, untapped potential or cosmic power (*shakti*) (Rama 1990: 27). It is viewed as a very powerful form of psycho-spiritual energy that is curled, or coiled, at the base of the spine in the first chakra (Stutley, 1985:169) – the possibility within each person of attaining a new and more fulfilling condition of life (White 1990:16). It can also be called the 'energy of consciousness' (Sanella, 1987: 8).

In Hinduism kundalini plays an important role in addressing the basic problem of all human beings. The human being's basic problem according to Hinduism is not moral. A human being is not viewed as a sinner. He or she is not guilty of having broken God's law and therefore needing to be forgiven for sin and to be reconciled to God. The human problem in Hindu thinking is a metaphysical problem. The human being experiences

2 'Tantric literature' refers to particular scriptures of Tibet and India, certain practices and techniques taught by those scriptures (primarily involving yoga practice), and the religious and philosophical traditions based on those scriptures, all of this considered as a collective phenomenon (Brooks, 1985:1).

him- or herself to be something he or she is not, and does not experience him- or herself to be what he or she actually is. The problem of the human is a problem of 'being'. Humankind has not reached its full potential (Mangalwadi, 1989: 1 - 2). Salvation according to Hinduism in general, would be to regain that state of consciousness before a human came under the influence of *karma* and became entangled in this world of bondage. One way to obtain salvation is through yoga. Varenne (1976: 10) remarks, "... the aim of yoga is salvation, not the performance of fairground stunts". An important step in the direction of salvation is the realization of a different state of consciousness. This realization should not be understood in a cognitive sense, that a human being intellectually or mentally learns who he or she is, but in the more direct sense of seeing him- or herself for what he or she is. This perception or realization is dependent on the nervous system. The techniques of salvation are techniques of manipulating the nervous system. There are many different ways by which the nervous system can be manipulated in order to enter an altered state of consciousness³ or realize a different transcendental state of consciousness (Mangalwadi, 1989: 3). The technique essentially used in Hinduism for altering a person's state of consciousness by manipulating the nervous system is called yoga⁴. Of particular interest for this study is *Kundalini* Yoga. Kundalini yoga is one kind of yoga that is used to obtain salvation, also called salvation through the 'serpent power'. The objective of yoga is to awaken the Kundalini in the process of salvation.

How exactly Kundalini is awakened is unknown. Mangalwadi (1989:9) describes it as another power overtaking the human being, an extra-egoic power that is called 'guru's grace'. When the serpent (Kundalini) in a human being is awakened, *shakti* (energy, divine power) travels from the spine to the head and passes through the six different psychic centres. As the serpent power moves up through the different psychic centres (or chakras) it produces tremendous psychic, mystical or spiritual experiences. When the serpent power reaches the crown of the head

3 'Altered states of consciousness' (ASC) refers to unusual conditions of perception achieved by the deliberate cultivation of often abnormal mental states, states not normally experienced apart from specific religious techniques and/or occult programs (Ankerberg & Weldon 1996:17).

4 Yoga began originally as the practical aspect of the dualistic Samkhya philosophy, which taught that there is a soul and there is a body and matter. The soul and the body have become entangled and need to be separated in order to free the soul from bondage. Salvation in this regard means separating the soul from the body, achieving an isolation in which the soul will be conscious of itself and not of body and matter (Mangalwadi, 1989:3).

(seventh psychic centre), Shakti meets Shiva, and a person is said to experience the highest type of spiritual ecstasy (Washburn 1988: 187). Rama (1990: 32) explains that through this meeting of Shakti and Shiva an individual becomes fully conscious. The human being experiences divinity. No *Samadhi* (union with God) is possible if this power is not awakened.

The Kundalini energy is, however, not only awakened by yoga. Kundalini energy can also be awakened by a Guru, through what is called *shaktipat* ('descent of shakti'). This technique is also called *Siddha Mahayoga*, *Kundalini Mahayoga* or *Shaja Yoga* (spontaneous yoga) (Keutzer, s.a.: 3). St Romain (1994: 116) refers to one of the well known authorities on Kundalini, Swami Muktananda, who states that there are four ways in which the Guru can transmit shakti: by touch, word, look and thought. The most common way of transmitting *shakti* is by touching (*shaktipat*) the disciple, usually in the space between the eyebrows (the location of the sixth chakra), but also in the area of the heart or at the base of the spine.

