

Tantra for Everyone
by
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Tantra has enjoyed many different forms of expression. It has been a pan-Asian tradition for centuries and is now becoming a global phenomenon. Tantrik lineages, schools, sects and points of view are alive and thriving in both Indian-Hindu and Buddhist traditions throughout Asia and the world.

The traditional divisions of Indian Tantrik lineages are *Shaivite*, *Shakta* and *Vaishnava*, in other words lineages in which the supreme, all-encompassing Reality is equated with Shiva and Shakti, Shakti or Vishnu. Although it is less common, the ancient “fourth” Tantrik way focusing on the practices and worship of Ganapati or Ganesha, the elephant-headed God, still exists both in North and South India.

The practices associated with Tantra such as *mantra*, *yantra*, *puja*, *mandala* and hatha yoga existed long before anyone uttered the word “Tantra.” Artifacts of figures seated in yogic poses and other Tantrik images have been found that are thousands of years old.

Direct realization Tantra helps you to discover what is sometimes called “the natural state.” You discover that duality, the everyday world of you, me, car and tree, is an expression of a natural, base state of continuity, or “not two.” Practices such as Guru yoga, *mantra* and meditation do not lead the Tantrika to transcend duality in favor of “oneness,” but rather to enlarge her embodied View so that the experience of duality is happening within the context of the experience of the continuity of all life.

Buddhists tend to limit the definition of Tantra to transformational practices involving certain deities. Within the Indian context, Tantrik practice includes everything from Ayurveda to hatha yoga to ritual to deity practice to direct realization through contemplative practice and direct transmission from Guru to disciple.

Because of this diversity of expressions, there is no single, true-for-all-times-and-places definition of Tantra. However, it is possible to come up with a short list of Tantrik values that inform the View of the tradition as a whole and that have remained remarkably consistent over time. These values include:

- an acceptance of the material, phenomenal world as a real and not illusory manifestation of consciousness (Shiva) and power (Shakti);
- a commitment to non-exclusivity of caste, class and gender;
- the belief that the human body is our most valuable tool in seeking liberation;

and

- the insistence that everyday life and Self-realization are not mutually exclusive.

Tantra only began to emerge as a written tradition around 500 AD in India. The Tantras, or written texts, consist of teachings about cosmology and instructions for practice. They are usually, but not always, structured as dialogues between Shiva and Shakti. Not until the 19th century did the word “Tantra” refer to anything other than these scriptures. Eventually, the word came to describe a tradition (Tantra) and people in the tradition (Tantrikas).

Tantrik practice helps the practitioner to embody a more relaxed, complete relationship with the world. The Guru-disciple relationship is the central Tantrik practice. The Guru acts as a gateway to discovering the natural, uncontrived state. An advanced practitioner will experience the entire world as Guru.

The ultimate goal of Tantrik practice is full, conscious participation in the world process. In its broadest sense, Tantra is a spiritual technology for completing the human relationship to the cosmos. It is preparation for death by fully realizing this thing called “being human.” Tantra is not a transcendental practice because it does not urge us to skip over the being human part. The only way out is through, and the way through is full of beauty.

The Tantrik practitioner does not rip away the everyday world to discover the transcendent real world. She relaxes her own limitations to discover a wider View, a more inclusive Reality that was always ongoing from the beginning. Ultimately, the Tantrik practitioner discovers that all of life, in every form or state of formlessness, is of “one taste”: the taste of beauty, wisdom and compassion.