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Of Experiential Tantra: Being With a Tantric

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THIS IS AN EXPERIENTIAL view of tantra. The purpose of this article is to demystify tantra and establish the path of tantra as a valid contemporary spiritual method to attain to the supreme Godhead qua Brahman. What does not lead us to that effulgent Being is not tantra and it is not real and effective. We have to

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remember how Sri Ramakrishna learnt the discipline and practised tantra himself. And his tantric mentor, Bhairavi Brahmani, knew not only tantra but could tell from memory entire passages from texts on Advaita Vedanta. The learned Bhairavi Brahmani and the ‘illiterate’ epochal avatara are our gurus in tantra. What the avatara practised cannot be wrong and redundant.

Sri Ramakrishna knew that some tantrics can help us by reducing our material, physical,

and emotional sufferings. If these sufferings are not lessened by the compassion of the supreme Godhead or Brahman, we will find it hard to focus on the only thing which matters—Brahman. Tantrics can help those in distress by taking the aid of spiritual beings like *dakinis*, creating a favourable environment aimed ultimately at the spiritual growth of the person being helped, and through rituals reducing the force of past events. *Dakinis* are to be found both in Hinduism and in Tibetan Buddhism. Dakinis in tantra are liberated spirits but not yoginis as they are in Tibetan Buddhism. Unscrupulous and money-hungry tantrics have made tantra obscure and purposely made the discipline mysterious and therefore, people are generally afraid of tantrics and keep a safe distance from them so as not to incite their displeasure. Further, the red or black dresses of tantrics put people off—they are more objects of fear than of veneration. But this article is a message to the world that true tantrics are to be recognised if they show the qualities of holy people given in the first shloka of the sixteenth chapter of the Bhagavadgita: ‘Fearlessness, purity of mind, persistence in knowledge and yoga, charity, and control of the external organs, sacrifice, (scriptural) study, austerity, and rectitude.’ Those who curse or harm others can call themselves tantrics but they are charlatans.

But what if, a tantric spends one’s time and power acquired by sadhana for the wellbeing of fellow human beings and helps in the alleviation of their suffering without ever causing any harm to anyone? What if a group of practitioners of this vast and majestic spiritual discipline of tantra, decide to use their spiritual wisdom in mending the matters of worlds and phenomena not perceptible through ordinary means? This is an account of such an anonymous tantric adept whom this author knows. This tantric is a strong and wise mentor to the author, a reluctant and

unworthy disciple of both the tantric and the discipline. The tantric in question has forbidden even the writing of this article. But the world should know that tantra is a living and benign part of Hinduism.

Sri Ramakrishna warns us over and again not to dabble with the occult. This volume has scholars writing about the philosophy and the importance of tantra within world philosophies and Indian philosophy and, within dharmic studies. I write here about the experiences of being with a contemporary tantric. And particularly being his reluctant disciple from 1998 till date. He has flatly denied me permission to either write of his or my experiences with him and his work. But if this section about the praxis of tantra is missing, then this issue will probably be incomplete and merely abstract. Because of a very strong secular Western education, which I received and transmit to my students, I am sceptical about such esoteric practices. I do not consider tantra or tantrics to be the resort of anyone in distress. This is a disclaimer: please do not even show curiosity about tantra in the form described here. However, I do present here my observations just to place on record that such a form of tantra does very much exist, even today, when the age of the post-human is imminent and the world is in the cusp of a paradigm change to be brought about through the dominance of the simulation of reality through what is otherwise known as the World Wide Web.

Tantra helps people to have that space in their lives where life becomes slightly simpler and better for them to contemplate the Godhead qua Brahman. Rare is the person who utilises this space created by sincere practitioners of tantra. Tantra is to be used to help others to realise in *the here and the now* the blissful Atman. Tantra is never to be used to harm or doom others. Run for your lives if you find a person proclaiming oneself

to be a great tantric and cowing you down with abracadabra of future doom. Those who even speak of simony or of their great powers and the need for animal sacrifice are out to cheat those in extreme distress. Tantra makes people stronger and not dependent on the practitioner's whims.

I know this man who lives in the northern fringes of Kolkata from 1998—he has been living there from his childhood when this author was not even born. He has four kids and I have never seen him wear any particular dress associated with any sect of tantrics. Neither does he wear the red, black, or white dresses, sometimes worn by tantrics and brahmins. He is a brahmin originally from Uttar Pradesh in India and one of his gurus is still living. This living guru is from Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh and is a Vaishnavite. I have met the latter: he is a vegetarian and a man who sees Sri Krishna everywhere. My tantric mentor goes every other year to pay his respects to his Vaishnavite guru who is now nearly a hundred years old. The tantric I talk of here, is about sixty. He has had a bye-pass heart surgery about six years ago; and recently he told me again of recurrent chest pains. Even if he tries very hard, he cannot help himself or his own family. Except hard-core science nothing works for him.