3.2. Signs and symptoms of awakened Kundalini

When Kundalini is awakened, the person will invariably feel some involuntary movements of the body, which begin with trembling and shaking, of an intensity varying with different persons. Some experiences are accompanied by violent shaking of different kinds. Such physical movements are accompanied with a heretofore not experienced feeling of pleasure, of spiritual intoxication. These symptoms are seen as symptoms of awakened Kundalini and are followed by various signs and experiences, too many to be enumerated (Tirtha, 1990:94). Sanella (1987: 93 - 102) prefers rather to distinguish between signs (objective indications) and symptoms (subjective descriptions). He also arranges these into four basic categories – motor, sensory, interpretive, and non-physiological phenomena.

3.3. Evaluation of Kundalini

Different people view Kundalini differently. Some believe that Kundalini is a spiritual path to God-realization, whilst others believe that it is only an extraordinary mechanism and not God-realization. The proponents of Kundalini energy commonly view it as the cosmic energy dormant in the human being. Awakening of this energy brings the awareness of being one with the Ultimate. Some believe that the Kundalini experience is a matter of the evolving nervous system. There are also some who view the

Kundalini as spirit possession. Furthermore the Kundalini phenomenon is encountered in many different religions and for that reason also it is interpreted in different ways.

The Kundalini Awakening is, however, described as a 'spiritual' experience as it relates to techniques leading to psychic powers and extraordinary consciousness. It could also be called a 'religious spiritual' experience, seeing that it forms part of a particular system of faith and worship. In the light of the viewpoint of Sanella that Kundalini is not the way to God, but a way to self-realization in order to come to God-realization (1987: 122), it could be viewed as a psycho-physiological process performed by humankind.

4. The Toronto Blessing and Kundalini

4.1 *The Charismatic Movement and Toronto Blessing*

The Charismatic Movement refers to a religious movement, which began in the late 1950's and the early 1960's. The name is derived from the Greek word *charisma*, which means 'spiritual gifts', 'favour' and 'grace' (Buskey 1978:10). Webster (1969:140) defines the word charismatic as 'an extraordinary power given to a believer by the Holy Spirit for the good of the church'. The connection between the Greek word *charisma* and the Charismatic Movement is found in the emphasis the movement places on the personal experience of the Holy Spirit as well as on the variety of spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit grants in that experience (Peart & Davies, 1980: vii).

The early Christian church, as described in Acts, serves as the foundation for the charismatics' emphasis on 'Signs and Wonders'. There are three aspects to these signs, namely healings, miracles and the ability to confer gifts on others by 'laying on of hands' (Budgen, 1985:99). Charismatics aggressively pursue ecstatic experience, mystical phenomena, miraculous powers and supernatural wonders (McArthur, 1992:157). Charismatics view Christianity without the miraculous as impotent, adulterated by the Western, materialistic mindset. This viewpoint opened the door to the Toronto Blessing.

The phenomenon of the Toronto Blessing or the 'laughing revival' started on January 10, 1994, at a Vineyard church near the Pearson International Airport in Toronto. Rodney Howard-Browne, a South African minister associated with the 'Word of Faith Movement', is the recognised father of this revival.

4.2 *Characteristics of the Toronto Blessing*

The Toronto Blessing has a variety of physical characteristics, which are treated as 'manifestations of the Holy Spirit'. Not every feature will be

found in every church where the Toronto Blessing is manifested. Astbury (2000: 94), who did thorough research on the Toronto Blessing experience, points out the physical characteristics that are expressed in a multitude of vocal, kinetic or locomotor, spiritual, emotional and sensory expressions. These experiences include: Outbursts of uproarious laughter almost invariably characterise meetings affected by the Toronto Blessing. The uncontrollable laughter⁵ is also referred to as ‘holy laughter’ and is often accompanied by falling backwards toward the ground (Fruchtenbaum, s.a. : 3). Sometimes the Toronto Blessing involves a person making animal sounds⁶.

