



Synergy in Tantra Yoga

By

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A Brief Introduction

The Tantra and Hatha yoga systems are probably the most attractive expressions of Vedic wisdom. Energy based yoga systems such as these are particularly compelling today because of mediocre living standards that measure lifestyle quantitatively versus qualitatively. Current lifestyle trends have most people so over stimulated externally, they are left feeling empty inside. Many sensationalized approaches to health and spirituality have bred a collective consciousness in societies mostly interested in quick fixes driven by self-gratification. For this reason, tantric and hatha yoga's have become so charming, because they allure us and inspire us to awaken and discover the true essence of our being. Our true essence is beyond something we can taste, see or touch, the true self is found through the mystical sensitivities of the heart as emanated from the soul.

When we practice yoga we become enlivened with the potential of expressing our natural innate qualities of contentment, compassion and love. The tantra yoga tradition provides all the necessary methods for any practitioner to completely reform their life, if practiced properly. The most popular expressions of tantra exist in the form of hatha yoga, the postural system for improving the mind-body relationship. Tantra is considered one of three components of the Hindu tradition after the Vedas and Puranas, and is the most recent of the three, which developed mostly during early medieval times. Another tantric teaching, the Agamas, are considered by some to have been the source of early yogic and self realization concepts in India, although little has been written about them comparative to Vedic and classical yogic works. The term *tantra* means a text or book, teaching and is correlated with tension, which demonstrates how tension as linked to *will*

power can be used as a psycho-spiritual method for transmutation of our vital energy. Tantra can be considered a valid system for realizing the higher self, the unveiling of our unique and distinct qualities. Tantra yoga in many ways is an art, a form of mental, physical and emotional expression that encourages the practitioner to fully expand the inner forces of nature within, in a manner that fosters inclusion into the fabric of human existence.

On the other side of the spectrum is the classical or Raja yoga, which is often considered a system of taming the primal energies that can become rulers of the five senses, said to create potential afflictions (kleshas) of the mind. The integrative viewpoint points to balance of both paths to provide a direct approach to the original Vedic yoga. It's important to note the Vedantic concept of "oneness" has maintained itself through out the entire evolution of yoga and exists as the underlying stream of all forms of tantric, hatha and raja yoga's, thus establishing the importance of synergy between the mind-body and spirit realm.



Much of tantra is centered on the worship of the Goddess or Divine Feminine and the bulk of the teachings are presented in the Wisdom of the Ten Goddesses (Dasha Mahavidya) and the Worship of God as Mother (Devi Mahatmya). Basically, there are two aspects to the teaching, the right-handed side provides a sattvic (pure) approach based in meditation, mantras and yantras and exists as solar forms of managing the mind. The left-handed side being more rajasic (externalized) incorporates practices for enhancing sexual intimacy and exploration with the creative force, consumption of intoxicating wines and meats as sacrificial offerings to the divine to enliven the inner pranic powers or *shaktis*. The occult (externalized) practices are born of the dark side of the moon while the sattvic sensitivity producing disciplines are reflections of the sun.

In my view, many of the forbidden practices or *makaras* have been misconstrued in recent times, between being understood as *symbolic* or taken as *literal*, for experiencing the shakti of the Divine feminine. In many ways the right-handed path represents the earlier themes of the Vedic and Puranic traditions and the left-handed seems more characteristic of the collective consciousness of the darker ages of recent times. Indulgence into any occult practice for purposes of self-realization was foretold to us in the Upanishads ... "*Sages say the path is narrow and difficult to tread, narrow as the razors edge*" And thus, without some level of mental mastery or physical purification, the practices and techniques of yoga become like dangerous weapons placed in the tinkering hands of children. Sadly, tantra in the West has been the most misconceived of the yogic teachings, imparting a rebellion of the Judeo-Christian traditions view of sexuality as vulgar or sinful. While tantra does acknowledge the importance of sexuality as sacred, it is only a very small portion of the greater teachings.

Awakening the Inner Goddess

Tantra is the discovery of a powerful force or energy in the body known as *kundalini*¹, a power that awakens in the first chakra. Kundalini, when awakened, provides us with a great capacity for transformation. As prana begins to ascend, it is symbolized in various forms of the Goddess as Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. In the initial stages of the first and second chakras, Durga provides us strength, courage and protection, affording us the momentum to continue on the spiritual path. In the second stage of ascension, as consciousness expands beyond the second and third chakras towards the auspicious fourth center, Lakshmi grants us the gifts of abundance and the rewards of love and compassion as incentives to continue onwards and upwards to attain greater virtues. Finally, arriving at the consciousness of the fifth and sixth centers, the sadhaka (aspirant) embraces their life dharma as service to others and lives in the highest truth of spiritual oneness as Saraswati bestows the purest knowledge of intuition. The culmination of tantric yoga is to raise the awakened prana as Shakti so to join Shiva for the dance of cosmic bliss at the sahasara or seventh chakra; this supreme abode is sometimes called *Hiranyagarbha*.

Hatha yoga, as a sub branch of tantra, considers the body a powerful tool for becoming a *brahma-acharya*, a master of the creative force. The principle practice of brahmacharya, as mentioned in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, should not be confused with abstinence, but more effectively with the capacity to *transmute* the pro-creative energy. The word brahmacharya literally means living and moving in Brahman, the eternal Self. In other words, there is a mystical motive behind the creative impulse that all humans are born with, which is to realize this force comes from the One, the eternal that is within us. The inherent search for the *One*, is equal in all of humanity and is to be discovered while merging the open heart into all outer aspects of life. This in itself is a process of sublime purification. Purity of heart is considered an important step in this direction and involves self-discipline over three things: kama (lust), krodha (anger) and lobha (greed). Clearing such disruptions of the mind and transmutation of the passionate physical impulses is essential to success on the yogic path.

The Importance of Synergy in Yoga

A synergized approach to yoga (tantra-hatha-raja) preserves the vessel of the heart in which prana can be expanded from and physically it strengthens the body's vital energies, producing balanced systemic function for health and wellness of the entire being. Hatha yoga is focused on promoting mind-body synergy and provides valuable methods in this regard. Physical postures bring suppleness to the spine and greater flexibility in the muscles and joints and with regular practice they are helpful agents of anti-aging, increasing endurance of the body overall. Breath work (pranayama's) aid in purifying the mind, slowing it down, removing the clutter and flutter of thoughts that disturb introspection. Relaxation techniques (methods found in hatha & raja yogas) are also supported through proper ayurvedic lifestyle. All these provide an important link that can synergize the entire human being. We have a physical body that we are not, we have sought after things of the mind that we are not, for that reason... Tat, Twam Asi.²

¹ The term Kundalini comes from the word *kunda*, a place or a crevice where the energy is coiled.

² Thou Art That, from one of the Mahāvākyas (Grand Pronouncements) found in the Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7