

[Secrets from the Kularnava Tantra](#)

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SCRIPTURE

## Secrets from the Kularnava Tantra

Everyone needs a hero, a model to look up to and follow, a master of his art, a champion in his field, one who sets the standards of aspiration. These days, heroes are often rock stars, athletes or actors, but there is, indeed, a class of souls of a higher calling. For century upon century, Hindu society has been uniquely inwardly oriented, ever intrigued with the deeper realities of existence, fascinated with the search for Truth, the control of mind and realization of the Self, God, within, through the practice of yoga. Thus, it honors the great rishis, gurus, saints and mahatmas as the greatest heroes of all. These are beings who walk with God and hold truth in the palm of their hand, who seem to know everything, because they do, because they have discovered the source of all knowing.

Though perhaps rare, such awakened beings still walk among us today. All too often amid the pace of modern life, humans are too busy to recognize and honor these pure souls until after they have departed this earthly stage. Only in their absence is their greatness apparent to many, in the vacuum of their prodigious presence, which had filled with faith and courage the voids of doubt and discouragement for everyone they touched. Around 1150 ce , a scripture was recorded, called the Kularnava Tantra, that pours forth exaltation to such

spiritual lights and admonishes seekers to raise slumbersome eyelids and recognize their glory. Among its messages is that the guru is like a deep well from which one can and should draw forth wisdom and blessings, taking advantage of his rare presence, his radiant darshan, to advance oneself on the spiritual path. This tantra of guru devotion and protocol gives guidance that is as practical and poignant today as it was when first scribed on palm leaves and etched in stone long, long ago.

The Kularnava Tantra is an important and authoritative text of the Shakta Agamic tantra tradition and a major statement of Hindu spiritual thought. It focuses unequivocally on the quest for God Realization calling on us to leave aside our attachments, our desires, our misapprehensions and to live a divine life, a holy life, on this Earth and seek for the Self within.

The original, first translated from the Sanskrit and published in English in 1878, contains 2,058 verses on many profound subjects, of which a small fraction dealing with the guru-shishya (teacher-disciple) relationship are excerpted here. This translation was completed in 1916 by Sri M.P. Pandit and Sir Arthur Avalon in north India. The selected verses have been slightly edited for this presentation.

The scripture opens with a single question posed by Shakti, the Mother of the universe, as to how all souls may attain release from sorrow, ignorance and birth. Lord Siva answers, speaking out the verses of the Kularnava Tantra.

## Foreword

### Worship of The Holy Feet

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The uninitiated may wonder why the feet of holy ones are so reverently worshiped in the Hindu faith. According to tradition, the totality of the satguru is contained within his feet. All nerve currents terminate there. The vital points of every organ of his bodies inner astral, inner mental and soul are there. Touch the feet and we touch the spiritual master.

Mystics teach that the big toe on the left foot exudes the most grace. The left leg is the revealing grace, and the big toe of that leg connects to the guru's pituitary gland, the entrance to the door of Brahm, deep within the sahasrara chakra where, in contemplation, he merges with Siva. The vibration of the satguru can be subtly felt through gently touching his sandals. In doing so, one tunes in to the feet of the preceptor's physical, pranic, astral, mental and soul bodies.

In deep spirituality there is little presumption of ego. All that one hopes for, all that one prays for, all that one strives for is to touch the Divine in the most modest of ways. Worship of the feet epitomizes this humble attitude. Devotees worship the feet of the guru as the feet of God Siva, the attainable attainment, seeking to partake of, absorb into themselves, the vibration of their guru, ultimately to become like their guru, who has realized his oneness with God Siva.