People have roared like lions, barked like dogs, brayed like donkeys, swum like fish, screeched like an eagle or even imitated Donald Duck (Richter, 1995:8). A variety of these bodily behaviours over which people had no control have been reported. Some of these actions were ‘normal’ bodily reactions, experienced in an uncontrollable fashion, such as shaking, ‘drunkenness’, falling, or being ‘slain in the spirit’, jerking, crawling, trembling and swaying. This so-called drunkenness has further been described as ‘drunkenness without having a hangover and without having expense’ (Richter 1995:8). Thousands testify to getting ‘drunk’ and their experiences are so real that some evangelical Christian leaders are convinced that this is as a result of the power of the Holy Spirit (Hanegraaff, 2001: 243). Some recipients of the Toronto Blessing feel a little giddy, others lose control of their limbs, as if drunk, and are unable to walk in a straight line or even stand, whilst otherwise being fully conscious.

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- 5 Richter (1995: 8) describes the laughter as laughter that ‘... ranges from polite giggles to roaring, hysterical, uncontrollable fits of mirth, such as a young child might display when tickled. This ‘gut-busting’ convulsive laughter disconnects the person from what is going on around them.’ Needham (1995: 4) compares the laughter with the annoying ‘laughing machines’ found in amusement arcades.
- 6 Astbury (2000: 227) reports that one of her respondents began to screech like an eagle. Dupont (1995: 7) reports that two people started to bark like dogs. The barks were interspersed with howling noises like wolves, or possibly dogs baying at the moon. Another person was screeching like a cat. Beverley (1995: 69) heard one man making noises like a cow. Other people were making noises (oinking) like pigs and crowing like roosters. The lion roaring is said to be prophetic in that it signals a powerful word from Jesus, the lion of the tribe of Judah. In one case, it has been reported that someone was ‘swimming in the spirit’ as he was lying on his belly and behaving like a fish (Fruchtenbaum, s.a.:3).
- 7 Wright (1996:86) refers to the first Newsletter issued by Toronto Airport Vineyard, March 1994 vol 1, which reported that “Some are so drunk with the Spirit that they have to be helped from the meeting and driven home. Randy Clark, one of the leaders at Toronto Airport Vineyard, was reported to be drunk two or three times” (Wright , 1996:86).

Before or after people fall – ‘slain in the spirit’, as a result of the blessing their bodies may twitch or shake uncontrollably. This may sometimes resemble an epileptic seizure. Some recipients of the blessing roll around on the floor uncontrollably while experiencing the revival phenomena. Some recipients of the Toronto Blessing reported sensory manifestations, for example numbness, as well as sensations of heat and light (Astbury, 2000).

Other respondents reported the experience of seeing a bright light and feeling a sensation of heat over them (Huima, s.a.: 2). Recipients of the Toronto Blessing sometimes describe their experience, in impersonal terms, as being ‘surrounded by the light of God’ as being ‘transparent with light’, as ‘resting under the cloak of his glory’, as a ‘state of blissful abandonment’ or like ‘electric current’. Sometimes recipients report out-of-body experiences⁸.

4.3 Comparison between manifestations of Kundalini and the Toronto Blessing

Some theologians and other Christians believe that a comparison exists between the manifestations of the so-called Kundalini Awakening and the Toronto blessing manifestations.

Huima (s.a.:1); Collie (s.a.:1-6) and Kuglin (1996:118-119) explain that the Kundalini experience and the Toronto Blessing are almost identical in at least the following aspects:

- both involve the very same bodily manifestations;
- both are distributed in the very same way, namely by a touch or by some other method from one already ‘in fire’. The phenomenon is very contagious;
- the reasons for the bodily manifestations are the same;
- the same initial mental and bodily condition is needed to receive the experience;
- both consider the transfer of the power to be a central issue which is subject to scientific considerations.

The similarities are shown in more detail in the tables below.

8 Belma Vardy reported seeing her self ‘walking in a lush green pasture, hand in hand with Jesus’ (Chevreau 1994:179-180).

Outward manifestations

The outward signs can be grouped into mental signs, vocal signs and physical signs. Mental signs can include visions, ranging from ecstatically blissful to frightful. Vocal signs can include spontaneous vocal expression, ranging from singing to the making of animal sounds. Physical signs range from trembling to certain yoga postures.

