

KRIYA: THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD?

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“It is written” is not a phrase likely to be uttered by a Tantric practitioner to justify a viewpoint and is still less likely to convince one to follow a course of action. That which is written is dead, second hand experience, and likely to have become a binding dogma rather than a liberating truth. All too often such dogma results in chapter-and-verse arguments which are at best futile and at worst lead to escalating conflict. This is not, of course, to say that there are no Tantric texts, they are both voluminous and ancient, but they present, not viewpoints that are supposed to be the truth, but practical methods for us to apply to our lives so that we can experience the truth for ourselves. Indeed the Sanskrit word *shastra*, which is usually translated as “scripture,” means, according to the Monier-Williams dictionary, “any manual or compendium of rules”, so we can legitimately think of Tantric texts as “instruction manuals.” Tantra, then, is experiential learning.

The problem arising from this is that the journey into the labyrinth of our own mind is fraught with risk, not least of self-deception since the ego, or *ahamkara* (literally, “I-maker), is endlessly inventive in perpetuating its own existence by rationalising our iniquities and foibles or even imagining that they are virtues. There is also the possibility of the sudden and unexpected release of traumatic material from the unconscious into consciousness, so, although the results of the practices can be predicted in a general sense, we are all individuals and respond individually to them with regard to the particulars, hence the pivotal role of the guru in Tantric practice.

The guru has trod the path the *chela* or student is treading and knows the perils that lurk in the labyrinth of the mind, as well as

the wiles of the *ahamkara*. He or she will also teach ways of dealing with the manifestation of any negative emotions that may arise as the psychic accretions that occlude our true consciousness are slowly eroded by *saadhana* (meditative endeavour).

We are lucky to have an ever-growing number of Tantric teachers, particularly from the Tibetan tradition, here in the West, but training with one can often involve a lot of travelling, expense and be somewhat time consuming, so that anyone with work and family commitments may be excluded. Furthermore, teachers trained in the Indian tradition of Tantra by Indians or someone in a genuine Indian lineage is something of a rarity. In view of this we are fortunate indeed that Swami Anandakapila Saraswati has made available a course in Tantric kriya yoga, called OM Kara Kriya (usually abbreviated to OKK in correspondence) which is conducted by means of email. I have recently completed the course and the following is an overview of it in which I have used examples from my personal experience to illustrate.

Swami Anandakapila is known in his Western aspect as Dr Jonn Mumford but to most of his students he is simply “Swamiji”. “Swami” is a traditional Indian title implying self mastery and the “ji” suffix denotes a combination of respect and affection. The aptness of the title soon becomes apparent to the neophyte student as Swamiji is a vast walking, talking database of not only Tantric and Yogic knowledge but also Western Hermeticism and anatomy and physiology - hence the respect. However this knowledge is communicated with lashings and lashings of humour and compassion as he guides you through the carefully constructed lessons - hence the affection.

The initial part of the course is built around a Tantric text called the *Shat Chakra Nirupana* translated into English by Sir John Woodroffe in his classic work *The Serpent Power* and follows the

traditional approach to the chakras that is presented in that work i.e. starting with the bottom one, wherein sleeps the snake goddess, Kundalini, and working upwards, thus following the path that the Kundalini Herself will take when awoken. Swamiji is no slave to tradition though and the traditional aspects of the chakra meditations are augmented with exercises and experiments that assist the learning and demonstrate practical applications of the material. In addition cross-cultural similarities are explored, including imagery from Greek and Roman mythology through to Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism.

The course is constructed according to the principles of Indian numerology and divided into two “years”, each year consisting of three semesters of nine lessons. However, the student has much leeway and each “year” can be completed in considerably more or considerably less than a year according to individual circumstances and motivation. The first two semesters are a detailed experiential study of the principal chakras from the base to the eyebrow centre. You are taught the seed mantra for each one and also the yantra (a device of magical geometry). The resident deities of each chakra are studied along with the other symbolism, the sensory and action organs, and the physical manifestation of each one in the shape of their associated nerve plexuses and endocrine glands.

Throughout the course, Swamiji teaches techniques from various traditions and it would be impossible for me to recount all my experiences here, but the second semester of year one includes a technique from the Vijnana Bhairava Tantra which I have often found useful in dispelling those irrational emotions to which we are sometimes prey. On one occasion I awoke in the middle of the night with a feeling of utter dread. I had not had a nightmare and there was no clear cause of the all- consuming fear. I had learnt the

VBT technique, as I have come to call it, a few days previously and applied it to this situation. The fear gently subsided and I went back to sleep without difficulty.

Unless you are a peculiarly gifted linguist or the most bizarre species of masochist you will be relieved to know that you don't have to learn Sanskrit for this course, but the third semester of year one does teach the correct pronunciation of the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. I recently attended a yoga workshop at which the instructor took great pains to pronounce the word "mantra" correctly and then proceeded to pronounce the mantras themselves incorrectly! (the correct pronunciation of "mantra" is with both letters "a" short, as in English *ago*, and the "t" as a full dental i.e. the tongue strikes the back of the upper front teeth)

This is not mere pedantry on my part. Sanskrit is a magical language, the name suggesting that it has been prepared then brought to completion, and its sounds have specific effects on consciousness – different sound, different effect. It is worth noting at this point that the rishis of five millennia ago had a sophisticated knowledge of phonetics, as illustrated by the scientific construction of the Sanskrit alphabet that was only matched in Europe in the nineteenth century. This part of the course also teaches the little-known oral trigger points for each chakra which assist in their awakening when incorporated into the chanting of the bija mantras .This semester also explores the manifold mystical and medical benefits of OM chanting and the importance of symbols to human consciousness.