Our beloved Satguru, Sivaya Subramuniaswami wrote, "Practices to advance spiritual unfoldment include prostrating before God, Gods and guru, full body, face down, arms and hands outstretched, and in that act, total giving up, giving up, giving up, giving up. What are these devoted ones giving up? By this act they are giving the lower energies to the higher energies. It is a merger, a blending. When one is performing this traditional devotional act, awakening true prapatti, it is easy to see the lower energies from the base of the spine, the muladhara chakra, rising, rising, rising up the spine through all six chakras above it and out through the top of the head. It is transmuting, changing the form of, the base energies which breed conflict and resistance, 'mine and yours' and 'you and me,' division, insecurity and separateness, into the spiritual energies of 'us and we,' amalgamation, security, togetherness. Once the giving up of the lower is total body and face on the ground, hands outstretched before the image of God, Gods or guru - those energies are surrendered into the higher chakras within the devotee, and it is a blissful moment, into the consciousness of us and ours, 'we and oneness,' and inseparable love, thus claiming their individuality, not as a separate thing, but as a shared oneness with all. Thereafter, these devoted ones, having been transformed, are able to uplift others, to harmonize forces around them that they work with day after day after day, year after year after year. This total surrender, prapatti, is the meaning of Siddhanta. This is the true meaning of Vedanta. The combination of both, and the pure practice of prapatti as just described brings out from within the deeper meanings of Vedanta, the Vedic philosophy, without having to depend on the path of words, lectures and debates.

Devotees are admonished to choose their guru carefully,

forsaking all previous beliefs, religious inclinations and aspirations and adopting his revelation of the Sanatana Dharma as their own. Therefore, choose your spiritual model carefully, because you are going to become like that model if you worship that guru's feet. There is yet another meaning of the holy feet. When a person walks upon the Earth, only the feet touch the ground. Similarly, when God and guru contact the Earth, it is the esoteric feet, the lowest part of consciousness, which make that contact. This, then, becomes the locus of communion with the Divine. In India the greatest of all initiations is for the satguru to place his holy feet upon the worthy disciple's head.

From Chapter One

Guru Devotion

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Lord Siva said: There is One Real. Call it Siva. This Parabrahman is formless, stainless, one without a second, changeless, beyond the highest. This Mahesvara is all-knowing, all-doing, sovereign of all, self-luminous, without beginning or end. All embodied souls, jivas, all the born creatures, are portions of Me, like sparks of the fire. But human birth is the most important, for it is then that one becomes awake, aware of his state of bondage and the necessity of release. It is then that one is in a position to take steps for his liberation from bondage's hold.

Humans have a self-will and are not totally subject to the

impulses and drives of nature, as are other creatures. It is only on this Earth and that, too, in a human body endowed with a soul that one can choose one's path for spiritual progress. But not all are aware of the precious opportunity afforded by human birth, which is truly the ladder to Liberation. The Self is to be realized only here in this life. If here you do not find it and work out the means for your Liberation, where else is it possible? It is possible nowhere else. It has to be worked out by yourself from within yourself.

The world you reach after the physical body is shed is determined by the level of consciousness reached while in the body. So, as long as the body lasts, exert yourself towards the goal of Liberation. Remember, the physical body does not last forever. Age prowls like a leopard; diseases attack like an enemy. Death waits not to see what is done or not done. Before the limbs lose their vitality, before adversities crowd in upon you, take to the auspicious path.

Therefore, choose, then worship a satguru. Worship his feet. Cherish the very sandals (paduka) which hold his feet. All knowledge is founded on those paduka. Remember and cherish those paduka, which yield infinitely more merit than any number of observances, gifts, sacrifices, pilgrimages, mantra-japa and rituals of worship.

It is these feet, when remembered, that protect in times of distress, danger or calamity. Study, remembrance, knowledge, donations, sacrifices and worship are truly done by him who ever remembers the satguru's feet. Look toward the direction in which the lotus feet of the satguru lie and bow down to

them every day with devotion. There is no mantra higher than that of his feet, no merit higher than his worship.

All fear of distress, grief, avarice, delusion and bewilderment exist only as long as one does not take refuge in the satguru. All wanderings in the ocean of births, called samsara, fraught with grief and impurity, last as long as one has no devotion to a holy Sivaguru. As the boon-giving guru gives the mantra in contentment and beatitude, try to please him with devotion, wealth, your very life.