<p>Kundalini experience</p> <p>Laughing and weeping are as unintentional and uncontrollable as hiccoughs (Collie, s.a.:4).</p>	<p>Toronto Blessing</p> <p>Uncontrollable laughter (Collie, s.a.:4). Astbury (2000:223-224) describes it as loud, uncontrollable laughter. The stimulus of the laughter is unknown and it seems to take the form of a spontaneous outburst.</p>
<p>Singing or reciting mantras (Huima, s.a.:2).</p>	<p>Inspired singing in the spirit as well as other inspired utterances including tongues (Huima, s.a.:2).</p>
<p>Animal sounds like those of a frog, a lion, or like jackals, a dog and tigers (Tirtha, 1990: 96).</p>	<p>Animal sounds include roaring like lions, barking like dogs, braying like donkeys, groaning like angry bulls, growing roosters and gobbling turkeys (Richter, 1995:8-9; Fruchtenbaum, s.a.:3 and Kuglin, 1996: 112 - 114).</p>
<p>Involuntary trembling and shaking of the body occur and the body can also drop to the ground. Postures of yoga are involuntarily performed as if under the influence of some spirit. Also numbness in the limbs is experienced (Sanella, 1987:94; Tirtha 1990:95).</p>	<p>A person's body starts to twitch, tremble and shake uncontrollably before or after the person's body has dropped to the ground (Astbury, 2000: 233). The 'Toronto Twitch' as it is known, is occasionally associated with pain, and has been compared with labour pains. Strange postures in general can be performed such as people moving their bodies rapidly and rhythmically, even erotically, or making karate like chopping actions with their fore arms (Richter, 1995:8; Huima, s.a.:2).</p>

<p>The following emotions might be experienced: ecstasy, bliss, peace, love, devotion, joy and cosmic harmony (Sanella, 1987:98). A person can also feel intoxicated without taking a drug, or feels like one drunk with divinity (Tirtha, 1990: 96)</p>	<p>Inward joy is experienced as well as laughter that causes the person to leap with joy (Roberts, 1994: 129; Richter, 1995:8). A person may also feel as if drunk and unable to walk in a straight line or even stand, whilst otherwise fully conscious. This has been described as drunkenness without a hangover and without expense (Richter, 1995:8; Costella, s.a.:4; Astbury, 2000:237).</p>
<p>An altered state of consciousness is experienced. A person may experience a consciousness that differs from mere aloofness or anxious withdrawal in as much as the observer, self, experiences itself in opposition to the observed mental activities. A person may also experience a feeling that he or she has been divinely chosen for some great mission and is receiving instructions from gods 1995: (Sanella, 1987:98- 99).</p>	<p>The Toronto Blessing generally reflects what is reported to be deeply meaningful, ecstatic religious experience. It occurs as a result of altered states of consciousness⁹ (Dixon, 1994:4). It may also be accompanied by ‘prophetic insights’ into the future, ‘prophetic’ announcements from God, deep insight into one’s own or another’s problems, visions and ‘out of body’ mystical experiences (Richter, 1995 : 9)</p>
<p>Aches also accompany this experience. Painful sensations are often reported in the head, the eyes, the spine, and other parts of the body, racing heart beat, and pressure within the skull (Sanella, 1987:97; Collie, s.a.:2).</p>	<p>The ‘Toronto Twitch’ referring to an experience in the region of the stomach, can occasionally be quite painful, and has been compared to labour pains (Richter, 1995:8).</p>
<p>A variety of light experiences may occur. These experiences include: visions of red light, white and black spots, and a</p>	<p>A characteristic of the Toronto Blessing is described as a ‘thick atmosphere’ in the Brownsville Assembly of God. The ‘thick</p>

9 Dixon (1994), in his book *Signs of Revival: Detailed historical research throws light on today’s move of God’s Spirit*, makes detailed comments on altered states of consciousness in chapter five ‘Medical Perspectives on manifestations’.

