

Insight into Tantra

By Swami Jyotirmayananda

Tantra is an ancient mystical system of spiritual discipline based on the Vedas that blends *yantra* and *mantra*. *Yantra* relates to form, more precisely to diagrams that have profound mystical meaning and spiritual impact upon the mind. All religions have such diagrammatic symbols. For example, in Christianity there is the cross. In Judaism there is the Star of David. In Hinduism there are many *yantras* that represent different aspects of God or Goddess.

Similarly, since mind is deeply affected by sounds, Sages evolved the mystic science of *mantra* for worshipping the Divine Self. *Tantra* is the blend of both *yantra* and *mantra*, designed by enlightened Sages to scientifically and profoundly influence the minds of aspirants on the spiritual path.

The majority of people know very little about *tantra*, and what they do know is generally based upon a terrible misunderstanding. *Tantra* is often wrongly associated with magic or degenerate behavior, and the term has entered in a negative way into the common parlance of the Western world. When a person does something strange and abrupt, people say, “He or she is throwing a tantrum.” However, true *tantra* worshippers are highly advanced devotees of Shiva or Shakti (Devi, or Goddess) and their worship scales the heights of spirituality.

A *tantra* worshipper is symbolically described as one who enjoys the *Panncha Makaaraas* (five words beginning with “M”). These five are *Matsya* (Fish-eating), *Mamsa* (Flesh-eating), *Madya* (liquor—wine), *Mudra* (sensual positions of hands) and *Maithuna* (sex-indulgence). Although a perverted *tantrika* pursues the literal meaning of each *Panncha Makaaraa* with great license, a true aspirant understands that the mystical meaning of each of the *Panncha Makaaraas* is profoundly sacred and totally different from its literal meaning:

1. Eating fish implies controlling that ego that makes the mind “fishy”—fickle and impure.

2. Eating flesh implies eating up or removing lust and passions for the flesh.

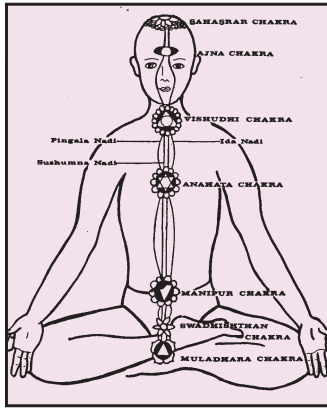
3. Drinking wine refers to drinking the nectar of Divine Love. Through ecstatic, mystic tranquility and intense devotion to God, an aspirant becomes spiritually intoxicated. This theme is well illustrated in a Sufi story from the Middle East. It tells how a Sufi Saint goes to an actual bar and sits down among many people who are drinking wine. When the saint asks for one penny-worth of wine, the bar tender looks at him in surprise and says, “How can you become drunk on one penny worth of wine?” He replies, “I am already drunk. I just want to paint my moustache with wine

so that the other people here do not feel that I am different from them!”

4. Adopting *Mudra* refers to mystical positions of hands and body that beckon the mind to the glorious heights of spirituality—not negative gestures that bring out the forces of darkness. For example, in *Chin Mudra* the tip of your index finger is joined to the tip of your thumb and the three small fingers are extended away. Your index finger refers to your ego. Your thumb refers to God. The other three fingers refer to the three *gunas* (*sattwa*, *rajas* and *tamas*). Separate your ego from those three *gunas* and let it blend with God. That becomes *Chin Mudra*.

5. *Maithuna* literally refers to sex-indulgence. Living solely for sex-pleasure is sheer ignorance. A devotee seeks Divine Communion—the blessed experience of blending with God, becoming One with God.

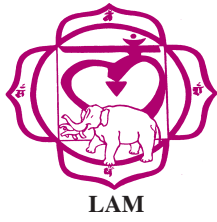
Therefore, it should be well understood that from the spiritual point of view the real purpose of *Tantra* is communion with God. It is the fabric behind most mystical systems, and especially the system that arose out of the Vedic culture. Only when the five *Panncha Makaaraas* are not well understood is *Tantra* led into tantrum!