The shishya who has complete devotion, steady and constant, what has he to worry about? Moksha is in the hollow of his palm. For him who remembers, "My satguru is Siva Himself who grants Liberation, fulfillment is not far off. As the steady devotion for the satguru grows, so grows one's knowledge. The sacred paduka of the guru are the ornament. Remembrance of his name is japa. Carrying out his command is duty. Service to him is worship.

From Chapter Two

Guru Service

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Why the pains of long pilgrimage? Why observances that emaciate the body? All the fruit anticipated from such austerities can be easily obtained by motiveless service to the holy satguru. Therefore, bear your karma for the sake of the

guru. Acquire wealth for the sake of the guru. Exert yourself for the guru, regardless of your own life.

Service to the satguru and his mission is fourfold: service with your own hands, service by wealth or through others, service by spiritual enthusiasm and service by happy feeling. Service done with devotion, according to one's means, has the same merit whether little or much, whether by the rich or by the poor.

With your mind dedicated to selfless service, please the satguru. The fruit obtained is the same as from great rituals. Such service invites the grace of the Mother of the Universe.

In the service of the guru, either expressed or unexpressed by him, do not be unmindful. Be always in service of the guru, ever in his presence, giving up desire and anger, humble and devoted, lauding in spirit, upright in doing his work.

If service is accompanied by santosha (happy devotion), it brings with it all fulfillment. Sins dissolve away and merit grows by leaps and bounds.

From Chapter Three

Guru Power

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When the entire universe is looked on as pervaded by the Sivaguru, what mantra can fail to achieve its purpose for the shishya? When the satguru is present, no tapas is necessary, neither by fasting nor observances, neither pilgrimage nor purificatory bath. What he speaks is as scripture.

Feel one with your guru and not separate from him, and do good to all as your own. Whatever is beneficial to yourself, term that beneficial to him. Whether moving or standing, sleeping or waking, performing japa or making offerings, carry out only the injunctions of your guru with your inner being dwelling in him.

As in the vicinity of fire, butter gets melted, so in the proximity of the holy Sivaguru all bad karmas dissolve. As lighted fire burns up all fuel, dry and moist, so the glance of the Sivaguru burns up in a moment the karmas of the shishya. As the heap of cotton blown up by a great storm scatters in all the ten directions, so the heap of negative karmas is blown away by the compassion of the Sivaguru. As darkness is destroyed at the very sight of the lamp, so is ignorance destroyed at the sight of the holy Sivaguru.

I tell you now that there can be no Liberation without diksha, initiation. Nor can there be initiation without a preceptor. Hence the dharma, the shakti and the tradition come down the line of masters, called parampara.

Without a satguru all philosophy, knowledge and mantras are fruitless. Him alone the Gods praise who is the satguru,

keeping active what is handed down to him by tradition. Therefore, one should seek with all effort to obtain a preceptor of the unbroken tradition, born of Supreme Siva.

From Chapter Four

Guru Nature

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Lord Siva said: At the root of dhyana, meditation, is the form of the satguru. At the root of puja, worship, is the feet of the satguru. At the root of mantra, incantation, is the word of the satguru. At the root of all Liberation is the grace of the satguru. In this world all holy actions are rooted in the satguru. Therefore, he is to be constantly served with devotion for fulfillment.

For the shishya who devotedly remembers, "My guru is actually Siva Himself who grants Liberation, fulfillment is not far off. Look upon your satguru as mother, as father, as Siva. The satguru, it is to be declared in unmistakable terms, is the very Lord Himself. To approach the satguru, to worship the satguru, is to approach Siva, to worship Siva.

Why should I choose to manifest through the satguru? Why should I not act directly? I am really all-pervading, subtle, above the mind, with and without form, imperishable, of the form of ether, eternal and infinite. How can such a One be

worshiped? That is why, out of compassion for My creations, I take the form of the satguru, and when so worshiped in devotion grant Liberation and fulfillment.

Because I have no binding form that is perceived by the human eye, I protect the shishya, revealing the dharma in the form of the guru. Therefore, the satguru is none other than the Supreme Siva enclosed in a human skin. Within him I walk the Earth concealed.