<p>lentil-sized ‘blue pearl’ in which the matrix of the universe is seen. A person may also see an aura or halo of light around the enlightened person (Sanella, 1987:96).</p> <p>A feeling of heat or cold flushes. Sensations of temperature extremes, affecting either the whole body or parts of it, also described as hot or cold flushes, are experienced (Sanella, 1987: 95; Collie, s.a.: 2; Huima, s.a.: 2).</p>	<p>atmosphere’ is described as ‘fog’ in the church. It is also described as a blue haze that appears in the place (Costella, s.a.:4).</p> <p>A person also experiences heat or cold in the body. Some have described this as an electric current that goes through them making them tingle all over. Others describe it as a form of liquid that flows through their body (Richter, 1995: 7; Costella, s.a.: 3).</p>
<p>Contagiousness of the Phenomena</p>	
<p>Kundalini experience</p>	<p>Toronto Blessing</p>
<p>According to Huima (s.a.:3) there can be no doubt that shakti is contagious. The presence of a person whose shakti is strongly active can awaken the shakti of those around him or her.</p>	<p>The ‘anointing’ is known to be contagious by nature and is easily transferred from one to another. Some charismatics have referred to it as a ‘spiritual virus’ (Huima, s.a.: 1).</p>
<p>Outward method</p>	
<p>Kundalini experience</p>	<p>Toronto Blessing</p>
<p>The awakening of Kundalini happens basically by means of two ways. One approach requires initiation by a guru and relies on the technique called ‘shaktipat’, also called: Siddha Mahayoga, Kundalini yoga or Sahaja yoga. Kundalini could also be awakened by means of yoga or meditation (Huima, s.a.: 3). A guru can transmit shakti in four different ways; namely by touch, word, look and thought (St Romain, 1994: 116).</p>	<p>Touching people, blowing over them, speaking a ‘word’ over them or even just looking at them is exactly what happens with this experience (Huima, s.a.:3; Collie, s.a.: 5).</p>

A clear resemblance is also visible in the distributors of this power and the requirement for the receiver. *The Kundalini experience* can be imparted through shaktipat, in other words, by those who's Kundalini is already awakened. Because shaktipat is viewed as a science, only those instructed in that science can give it (Huima, s.a.:4). The same basic rule applies for the Toronto Blessing it can easily be transferred to another person from one 'already on fire'. Short courses are also conducted to direct intercessors before they minister to people.

Therefore it is desirable in the Kundalini experience that the guru must be empowered to give shaktipat only by his own guru and that he has been trained in an unbroken lineage back to a great master who was fully aware of the science of shaktipat. In this way some quality control is maintained (Huima, s.a.:4). This is much more individualistic than the Toronto Blessing though, which only ever seems to occur in large groups, however the transference is believed to be by a specific person in both cases. The method used to distribute the Toronto Blessing differs from the traditional Christian view regarding intercessors. Traditional intercessors focus on God and His work; no control, surveillance or intervention from people is needed. In the Toronto Blessing the intercessors are instructed to watch people and their bodily manifestations to determine what the spirit is doing. In this way the Toronto Blessing resembles a science more than the traditional intercession (Huima, s.a.:4). In meetings associated with the Toronto Blessing, usually only appointed ministers are allowed to pray for people. This illustrates the control of leaders over the meetings (Huima, s.a.:4).

The requirement to receive this power in the Kundalini experience is complete surrender to this force. As a result of Kundalini's awakening spontaneous purifying movements, called *kriyas*, occur. The unique perspective of Siddha Mahayoga is that because Kundalini is an intelligent force, it will upon awakening, naturally direct the practice of the student. The receiver of the Toronto Blessing is also asked to surrender to the 'power of the Holy Spirit' and to receive the good work of God without questioning.

To reach the point of total surrender to shakti takes practice. Some aids in cultivating surrender are chanting and selfless service. Through these practices a person's heart is opened and made more susceptible to the influence of shakti (Huima, s.a.:5). Chanting spiritual songs is also done abundantly in meetings associated with the Toronto Blessing. Through these songs people are moved to a light trance and are so enabled to receive spiritual experiences (Huima, s.a.:5).

4.4 Similarities between Pentecostalism/Charismatics and Kundalini

St Romain (1994: 115) further points out the following similarities:

In Siddha Yoga, Kundalini is awakened through the grace of the Master or Guru. The Guru transfers spiritual energy to the disciple through a graced touch called a 'shaktipat'. The Guru touches the disciple between the eyes on the forehead. This area between the eyes is also known as the area of the third eye (spiritual eye) or the sixth chakra. The transfer of energy by the guru is done through this energy point (sixth chakra). The Guru awakens the dormant Shakti, by transmitting his power into a disciple. The Guru's task, however, is not only to awaken Kundalini; he must also control and regulate the process until the disciple attains the ultimate realization of Self; he also helps the disciple to remove all blocks which hinder spiritual development. The Guru can release the Kundalini by means of touch, word, look and thought. Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh would daily go into trances, falling down and entering into super-conscious bliss, having visions, and 'out of body' experiences. Rajneesh would transfer his 'guru grace' to his followers by a touch or sometimes by a wave of the hand. Uncontrollable laughter or weeping, convulsions, roaring, barking, hissing and the like, would accompany the transfer. His followers would find themselves involuntarily hyper-ventilating to cool off (Church of the living word, 1996:8)