He is a fair main with rugged looks and wears a suit and can do a nice jig over a wedding feast

Dashamahavidyas



and rocks to the latest movie song in fashion. Yet from 1998 till date I have never heard him judge, criticise, or even say a bad word about anyone. He has never drunk even a drop of alcohol. He has no ill-will towards anyone—and to my knowledge; he has harmed not even a bird. He does not generally help the rich; he opts preferentially for the marginalised and the abject. Now what does he do? First a few case histories and then a few things I have seen him do—the readers can reserve their right to believe these incidents, I am just stating them as I know they happened:

1. I have sent to him more than three people with terminal diseases. He has completely cured two and extended the lifespan of another for over a decade. When I say complete cure, I mean, for instance, complete cure of advanced malignant cancer of the pancreas.
2. One of the several couples sent by me to him was declared infertile by all known medical tests and parameters. This couple, after consulting him for less than three months, conceived a child who is now hale and hearty. The couple remain clinically barren.
3. He has saved two people whom I know, from financial ruin.
4. Once, he altered natural phenomena too.
5. My mentor told me of one of his tantric gurus whom he saw bring to life a little child after the parents pestered this now deceased tantric. The parents nagged my mentor's tantric guru so much that the latter in exhaustion brought the child back to life. Something one ideally should not do, but this is not an ideal world and holy people have their own reasons to do what they do. Incidentally two of his living gurus who taught my mentor this discipline, live in total anonymity in the heart of Kolkata. These two are in their nineties and of strong mind and body. But except my mentor none anymore knows of them. These two men live quiet humdrum family lives away from

any scrutiny. These men are also teetotallers, chaste, and totally free of pride. You would not know them as holy men with supernatural gifts if you were to meet them on your way to office. Tantra has to be learnt from other tantrics and one cannot become a tantric by reading books on tantra.

For his services, this tantric whom I am writing about, charges rupees two and a half to rupees ten. If one consults him he advises physical exercises; psychotherapy, and the best possible allopathic medical help. But if one persists with him then he can and has done these things, among many other things.

I have been to crematoriums with him and have seen him offer tobacco and alcohol to corpses and I have unbelievably witnessed the same being emptied by I do not know what. After this he does elaborate fire-sacrifices. Then the persons for whom he has prayed receive their chances at contemplating God without say, thinking of pancreatic cancer; the effects of marital discord, or as I shall relate, of evil spirits. He recently took me to a house in Kolkata. The man who brought him there is a very well-known person in Kolkata. This is what I saw:

A car first picked him up from the north of the city and then he picked me up from my home. We proceeded to this man's house during the day and while going there I had an ice-cream. My mentor had some tobacco. We reached the house and this very frightened family met us with a lot of respect. His feet were repeatedly touched and they tried to touch mine too. I being a secular and liberal person, who believes more in science and the power of psychoanalysis and suggestion, refused to accept their obeisance. I am born into a brahmin family and had a Western education—my perspective makes me not wear even the traditional brahmin sacred thread. I burnt my Indian horoscope long ago, to the great anger of my parents. I wear no

amulets, gemstones, or repeat any special mantra. Melanie Klein and Jean Piaget are more admissible to me any day than tantrics.

Coming back to our visit to this house, we ate a few sweets and I had black coffee and my mentor some milk coffee with sugar. Then he and I toured the mansion. He prayed to Shakti as represented by the ten *mahavidyas*; especially to Mother Chinnamasta. I really do not care much for the ten *mahavidyas*. I believe that they are representations and configurations of the repressed feminine in our society. I have been trained in the tradition of Western psychoanalysts and had to read Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, and Julia Kristeva, as part of my training as a psychoanalyst, and my understanding is so influenced by their thought that it is tough to convince me that there are evil spirits, to speak nothing of warding them off! To me, most spirituality is so much humbug and manifestations of what Freud classically termed as 'fixations'. As I write this I am still of the opinion that those overtly religious suffer from some crises in their psychic apparatus. This is what my reading has convinced me of. But this family had decided to sell their house since after they had shifted here they were continually ill; continually disturbed by marital discord, and their sleep was daily and collectively punctuated by nightmares. In short, they were half crazy with fatigue and chronic diseases. My mentor and I visited this house three times. And he did his rituals and prayed in each room to the ten *mahavidyas*. For this family we two went to a place where corpses are available easily and fed them the usual tobacco and alcohol, and also meat to I do not know what. This tantric is a strict vegetarian but occasionally he has to use meat in his rituals. As a rule he does not kill animals or perform any sort of violent sacrifice. Meat is collected from already naturally dead animals only when such is absolutely necessary. I remain a voracious non-vegetarian skeptic. The family is now functional and all their diseases have gone and



Chinnamasta, Standing on Rati and Kamadeva

their financial health is strong now and those nightmares have ceased for good. They have a chance at what in psychology is called 'self-actualisation', both individually and as a family.