The Awakening of Kundalini

Kundalini Shakti and its awakening is a part of Tantra Yoga. The *Devi* (the Divine Mother) is *Kula-kundalini* dormant at the Muladhara Chakra (at the base of the spine). She is awakened and led through the mystic channel of *Sushumna*, passing from Muladhara to Sahasrara Chakra (at the crown of the head). The *chakras* along this channel have the following diagrammatic presentations (*yantra*) and root letters (*mantra*):

MULADHARA CHAKRA



LAM

SWADHISHTHANA CHAKRA



VAM

MANIPURA CHAKRA



RAM

ANAHATA CHAKRA



YAM

VISHUDHI CHAKRA



HAM

AJNA CHAKRA



OM

SAHASRARA CHAKRA



VINDU OR NON-MANIFEST POINT

When *Kundalini* passes through Manipura Chakra at the navel, *karma granthi* or the knot of karma is removed. One gains *chitta shuddhi* (purity of heart). As the ascending *Kundalini* pierces the Anahata Chakra (at the heart), one attains freedom from *kaama granthi* (the knot of desire), and as the *Kundalini* pierces the Ajna Chakra (between the eye-brows), one gains the intuitive knowledge that removes the knot of ignorance (*avidya-granthi*). Finally the *Kundalini* (Divine Mother) communes with Shiva (Divine Father) at the crown of the head, and the mystic nectar showers from the thousand-petalled lotus (Sahasrara Chakra), sweeping away the illusion of the world-process!

Ten Mahavidyas of the Tantra (Dashamahavidya)

Brahman or the Absolute Self is worshipped in two aspects:

Father aspect: As Vishnu, Shiva, Rama, Krishna, Hanuman, Ganesha and numerous manifestations.

Mother aspect: As Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswati, Kaalee and numerous manifestations. It is this Mother aspect that manifests as the Ten Mahavidyas. Each *Devi* of these ten may be worshipped as the supreme *Devi* for attaining *bhoga* (enjoyments) and *Moksha* (Liberation).

Devout meditation on the Mother-aspect of *Brahman* has been elaborated in the *Dashamahavidyas*. *Vidya* refers to the mystic art of practicing devout meditation.

The journey of the soul has been presented allegorically from Kaalee Devi to Kamala Devi as ten ascending steps culminating in Enlightenment.

It must be remembered that each of these Devis may be worshipped and meditated upon as the Supreme Devi!

The following are these ten aspects of the Devi:

1. Kaalee
2. Taaraa
3. Chhinnamastaa
4. Shodashee (Lalita)
5. Bhuvaneshwaree
6. Tripura-bhairavee
7. Dhoomaavatee
8. Bagalaa-mukhi
9. Maatangee
10. Kamalaa



1. SRI KAALEE DEVI:

ॐ क्रीं क्रीं क्रीं ह्रीं ह्रीं हूं हूं दक्षिणे कालिके
क्रीं क्रीं क्रीं ह्रीं ह्रीं हूं हूं स्वाहा ॥

**Om Kreem kreem kreem hreem hreem
hroom hroom dakshine Kaalike kreem
kreem kreem hreem hreem hroom
hroom swaahaa**

Kaalee Devi is the first of the ten Mahavidyas. She is the *Maha-Nirguna* (Destroyer) aspect. The *Maha-Saguna* (Most Beautiful) aspect of the *Devi* is called Sundari (Tripura-Sundari). Kaalee is also known as Krishnaa (black-complexioned) and Dakshinaa (Giver of Liberation).

The *upasana* (devout meditation) on this Devi removes these impurities: *ahamta* (ego-sense), *mamata* (mine-ness), *maya* (delusion), and *bhed drishti* (perception of multiplicity). As these impurities are reduced, the worship of the Devi becomes increasingly intensified.

The *saguna* aspect gives support for the mind leading to *savikalpa samadhi*. The *nirguna* aspect leads the mind to support-less *samadhi* (*nirvikalpa samadhi*) where there is absolute negation of the world-process. Mother Kaalee is meditated upon in the following manner:

She is endowed with indescribable beauty and glory. She appears as a mountain of black ungent (symbolizing *Moksha*—the cessation of the world-process). She is devoid of clothes (veils of illusion). Her hair is loose (unrestricted glory). She stands on a *shava* or dead body (She is the Reality behind the dead—illusory universe). She is decked with a garland of skulls (skulls of enlightened Sages). She abides in cremation grounds (where ignorance, desires and karmas are burnt to ashes). Her extended tongue is *Brahmakara Vritti* (the intuitive function of the mind that sweeps away the world of the illusory triad—seer, seen and sight).