In Pentecostal Christianity, the transmission of spiritual energy is evident. This transmission also takes place by means of the laying on of hands by the pastor, mostly on the forehead between the eyes. The practice of 'laying on of hands' frequently results in spiritual gifts or charisms such as speaking in tongues, prophesying and healing. Great love for other people is a possible result, as well as spending more time in prayer. These and other gifts come spontaneously as the Spirit prompts the believer.

With the laying on of hands in Pentecostal/ Charismatic meetings spontaneous asanas, similar to the Kundalini arousal, take place. People fall to the floor and shake or roll, and animal noises and uncontrollable laughter have been recorded in most of the Toronto Blessing meetings. This phenomenon is known as 'slaying in the Spirit' or 'resting in the Spirit'. According to St Romain (1994: 118), people who have experienced this phenomenon describe it as a sense of feeling overwhelmed by God's power and love, feeling moved to lie still in a semi-trance state as an incredibly blissful energy races through their bodies. Some people report healings in memory and body as a result of the so-called resting in the Spirit.

5. Evaluation of the Toronto Blessing and Kundalini

What makes this evaluation even more difficult is the fact that in different religious settings similar manifestations take place. The resemblance could very easily lead to the conclusion that the Kundalini Awakening and the Toronto Blessing are the same experience and thus brought on by the same force. Both experiences could thus be the result of one of the following: firstly, they could be the result of God manifesting Himself to humankind in different religious settings; secondly, they could be the awakening of the same physical and psychological energy residing inside human beings, brought on by certain methods such as hypnotism in different settings. Thirdly, they could be the result, as some claim, of occult power.

The first possibility seems problematic. From a traditional Christian viewpoint¹⁰ that God reveals himself in accordance with Scripture, the interpretation of these manifestations as the work of God are problematic seeing that no clear confirmation can be found in Scripture. Secondly, these manifestations could possibly be the result of occult power. The final possibility, namely that it is the same energy residing inside human beings that is awakened, seems to be the most likely. Based on what tantric literature teaches about the awakening of Kundalini, it seems possible that with the Toronto Blessing energy is also awakened and very similar results obtained. The same conditions or preparations seem to apply, namely the emptying of the mind in order to move into an altered state of consciousness as well as the transmission of energy from the guru or pastor. The authors hold the same opinion as Floor (1990) that this process is triggered in the brain and that the bodily results are the secondary reverberations of primary activity in the brain, that project outward into the body via the peripheral nerves. The energy is thus dormant not at the spine of the human being but in the brain. The sensing of the experience, although it seems to have started at the spine, is because the brain's activities are felt directly and instantly, in the same sense as any other bodily sensation, because of the speed with which messages are carried from the brain to the tip of the spine via nerve pathways.

Furthermore, these manifestations seem to be the result of a desire on the side of humankind to receive them. In both the Kundalini experience as well as in the Toronto Blessing, humans mostly obtain these experiences

10 Some Christian denominations acknowledge God's revelation in nature as well as in Scripture.

by means of a certain methodology. In the Kundalini experience it is through the 'shaktipat' of the guru or through meditation or yoga. Some indications exist that in isolated cases it might be a spontaneous experience. With the Toronto Blessing, people are also deliberately seeking the experience of the Toronto Blessing. Many people have travelled from far, even from abroad, to experience it (Porter, 1995: 115 - 116). The pastor in some form or manner also transmits it. It can be through a spoken word, a prayer, a gesture or 'laying on of hands'. In both cases an expectation of the experience is created within the potential recipient.

In both instances clear indications also exist that people receive these experiences while in an altered state of consciousness. Obtaining such a state of consciousness seems to be inevitably necessary before receiving the Kundalini Awakening as well as the Toronto Blessing. Certain psychological processes such as hypnosis and suggestion could also produce these altered states of consciousness. An altered state of consciousness is not an unfamiliar phenomenon in the Christian tradition¹¹. Reference to such states can be found in the Bible. What is important is how this altered state of consciousness is brought about. In the Bible very little is found about an individual who experienced an altered state of consciousness. It seems however to take place in the normal way of life and as a result of God's direct intervention, whereas other altered states of consciousness are brought about methodologically through means such as meditation, deprivation and yoga.