To the jivas, embodied souls laden with beclouding karmas, the satguru appears to be merely human. But to them whose karmas are auspicious, meritorious, the satguru appears as Lord Siva Himself. The less fortunate do not recognize the satguru as the embodiment of Supreme Truth even when face to face with him, like the blind before the arisen sun.

But verily, the satguru is none other than Sadasiva. This is the truth. I Myself am the Truth. Otherwise, who is it who gives fulfillment and Liberation? There is no difference between God Siva and Satsivaguru. It is ignorance to make such a distinction.

Gurus are of six kinds: 1) preraka is the "impeller" who instigates interest that leads to initiation; 2) suchaka is the "indicator" who describes the sadhana in which interest has been awakened; 3) vachana is the "explainer" who describes the process and its object; 4) darshaka is the "shower" who definitely points out the working and aims of the path in greater detail; 5) shikshaka is the "trainer" who actually

instructs how to do sadhana; 6) bodhaka is the "illuminator," the satguru who lights in the shishya the lamp of spiritual knowledge. He is the cause of the other five.

The Vedas and shastras are many, but life is very short. Moreover, in this life there are millions of hindrances. Therefore, one should acquire only the essence of all shastras, just as the swan takes the milk out of water with which it has been mixed.

Neither the Vedas nor the philosophies are causes of Liberation. Realization alone is the cause of Liberation. Better it is to bear even a single life-inspiring great mantra taught by a satguru than to carry a load of lifeless blocks of wood which are various forms of worldly knowledge.

Only from the mouth of a satguru can a jiva realize the one immutable Brahman which has been taught by Siva Himself. Such knowledge cannot be attained through the study of even ten million shastras.

Many are the gurus who, like lamps, offer light in a house. But rare is the satguru who illumines the village like the sun. Many are the gurus who are proficient to the utmost in the Vedas and shastras. But rare is the satguru who has attained Parasiva. Many are the gurus on Earth who give what is other than the Self. But rare is the satguru who brings the atma to light. Many are the gurus who rob shishyas of their wealth. But rare is the satguru who removes the afflictions of the shishya.

He is the satguru in whose very presence there flows the supreme bliss called ananda. The intelligent person will choose such a one as satguru and none other.

From Chapter Six

## Guru Protocol

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When entering the presence of a Satguru, be calm of mind and devoted in the extreme. Dress traditionally or conservatively. Leave outside your sandals, umbrella, fan, make-up and other stimulating things.

If the spiritual preceptor speaks harshly, take it as a benediction. Whatever objects of enjoyment there be, offer these first to the guru and enjoy only what he leaves as prasadam.

To the satguru you shall not command or talk to as an equal. Do not enter into argument with those who deny your guru, nor even talk to them. Avoid them from afar. Do not sit in their company at any time. They are to be shunned.

What you hear elsewhere regarding mantras, tantras, sadhana, spiritual advice and scriptures, report to him and accept only what is approved by your guru, and reject what is not.

When he bestows confidential knowledge, do not speak of it to others, for sacred is secret. To talk of it is to weaken the guru-shishya understanding.

Even your own wealth you shall utilize only after mentally offering it to your satguru.

Do not lend your ear to any censure of your guru. Where such criticism appears, close your ears, leave immediately and chant his name to counteract.

Do not disrespect the retinue of a satguru. Do not criticize his traditions, whether based on the Vedas, Agamas or other scriptures.

In the presence of a satguru, take care to avoid dozing, harsh speech, ordering others, frivolous laughter, uncontrolled weeping, loosening or tightening of the clothes, informal or immodest dress, stretching of the legs toward him; debate, expressing hatred or blame. Avoid contortion of the body, whistling, striking of the hands in command, amusements, playful wrestling, smoking and the like. Such acts invoke the asuras in dreams and visions and invite calamity in your life.

In the presence of the satguru remain poised. Do not enter with desire. Serve him looking at his face. Do what he says. Honor wholeheartedly what he says and, when understood, do it without questioning.