2. SRI TAARAA DEVI:

ॐ ह्रीं त्रीं हुं फट् स्वाहा ॥

Om hreem treem hum phut swaahaa

Taaraa Devi leads Her devotee to cross over the ocean of the world-process (*Santaran*). She guides Her devotees towards the attainment of *Moksha* (Liberation).

She is worshipped for destroying *asuri* or demoniac forces based on *mala* (gross impurities) and *vikshepa* (subtle impurities that cause distractions of the mind). Consequently an aspirant develops *vaak-shakti* (power of speech) and is able to awaken the boundless potentiality of the soul. He attains *bhoga* (enjoyments) and *Moksha* (Liberation). She is also known as Raatri Devi – the Goddess presiding over the Night. Raatri Sukta (hymns for invoking the Goddess) occurs in the *Vedic* as well as in the *tantric* literature.



3. SRI CHHINNAMASTAA DEVI:

ॐ श्रीं ह्रीं त्रीं हुं फट् स्वाहा ॥

**Om Shreem hreem treem hum
phut swaahaa**

According to a mystic legend, Goddess Chhinnamastaa Bhavani chopped off Her head to give a nectarine drink to Jaya (spirit of *bhoga* or enjoyment) and Vijaya (spirit of *apavarga* or spiritual ascent). Chopping off the head is similar to the Biblical Cross. The horizontal reality of the world of time-space is intercepted by the vertical vision of the Transcendental Self. Consequently three streams emerged from Her trunk. Two of them nourished Jaya (aspiration for relative progress and prosperity) and Vijaya (aspiration for spiritual upliftment). The third flowed towards the Absolute (Liberation—the Goal of Life).



4. SRI SHODASHEE (LALITA) DEVI:

ॐ ह्रीं क्लीं ऐं सौः ॐ ह्रीं श्रीं कण्डलह्रीं
हसकहलह्रीं सकलह्रीं सौः ऐं क्लीं ह्रीं श्रीं ॥

**Om hreem kleem aim sauh om
hreem shreem k-ye-i- la-hreem
ha-sa-ka-ha-la-hreem sauh aim
kleem hreem shreem**

Shodasee Devi is like the full moon in the firmament of the heart. She is Vidya Devi, with four arms and three eyes, the abode of *saumyata* and *daya*—grace and compassion. She is seated on a lotus that is sustained by Lord Shiva (Who is lying in a peaceful state), holding in Her four hands: noose (to trap the evil forces), spear (to pierce subtle knots of illusion), bow (purified *chitta*—mind), and arrows (arrows of Light to dispel the darkness of ignorance). Shodashee Devi is also known as Lalita Devi.



5. SRI BHUVANESHWAREE DEVI:

ह्रीं ॥

Hreem

Bhuvaneshwari Devi is the embodiment of Mahaa-Lakshmee (destroyer of *vikshepa*). Her form is gentle, her complexion is shining red (Divine Love). She is the *Shakti* of Sada-Shiva—the nourisher of the Universe; the bestower of *abhaya* (fearlessness) and all the *siddhis* (psychic powers as well as Liberation). The moon (Absolute Bliss) shines in Her crown. She is effulgent like the rising sun. Her glory is boundless!

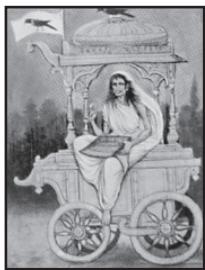


6. SRI TRIPURA-BHAIRAVEE DEVI:

हसै हसकरी हसै ॥

Ha-sain ha-sa-ka-reem ha-sain

Tripura-Bhairavee Devi is the giver of victory over the lower self, and bestower of supreme glory (Divine prosperity). She fills the three planes of the universe (*Bhur-Bhuvah-Swah*) with Her effulgence. She is the support of the perishable world (*ksheeyamaan*). Therefore, She is the consort of Kala-bhairava (Lord Shiva as the Destroyer). She shines with the effulgence of millions of suns, with shining red complexion, decked with *munda-maalaa* (garland of skulls). Her breasts are besmared with red blood (brimming with the nectar of immortality). She has three eyes (Two eyes relate to the horizontal vision—the practical reality, the third relates to the vertical vision—the Transcendental Self). Her crown is decked with the moon (Divine Bliss)!



