

Process Of Tantra

(Transcribed Lecture By: A'carya Pranakrsnananda Avadhuta at the University of Berkeley in California, USA)

I want to speak about Tantra in terms of process. How do we practice tantra? In the word "Tantra", "Tra" is a Sanskrit suffix which signifies repetition. Much of what we do in life is repetition. We repeat a particular action with only some variation of intensity or interest. How many times have you been in this room, how many times have you eaten breakfast, how many times have you eaten ice cream hoping that that ice cream would be the best ice cream you ever ate in your life?

What kind of repetition will get us out of repetition? Repetition is circular; it keeps going around and around. "Tra" signifies moving out of circular movement, repetition that brings you up and out of repetition. You still repeat but you repeat in a particular way or style that leads to something more.

"Tan" means to expand, to become larger, bigger, and greater. For example, my point of view in 1960 was different than it is now, every year it will become even bigger and bigger, year after year after year. Eventually what I want to become is the universe. My body is the universe, my mind controls it and my soul inspires my mind. I become "one, whole, complete." This movement towards greatness is my nature.



So Tantra is a process. I want to talk about that process. There are three aspects of a human being—physical, mental or psychic and spiritual. Everything in this universe has these three components. We spend a lot of time focused on the physical aspect. However I want to talk about the physical aspect in terms of the sensory and motor organs. The senses are how we get the information. You are now here in this university and through various means, eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin you collect information. Then you are tested on this and given a certificate stating that you have seen this information, tasted, touched and heard it.

Your experience of the external world is what you have perceived through your senses. At least that is what we think is happening. What is actually happening is that you are now looking at me and you think you see me but perhaps you don't. There is something coming from me, that is, something is coming to your eyes, your eyes are communicating that information to your brain. Actually, you are not seeing me; you are seeing the recreation of me in your mind. The little bits of information coming through your eyes are transmitted via nerves to your brain and the image of me is projected onto the screen of your mind and you say, "I see Pranakrsnananda,"

but actually you don't see me, you see the recreation of me. You hear me but actually you are hearing the recreation of my voice in your mind.

So, the physical world is experienced through the senses. Hopefully our senses give us a true enough picture of what we really perceive so that we can recreate the perception faithfully. How do we represent the external world internally? Some of you, perhaps one third will do that primarily visually; another third primarily as an audio representation and the final third will experience it energetically or kinesthetically. For some of you what you see is more important, what I look like, how I gesture and so forth. For some of you it will be what I say and for some of you it will be energy as you experience this environment, the energy you experience from me.

The mind recreates what the body experiences; this is where you actually, so to speak, experience the world although we tend to think of it as physical. The natural process is that from the senses we bring all those experiences inside of us.

All of us have had various experiences throughout our lives. The sense of self, “I exist, I am, I have an identity and somehow I am separate from everyone in this room is what I believe, somehow I’m separate from this universe. That’s what I believe; that’s my religion. I believe that I’m separate, I believe that I am an individual, I’m not the same as everyone else, these are my beliefs. And because I exist as an individual “I do things,” I have control and I don’t have control, I work to control my environment.

If I’m successful in controlling it, then I have things, they are mine, I own things. MY knowledge, MY country, MY religion, MY family, MY house, MY savings, MY credit card, This MY gives me a sense of ownership, of control and that creates a sort of lens, I look at the world through this mental lens. It is like wearing a pair of glasses. If I take off the glasses, then suddenly I don’t see so clearly. Put the glasses on again and “Oh wow,” more crisp. The way my glasses filter you gives me an impression of you. The way my mind filters information gives me a particular way of behaving.

In a few weeks we will have an election, how are you going to vote? Well, you decide that based on your filter. You see the external world through your filter and your “I-ness” identifies with a particular truth. The senses bring the information inside. Let’s use an example, my favorite. Here we have an ice cream cone. If you see an ice cream cone your mind will recreate that ice cream cone in your mind. How do you feel about ice cream cones? What if you’re diabetic? I love ice cream cones but if I eat it, I might not be conscious afterwards. What if you’re overweight and you’re on a diet. That’s another perspective on ice cream cones.

In relationship to the external world what do I do? Once I receive a representation from the external world through my senses then I’m going to act out that representation through my hands, my feet, my vocal cords, etc. I try to bring what is in my mind out into the world in some way.

You are now in a process of pushing a lot of stuff through the senses. You get a degree and then you go out and decide whether you are actually going to do that or not. You study for years and you get a BA, an MA or a PhD. You go out into the world and think, damn, I picked the wrong course. I had a friend in college who studied how to embalm bodies, make them look nice, etc. He got a degree to become a mortician and went out and started working. One day people working at the funeral parlor came into the display room and saw him on the floor puffed up like a balloon, he could hardly breathe. He was allergic to flowers. He came back to the university to do another degree as a speech therapist.