Intensely devoted to the satguru, do not commission others for his work if you yourself can do it, even though you may have any number of attendants. Do not be proud because of class, learning or wealth. Knowing the mind of the satguru, be by his side, humble and cheerful of countenance. Should you do anything in the presence of a satguru which is normally prohibited, it is extremely blameworthy. Do not, therefore, out of disregard, hear with the face turned away what the satguru says, whether it is beneficial or otherwise.

To speak falsehood before the satguru is to commit the highest sin. In the absence of the satguru who is away or in distress, do not abandon him. Go wherever he commands.

When he stands below, do not yourself stand above. Do not walk or drive in front of him. Do not sit when he stands up. Do not sleep in his presence. Unless directed by him, do not speak, do not read, do not sing, do not eat there. Do nothing without bowing to him. Never fail to carry out his injunctions.

In the presence of your guru's guru, bow to your own guru mentally. Should you eat food without first mentally offering it to your satguru, it becomes impure. Do not approach him empty-handed. Offer in the measure of your capacity fruit, flowers, cloth and the like.

From Chapter Seven

Guru Urgency

If atma itself does not keep atma from injury, then where in the world is the benefactor who can deliver atma from this sea of samsara? He who in this world does not undergo treatment for that disease which leads to lower-world states, what will he do with such disease when he goes to the next world, in which there is no medicine for this ailment?

The supreme Truth should be sought from the satguru so long as this body exists. Who is there so perverse as to commence the excavation of a well with a view to extinguish a fire which has already caught his house? Like a tigress, old age waits with open mouth to swallow the jiva.

As water continually exudes from a broken vessel, so is the period of life constantly being shortened. Diseases constantly inflict wounds like enemies laying siege to a fortress. Hence one should, as early as possible, engage in the working of good to oneself and satguru. Good work should be done in times when there is no sorrow or danger, and when the senses are not disabled.

Time passes in various involvements, but the jiva remains unaware of its passing. Happiness and sorrow born of samsara slay the jiva, but even then he does not awaken to the path of the welfare of the atma. How many jivas are born, fall into dangers, become subject to suffering and sorrow, and die? Even the sight of such does not enlighten the jiva, maddened as he is by drinking the wine of delusion as to what is his own good. Prosperity is like a dream, youth is short-lived like a flower, and life passes like a flash of lightning.



How can one be satisfied who has seen all of this? The utmost period of one's life is a hundred years. Half of it is passed in sleep, and the remaining half is made useless by childhood, disease, old age, sorrow and other causes.

Utterly indifferent to the spiritual work which ought to be begun by all means, sleeping during the time he should be awake, and imagining danger when he should have firm faith—alas! How can such a jiva, cherishing the fleeting samsara so dear to him, live without fear in this body which is as evanescent as a bubble of water, enduring no longer than the stay of a bird on the branch of a tree?

He seeks benefit from things which do him injury, thinks the impermanent to be permanent, sees the highest good in that which is evil, and yet he does not see that death is coming upon him.

Deluded by the great maya, the jiva looks and yet sees not, reads and yet knows not. The whole of this world is at each moment sinking into the deep sea of time infested with the great alligators of death and disease.

We speak of "my son," "my wife," "my wealth" and "my friend," but even as we indulge in such senseless talk, death seizes the body like a tiger. Death seizes a person while still engaged in doing this thing or that thing. Seeing all this, the awakened jiva does today the works of tomorrow, and in the forenoon the work of the afternoon, for death is indifferent to the finishing or unfinished of any work.

The slumbering jiva does not see approaching him before his very eyes death's terrible army of diseases guided by old age and with orders from death himself. Death devours people after piercing them with the roasting skewer of thirsting desire, smearing them with the ghee of mundane objects, and barbecuing them in the fire of attachment and dislike. Death brings all under Yama's rule, both boy or youth, old man, or child in the womb. The visible world and all classes of beings therein thus remain vulnerable to death and subject to Yama, My emmissary.

Therefore, jivas awakened to the path should be prompt in doing with all their heart such things as are calculated to benefit their satguru and themselves in this world and hereafter.