Please make of the above cases what you will.

I can only add a few things which are a tad theological in nature:

- Hindu exorcisms are done to obtain moksha for the evil spirits, who through Hindu rituals, transmigrate to suitable bodies and births, and strive to realise the Godhead through working out their bad karma.
- Hindu exorcisms are done over smaller durations and Hindu exorcists like my mentor, ensure that, the evil spirit never infests the person or the home again. The evil spirit is allowed to choose sanctity. Contrary to what many believe; tantra believes a lot in personal choices. Tantra is there to give you and I another chance at becoming holy.

- Further, tantra actively uses the help of spirits to do good to others; including such things as healing a hole in the heart or uniting fractured bones.
- A baby was born with a hole in his heart and this child was facing imminent death. This tantric decided that if the child died then his parents would be lost to this samsara for good. He cured the wee little fellow overnight. The child has just completed one year. Medical tests show no heart issues for the boy. The parents were preferentially helped since without their child they would be so much in the grip of grief that their search for transcendence would have ended with the death of their baby boy. The aim here was to let the parents have another chance at realising God in this life itself. The boy survives since without him, this couple would be facing spiritual death. Everyone cannot give up the world as easily as sannyasins can. Further, this kid was born after five years of marriage.

My mentor has never been part of any erotic ritual; he is strictly monogamous. His wife is my daughter's godmother and my wife and I think of this tantric as a very holy man. I am being taught by him now despite my unwillingness. But that is another tale, not to be ever told. It will be morally wrong for me to not declare that this tantric teaches me of his own free will and compassion. I still remain an empiricist who is sure that suggestion, psychoanalysis, and other talk-therapies are more effective over the rituals and effects of tantra.

So that I am not thought to be psychotic; let me clarify something about myself: I do not have any allegiance to any religious sect. So dear reader, I am not a gull for the miraculous and the occult as you may hastily presume, but from 1998 this tantric mentor of mine has predicted about others with a success rate of ninety-nine per cent. For instance, my mother was diagnosed with end-stage liver cancer in 2001 and she had ascites. She was admitted then in one of the best multi-speciality

hospitals in India. The doctors and I had given up on her. But my mentor said she was misdiagnosed. It turned out she had too much prescription Nimesulide and she is still fit and fine. Do not please take tantra as praxis lightly: it does a lot of good and to my knowledge, no harm, unless one gets stuck with getting more and more good things done from tantrics. Then one is doomed. So my teacher has taught me to tell people to read the scriptures and to keep the holy company of monks and to meditate before sending people to him.

Every Saturday I go out with my mentor on his mission to rid people of their woes. I write this in the hope that the public will understand that the aim of this aspect of tantra is to unite the victim of bad circumstances with Brahman. If tantra, as I have seen it, had anything to do with sex, money, power, or harming others, I would have run away long ago from my mentor. It has nothing to do even with animal sacrifice. And my mentor *can* indeed force one person to fall in love with another; but he can never make two people *be* in love. Therefore, since he does not interfere in others' private lives; I have learnt never to even give life-advice to people.

The company of monks and holy people can clear the mind of muck over a period of time. Tantra teaches one to rely on human effort rather than supernatural interventions. I see advertisements invoking supernatural aid for quick-fix solutions to everything from getting jobs to becoming rich. Tantra does not have these quick and quack remedies. A true practitioner of this difficult discipline will never even think of say, facilitating divorces, encourage illicit relationships, or help in the humiliation of others. One can help an individual but with the sole aim of making her or him grow in the desire for knowing Brahman. Any other aim is dross.

Practised tantra aims at opening one's being towards the life of the Upanishads and is not for

the ambitious, the unchaste, or the weak of will—it is the way of strength since it validates Advaita Vedanta. If one practises basic moral principles perfectly—if such a thing is humanly possible—then such a person may venture into the practise of tantra. One caveat must be added; when my mentor knows that some apparently bad thing cannot be prevented; he just avoids telling the person anything that might frighten one. This tantric chooses to remain anonymous and I can answer no queries about him or about anything related to tantra. Tantra as a canon can answer mostly everything.

I have to repeat again that this article is for academic purposes only and none should experiment with the occult or even read of the same unless academic purposes demand such studies. Generally, academics is only an excuse to satiate our insatiable curiosity about the supernatural. All that matters is experiencing Brahman in the here and the now. The author will not discuss this article with anyone and wrote this at the invitation of the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*. It is in bad form to turn down the requests of sannyasins. 