This is a normal process for most human beings if not all. Perceiving sensory information, pictures, sounds, energy and then somehow expressing it—in through the sensory organs and out through the motor organs, this process goes on repeatedly in a circle going on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in-out-in-out-in-out-in-out.

Now, what is Tantra’s interest? How do we take this natural process to another level? What is the next level? Spiritual! Within the word spiritual we have two words—ritual and spirit. What is ritual? Usually we talk about rituals in relation to religion, Christian rituals, Muslim rituals, Judaic rituals, Buddhist rituals, all kinds of rituals. Kissing can also be a ritual. A man leaves his home in the morning and gives his wife a kiss, gets in the car and goes to work; that is a ritual. Is it spiritual?



According to me, spiritual is something that has something meaningful in it. It’s not something that you just do, there’s something else to it. If the husband is kissing his wife and thinking about his secretary in the office while kissing his wife then that is a ritual. If while he is kissing his wife he is thinking about how much he loves and cares for her and how he really wants to be with her then it is spiritual.

From a tantric point of view there are only two things that exist in this universe, energy and consciousness. This world is changing around us; it is in constant metamorphosis all the time. It never stops. Energy is moving constantly. Most of our energy is involved in perception and expression. Sometimes we are overwhelmed with energy.

What do we do with this energy? The tantric wants to know how to merge energy in consciousness. Yoga means, the merger of the river with the sea. The yogi wants to direct energy towards consciousness.

Consciousness, now there's an interesting word! What is it? Consciousness is very difficult to define. The tantric would say that you can't define it. We could call it knowingness. Do you exist? I think therefore I am. What if I don't think, am I or am I not? Is there something witnessing me in this universe and that is why I am? Is there some power greater than myself? There are many definitions and arguments for and against. Banana is called Kela, Saging, Wallapallum, Kluay, Pisang and other names in different countries of the world.

However the importance of banana is that you eat it and it nourishes you, the name doesn't really matter. No one fights over the name of the banana they just eat the banana. However throughout our earth's history there have been serious arguments about the name of this witness who is seeing our every thought and action. Who cares? Put it in your mind and experience it, personally.

Suppose I took a bucket of water from the ocean, put it here on the table and said, "From which river did this water come?" Could you answer me? The different rivers in the world have all merged their waters with the ocean. Each of us is like a river and we are making every effort to merge our individual consciousness, our individual river, in the Universal Consciousness, the cosmic ocean. As individuals with different identities, we have something that is common to all of us and that is spirit. We are diverted by the physical and the psychic to think that body and mind are what we have in common.

There is an interesting concept which I am not sure everyone is ready to accept because it is a bit of a stretch. Shall we say a 'leap of faith?' I would like you to think about the possibility that you could become that ocean of consciousness.



I try to stay away from using Sanskrit words but it is difficult, it's like talking about science without using the word proof. But anyway, the process of becoming one involves the use of a particular tool called 'mantra' in yoga. Mantra is another word with a "tra" on the end. There several types of meditation which use mantra. Again, the suffix "tra" means something that is repeated bringing you out of the cycle of repetition. It frees you from the cycle of repetition. And "man" means mind. Mantra is something which you use to free the mind. It is a word.

While coming here, the radio was on in the car, the music was playing and the base was vibrating my body. Acoustics moves me. I couldn't help myself; I started moving with the music. Sound is the physical aspect of the mantra. The second aspect of the mantra is "Idea". What is your idea of consciousness? If I ask everyone in this room there will be as many ideas of what consciousness is as people in the room.

The third aspect is the spiritual aspect? Where does it come from? We have so many cities beginning with the word saint—Santa Rosa, Santa Barbara, San Jose, and San Mateo. There are so many people who became one with God but you're not allowed to say it. They acquired some of the characteristics of God, but to say that they are becoming God is not allowed.

From the tantric point of view, "Go ahead, just give it all up," The great yogis or saints of the past were ready to leave this planet, having become more and more 'holy' and wanted to leave something of value to those following, so they left mantra's, or powerful words filled with their spiritual and real experiences of oneness. Mantra is not just a sound that gets you up and moving, it's not just something that creates an idea in your mind, it also something like a rocket that takes you to a spiritual state because of the inherent energy in it.

What do I do with that energy which I experience in my life? Most people are simply going around and around, perceiving, experiencing, expressing, a kind of volley between their mind and body. What we want to do in Tantra is direct that energy with the help of mantra. Mantra then converts the energy into

consciousness. Mantra is the converter and the result of that conversion is passion for Greatness or devotion. Consciousness is not a passive entity, there is a relationship going on between you and that consciousness. Let's face it, that consciousness is your own self.

The passion you have is for your own self. How do you know you have it?

Well, I've had some experiences in meditation and I have a bigger view. In the past I had a feeling of dislike for some people but I've been doing meditation and it seems that my feeling for them has changed. I like them now for some reason. Somehow I feel that they are like me, I understand their situation now.