6. Conclusion

The fact that some kind of 'energy' resides inside human beings cannot be denied. Different opinions about its origin and description exist, however. In Hinduism it is referred to as Kundalini energy. If it is assumed that the 'energy' referred to equals the spirit or breath imparted to human beings by God, it could be further argued from a Christian point of view that some kind of 'energy' does indeed reside inside human beings. The purpose of this impartation of God's breath or spirit is to give life to a human being. Genesis 2 verse 7 states, 'And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.' God breathed his spirit or breath into the human being and the human being became a 'breathing creature' (nâphash). When the human being dies, scripture informs us that the

11. 2 Corinthians 12: 2 Paul speaks of an experience that points to an altered state of consciousness. Acts 10: 10 also reports Peter experiencing an altered state of consciousness.

breath or spirit returns to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12: 7). The question could be asked: but is the spirit of human beings not the Holy Spirit residing in them? A distinction must be made here between a living human being and the Holy Spirit. Apart from the physical body of a human being, an inner being or a spiritual being is identified. This distinction is found in a number of scripture verses for instance 2 Corinthians 4: 16 states: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day." "For what man knows the things of a man, except the spirit of man which is in him?" (1 Corinthians 2: 11). Acts 17:16 reports that Paul was stirred in his spirit. Thus from scripture it is ascertained that the human being consists of an earthly body and a spiritual being. The Holy Spirit is believed to be the third person in the Godhead and is involved in the believer's life in different areas. Certainly the most important fact is that the Holy Spirit indwells the believer, signifying that the believer belongs to God (Romans 8: 9). The Holy Spirit also testifies with the spirit of the believing human being that he or she is a Christian (Romans 8: 16; Ephesians 1: 13 - 14).

It is clear from a Christian viewpoint that the purpose of this God given breath ('energy') is to give life. From the viewpoint that human beings are created by God and thus receive this life giving 'energy', it seems that the same 'energy' can also be manipulated for other purposes, such as 'so-called' enlightenment or higher spiritual attainment. Christianity, however, is based on the relationship between a human being and a personal God. The Christian's spiritual state does not depend on human effort but on the continuous transforming work of the Holy Spirit. No mention is made of such practices as the awakening of some kind of 'energy'. But is the awakening of Kundalini not the same as the accounts of Pentecostal phenomena described in the New Testament, as suggested by St Romain (1994)? The accounts referred to by St Romain, however, clearly signify Godly intervention rather than human effort in obtaining supernatural manifestations. For example, in the account of Simon Magnus, Acts 8: 9 - 24; he discovered that the manifestations accompanying the preaching of the Gospel could not be obtained through human effort or means. Also, the gifts of the Holy Spirit in I Corinthians 12 cannot be attributed to Kundalini Awakening. In this case once again the Holy Spirit does not bring the spiritual gifts into action by human effort but as He wills (1 Corinthians 12: 11).

The main difference between the Kundalini Awakening and the Charismatic phenomena is that the Kundalini Awakening is mostly

brought on by human efforts and techniques, whereas the Charismatic phenomena and manifestations as recorded in the bible are the result of the Holy Spirit intervening as he wills. To suggest that the Holy Spirit could be manipulated by a certain methodology is not only to undermine God's sovereignty but also to suggest that human beings can prescribe to God.

This causes the authors to conclude that the God given breath ('energy') residing in all human beings, when 'awakened' or stimulated through certain techniques, can probably produce certain manifestations. It can be utilised to bring forth distorted manifestations if it is employed without considering God's purpose. To illustrate this point, a musical instrument can be used to make unpleasant noises but at the same time it can produce beautiful, harmonious sounds if played correctly. The development of technology is sufficient indication that human beings have enormous potential. Unfortunately this human potential can also lead to the destruction of the human being. Human beings are created with their own will and can therefore live their lives as they see fit. From a Christian viewpoint, however, God has given guidelines for living one's life in order to attain God's purpose for it.

Therefore, the manifestations of the Toronto Blessing cannot be described as an all inclusive Godly intervention belonging exclusively to the Charismatics further resulting in the questionability of the Christian authenticity of this phenomenon

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