7. SRI DHOOMAAVATEE DEVI:

धूं धूं धूमावती स्वाहा ॥

Dhoom dhoom dhoomaavatee swaahaa

For satisfying Her intense hunger, Dhoomaavatee Devi swallowed up Shiva Himself. Smoke radiated from Her body, therefore She is called Dhoomaavatee. She wafts the aroma of *parabhakti*, which engulfs and rolls up the three *lokas* (body, mind and soul) along with their subtle support (ignorance). Her *darshan* (appearance) is frightening for the *daityas*—demoniac forces of darkness, but She is the bestower of *Mukti* (Liberation) for Her devotees.



8. SRI BAGALAA-MUKHI DEVI:

ॐ ह्रीं बगलामुखि सर्वदुष्टानां वाचं मुखं पदं स्तम्भय
जिह्वां कीलय बुद्धिं विनाशय ह्रीं ॐ स्वाहा ॥

*Om hreem bagalaa-mukhi sarva-
dushtaanaam vaacham mukham
padam stambhaya jihvaam keelaya
buddhim vinaashaya hreem om
swaahaa*

Bagalaa-mukhi Devi is worshipped for attaining freedom from fear, and gaining the blessings of Goddess Saraswati—shining intellect, mystically potent speech. She is decked with yellow garments symbolizing intuitive mind. She holds the tongue of the enemy (demoniac self)

in one hand and a mace in the other. She is the destroyer of *mala* (gross impurities) by Her mace, and *vikshepa* (subtle impurities) by holding the tongue of the demoniac self. She is the controller of *vaani*, *vidyaa* and *gati* (three *granthis* or knots of the heart—*mala*, *vikshepa* and *avarana*). She is the *Kalpa-taru* (the mystic tree that fulfills all desires) for Her devotees. She is Bagalaa-Mukhi (with the face of intuitive Wisdom).

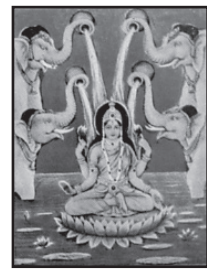


9. SRI MAATANGEE DEVI:

ॐ ऐं श्रीं नमो भगवति उच्छिष्टचाण्डालि
श्रीमातङ्गेश्वरि सर्वजनवशंकरि स्वाहा ॥

*Om aim shreem namo bhagavati
utchhishta-chaandaali shree-
maatangeshwari sarva-jana-vasham-
kari swaahaa*

Maatangee Devi is Shiva's Shakti. Matanga is the name of Shiva. She is of blue lotus complexion. The moon shines on Her crown. She has three eyes. She is like fire to destroy the forest of demons (destroyer of ignorance-based subtle impressions of the unconscious). On Her devotee She bestows *purushartha siddhi* (the ability to attain the fourfold goal of life: *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*). She deludes the demons and causes their destruction.



10. SRI KAMALAA DEVI:

श्रीं ॥

Shreem

Kamalaa Devi is the *Shakti* of Maha Vishnu—the Sustaining aspect of God. She enables Her devotee to attain *Daivi Sampat* (the Divine Wealth of virtues). Having attained Her grace, an aspirant becomes supremely fulfilled. Her complexion shines like gold. Four elephants, which are snowy white (purity) in color, with uplifted trunks are showering the Devi. They represent Cosmic Mind in four aspects: mind, intellect, ego and *chitta*. In two of Her four hands the Devi holds *vara* (boons), and *abhaya* (fearlessness). Each of Her other two hands holds a lotus, which is the symbol of the blossoms of *bhakti* and *jnana*. They waft the aroma of Liberation. The attainment of Liberation is characterized by the end of pain and fear, absolute fulfillment of all desires (lotuses), and Supreme Bliss!

॥ ॐ श्रीं मात्रे नमः ॥

Om Shree Maatre Namah.

(Adorations to the Divine Mother!)

May She shower Her choicest blessings on you!