To give a practical example, suppose, as a result of meditation I have decided that I would like to go out and feed the homeless. I am a vegetarian so I'm not going to cook meat for them, I cook vegetables and tofu. Some of them are very appreciative. From this experience I get so much energy, energy of gratification. Now what do I do with this energy? If I just wallow in it, my head will become so big that everyone will say, "Wow, what happened to him." What to do with it?

The yogi will give it to the mantra and get a better understanding of what is consciousness.

Remember, consciousness is an experience and cannot be defined exactly. Another person in that homeless group was not so appreciative, he said, "My God, what did you give me? Is this food? This is not fit for a dog," and throws it in the trash. Well, I get upset and I think, "I did so much work and he doesn't like my food, well he is just a jerk." Anger! That's another kind of energy, my ego has been hurt. So what do I do? I take that energy and feed it to the mantra because if I keep that energy with me I will just be meditating on anger or that I am such a good cook, etc.

Rather than just meditating on the energy and watch it grow bigger and bigger, let me direct it to consciousness, toward my own special relationship with consciousness. In many esoteric disciplines you will find great teachers trying to explain the relationship between energy and consciousness. There is so much philosophical debate about this, but it is all up in the air. Mantra helps me bring it into human experience.

When we talk about that relationship we are talking about a relationship between you and your Self. The great saint of Sufism, 'Kabir' says in one of his poems, "Oh Lord, my eye is like a bedroom and the pupil of my eye is the bed, come into my bedroom and I will close the curtain (eye lid) and we will enjoy together." This is a man talking about meditation. When you practice meditation you are cultivating the relationship between you and your Self, you as energy and you as



consciousness, bringing those two together. People in love use endearing words for each other, "darling" or "sweetheart". These words of endearment are like a mantra, the only trouble with darling and sweetheart is that they won't really bring one to that point of understanding the relationship between your energy and your consciousness. The reason why the word tantra in the west is surrounded by so much sexual connotation is that there is within it the sexual component of union. There is an effort to unite, to realize the Oneness of reality.

In this process of expansion the original action or experience is seen from another perspective and brought to another level of relationship. Consciousness is very difficult to define. There is a Sanskrit Shloka (poem) which attempts to describe it by saying, "Consciousness is eternal, pure, and no language that can describe it, and no form that can contain it." Mystics have found that the only way to define it is through relationship. You can define meditation, you can define spirituality only through this relationship, but it keeps changing because the relationship is becoming more and more intimate.

The process of physical energy being transmuted to mental and from mental to spiritual with the help of the mantra continues, inspiring the mind to action, doing things for other people, taking care of children,

caring for the homeless, working for others without getting anything in return. If you stop this process, you dam up the flow, the flow is like a river, if you dam it up it becomes stagnant and begins to stink. Take manure for example, if it is put through a bio-digester, magnetized a little and mixed with water and used as fertilizer it can make the world greener but if just left by itself it will smell bad.

The same can be said about money, that is, to increase its value you must keep it rolling; if you want thoughts to grow keep them moving. Also with spirituality if you want it to grow it must be kept moving.

To represent this process, Tantra gives us a symbol which was invented about 7,000 years ago. There may be some interesting reactions to this. How we express our relationship with consciousness in the world is represented by a triangle with the base down and the point up. And the representation of mind in relation to consciousness is a triangle with the point down and the base up. One triangle is superimposed over the other. As a result of this process of cognition there is a gradual expansion which is represented by the rising sun.



In ancient times humans were trying to develop a language with which to express the idea of consciousness, how can we describe it figuratively? It was decided to represent it with a straight vertical line, the idea of infinity, no end and no beginning. To represent something finite, something we can experience in the world around us a horizontal line over the vertical line was drawn. It is

somehow qualifying the other line by crossing it.

Now we have in the ancient mind a representation of God, G-enerator, O-perator and D-estroyer. Consciousness exists in time and space. Infinity has been qualified and made finite. Ancient yogis realized that natural movement is from subtle to crude. Awakening consciousness is a movement in reverse from crude to subtle. To represent this reverse movement the yogi's added arms to the two equal length lines crossing perpendicular to each other. In the Sanskrit language this symbol was given the name swastika.

It is very commonly seen in several countries of our world. In India you can see it everywhere from the boy's shoeshine box to Hindu and Buddhist temples. "Asti" means existence, "I exist," "I am," and the prefix "Su" indicates extraordinariness and so the word swastika represents an extraordinary state of existence. The swastika is a symbol indicating spiritual victory. Most of us know this symbol from its use by Adolf Hitler as a political symbol representing Nazism. However, it has nothing to do with any political movement. The entire symbol is like a formula in mathematics of physics which represents a process, a movement.

Internal realization + expression in the world lead to expansion and finally a state of extraordinary existence.

Here is the process of Tantra in a kind of mathematical language or symbolic language. All of Yoga is a detailed practice to achieve this state of extraordinary existence or oneness. I hope this presentation gives you the clarity to actually practice it and not just hear about the theory.