Western science has been even more tardy in catching up with the ancient Indian Seers with regard to another little-known branch of Tantra – Swara yoga, its physiology only being confirmed in the laboratory towards the end of the last century. This physiology is explained and techniques given to utilise it very practically in

controlling energy levels, mood and levels of arousal. It takes but little imagination to work out how these techniques can be adapted to Tantric sexual practices with great effect.

The same may be said of the kriyas themselves, three of which, after an explanation of the esoteric meaning of Om Kara Kriya, are taught in this semester. Tantric kriya yoga uses a variety of techniques in conjunction with each other to establish a psychic current between the base chakra and the third eye via the spinal column. The kriyas employ several actions simultaneously to establish this connection and my own experience was that they bring about greater psychological integration, but occasionally I encountered the *granthis*. These are blocks in the chakras that can be equated with neurotic fear and anxiety in Western terminology. In each instance the VBT technique enabled me to bring them safely into awareness and gently dissolve them.

Year one ends with guidelines for the creation of your own Tantric altar, but, as always with Swamiji, originality and creativity within these guidelines are encouraged. This brings me to a crucial point about teachers, masters and gurus – a genuine one will be attempting to make her or himself redundant, not indispensable.

Prior to doing this course hasta mudras (hand gestures) had been something I knew little about and, inasmuch as I thought about them at all, considered them to be largely symbolic. The first few lessons of the second year soon disabused me of this notion as I discovered their amazing ability to control the flow of breath and prana in the body even to the point of keeping one lung neutral while activating a specific area of the other. Another important feature of this semester, which closes with an introduction to mantra in the tradition of the Saraswati order and additional altar practices, is a technique of charging the solar plexus with prana and then using it for healing purposes.

The next stage potentiates the third kriya with additional practices. These practices might seem trivial when reading about them in the lesson but their effect can be quite startling and my experience was an increase in the intensity of the shakti (power or energy) aroused by the kriya coupled with changes in consciousness characterised by feelings of dreaminess and floating. This dovetails nicely with the Mind Magic part of the course (available separately) which induces profound states of relaxation and uses them to foster positive mind-states as well as to banish stress in daily life.

A dramatic experiment in which you create the fourth state of matter in your kitchen (the three better known ones being solid, liquid and gas) introduces both the final semester and a preliminary version of the fourth kriya. This practice is very powerful and the student may well find that they are progressing in leaps and bounds. The final version of the fourth kriya is taught a few weeks later.

Zen master Ikkyu is said to have answered all questions about Zen with one word – “Attention,” and there are additional practices in the final semester that are designed to promote this liberating state, the fourth state of consciousness (the other three being the waking state, dreaming, and dreamless sleep) called *Turiya* or *Sakshi Bhava* in Sanskrit. In Swamiji’s terminology it is “now-here”- a transcendental state in which we are fully aware in the present moment without confecting a fictive “self” from sense-data and our reactions to them.

At the very least this course will equip you to deal with stress much more effectively and it is a feast for connoisseurs of the occult. For the assiduous student though, prepared to tackle the lessons with awareness and intention (the two magic keys that open the door to the Tantric treasure-house) it will induce a lasting alchemical

change that will impact on all areas of your life. Swamiji is of the opinion that psychotherapy is a Western form of yoga (and the stated aims of Transactional Analysis are *awareness, spontaneity* and *capacity for intimacy* – remarkably similar to Tantra’s, especially when you understand the technical definitions in TA, which differ a little from the dictionary definitions) and even the earliest fruits of the practice can impart a flavour of Carl Rogers’ descriptions of the final stages of the psychotherapeutic process:

”Experiencing has lost almost completely its structure-bound aspects...the situation is experienced and interpreted in its newness, not as the past...The self becomes increasingly simply the subjective and reflexive awareness of experiencing. The self is much less frequently a perceived object, and much more frequently something confidently felt in process. ...” (On Becoming a Person p 152-154)

It is worth noting also that no less an authority than Israel Regardie recommended that students of the Western Magical Tradition should have psychotherapy in conjunction with their magical training.

There is so much that I have omitted from this account: cures for hiccups and toothache; instructions for neti practice (the nasal rinse of hatha yoga, which is an optional element of the course), a technique of sense withdrawal for pain control, the esoteric meaning of the Garden of Eden and other Judaeo-Christian concepts. I have even failed to mention Fire breath (Swamiji teaches an esoteric version) which is a major part of the practice. There is, as the adverts say when they have told you everything, much, much more, but in this case it is actually true.

Swamiji is resident in Australia, but this particular Wizard of Oz is not a very bad wizard, he’s a very good one, and you won’t need to

go via a yellow brick road to benefit from his teachings – a QWERTY keyboard will do the trick.

However, this electronic journey will, for the diligent student, initiate an inward journey that does begin with a yellow brick – the yellow cube of Muladhara chakra.

I doubt if you will find a tin man without a heart for company; more likely you will be leaving them behind in the dark, ignorant and ignoble obsession with the sense-objects. A cowardly lion? Honestly, did you ever meet a timid Leo? You are equally unlikely to find a scarecrow without a brain, but who wants an unkempt fundamentalist for a companion anyway?

Oh my! You may well encounter lions and tigers and bears in the form of hidden doubts, fears and hang-ups but the most dangerous aspect of this course is that both Swamiji and his friend Swami Ajnananda love wordplay and like to collect examples of it, so, if you love wordplay too and are of a competitive nature, you could find yourself involved in a pun fight at the OKK corral. On the other hand you may wish to concentrate solely on your studies and to tread the Tantric path all the way, in which case, you will start at a yellow brick and finish at the Philosopher's Stone...

For more details of Swami Anandakapila Saraswati's work, teachings and course see

www.jonnmumfordconsult.com/

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