From Chapter Nine

Guru Manifestation

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Lord Siva said: How can My subtle perfection, which is one, omnipresent, attributeless, indifferent, undecaying, unattached like space, unbeginning and unending, be an object of worship for the dualistic mind? Hence it is that I, as the Supreme Guru, have entered into the bodies of human satgurus.

Even My gross aspect, being full of light and energy, is imperceptible to human eyes. For this reason I have assumed

the form of the satguru in the world, and thus protect the race of shishyas.

As Mahesvara, in human body I secretly wander on the Earth in order to favor shishyas. As Sadasiva, I assume the modest and merciful form for the protection of sadhakas. Though remaining above samsara, yet I appear and act in this world as though I were a man of samsara.

When the fruits of sin predominate, satguru is seen as a person. And when the fruits of virtuous acts prevail, satguru is seen as Siva. Like blind men deprived forever of seeing the sun, unfortunate jivas are unable to see the real satguru, the embodiment of Mahesvara, though He is present before their eyes. It is undoubtedly true that Satguru is Deva Sadasiva Himself, for who is it that grants Liberation to seekers if satguru be not Siva Himself?

O Beloved, there is not the least difference between Deva Sadasiva and Sri Guru. Whoever makes a distinction between them commits a sin. For by assuming the form of a preceptor, the Gurudeva severs the multitude of bonds which bind jivas to the state of pashu and enables them to attain the Self, Parasiva.

## Glossary of Special Terms

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Agamas: A copious body of revealed scripture, coequal with

Vedas.

Asuras: Lower astral-world beings of malicious intent.

Atma: The soul, immortal and eternal, which animates life and reincarnates again and again.

Bhakti: Devotion. Religious fervor.

Brahman: God. A name from the Vedas.

Brahmin: A Hindu priest. Priestly caste.

Bhaktas: Consciousness centers in the inner bodies of man.

Deva: Angelic inner world being. When capitalized, a name of Siva.

Devanagari: The Sanskrit script.

Devi: The Goddess, Divine Mother. dharma: Way of righteousness.

Dhyana: Meditation.

Diksha: Initiation.

Door of Brahm: The subtle aperture into the crown chakra at the top of the head.

Guru: Preceptor; remover of darkness.

Isvara: God as personal Lord.

Japa: Incantation of mantras. jiva: An embodied soul.

Karma: The law of cause and effect governing all action. The fruit of action.

Liberation: Moksha, freedom from the cycles of reincarnation.

Mahadeva: "Great Being of Light;" a God, often refers to Lord Siva.

Mahesvara: Siva, the Primal Soul and personal Lord.

Mantra: Sacred sound(s) for japa and puja.

Moksha: Liberation from rebirth.

Namasivaya: Siva's most sacred mantra.

Paduka: The guru's sandals.

Pandit: Scriptural scholar.

Parabrahman: The transcendent God.

Parampara: Guru lineage.

Parasiva: God's utterly transcendent perfection.

Pashu: A soul bound in samsara.

Pranipata: Prostrating in obeisance.

Prapatti: Unequivocal devotion, surrender.

Prasada: Sacred offerings, including blessed food, distributed to devotees.

Puja: Traditional rites of worship.

**Purana:** A body of secondary scripture, folk naratives with stories of the Gods.

**Sadasiva:** A name of Siva's Primal Soul perfection.

**Sadhaka:** Serious aspirant, often a monk.

**Sadhana:** Spiritual discipline.

**Sadhu:** Homeless mendicant.

**Sahasrara:** The crown chakra located at the top of the cranium.

**SaktiâSiva:** Immanent/transcendent God.

**Samsara:** The cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Worldly existence. **satguru:** Enlightened preceptor.

**Sakti:** Godâs Creative energy; worshiped as the Divine Mother.

**Shishya:** A close devotee.

**Siddhanta:** The philosophy and religion of South India, Saiva

Siddhanta, literally "final attainments or conclusions."

Siva: God, the "Auspicious."

Tapas: Ascetic practices or condition.

Vedas: The central and most ancient scriptures of Hinduism.

Vedanta: The lofty philosophy of the Vedas, as expressed in their Upanishads

Yama: Lord of Death.