



- It's important to state that studying a tradition's historical origins is not in and of itself transformative.
 - an academic analysis of a tradition's principles has little impact on the quality of your life
 - *tantra* is revealed knowledge that comes to life only when it is practiced systematically
 - when practice is combined with knowledge, it can deepen your experience and allow you to more skillfully share the wisdom and practices of the tradition
- There are two distinct perspectives on the history, origins and evolution of *tantra*.
 - the scholarly or academic view
 - the oral tradition, which has been put forth and sustained by the *guru/shisya* relationship over millennium
- The scholarly view relies completely on material evidence (e.g. archeology and existent texts).
- The oral tradition is based on the living experience of masters who, for millennium, have passed on their wisdom from teacher to student.
- Both shed light on and help us understand the evolution and revolution of the tantric vision as well as its vast canon of sublime principles, practices and teachings.
- The common academic view asserts that *tantra* begins approximately 500 CE and ends sometime around 1,500 CE.



- its apex is between the 9th - 11th centuries, often referred to as the “Tantric Period”
- This scholarly view holds that tantra’s growth is specifically a reaction to and against the Vedic orthodoxy that dominated prior to the full flourishing of the tantric period, a period often referred to as the “Dark Ages of Veda.”
 - the rise of the Buddha and his teachings is recognized as a similar iconoclastic response to the prevailing emphasis on ritual, orthodoxy and the exclusivity of the Vedic teachings of the time
- At the time, and even today, orthodox Brahmanic schools prohibit non-Brahmins as well as women from reading, even hearing, let alone participating in Vedic ceremony and practices.
- The academic view asserts that it is during this post-Gupta period (320 to 550 CE) that *tantra* rises as a radical departure from the prevailing cultural and religious tradition of the times, offering systems of practice and worship to those whom would otherwise have been excluded.
- *Tantra* breaks away from prevailing orthodoxy in part by:
 - offering a unique world view which includes the polarity and unity of male and female divinity
 - refuting the caste system
 - simultaneously embracing both worldly and spiritual experience as expressions of the singular reality
- Scholars make the case that *tantra* is confined to this very specific era called, the “Tantric Period.”
- The other view holds that *tantra* existed long before there were explicitly “tantric” texts.



- This view sees *tantra* woven throughout what is considered more ancient traditions: Jainism, Buddhism and even certain Hindu teachings, all of which existed prior to the “tantric” scriptures.
 - it is worth considering that only a small portion of India's most ancient and sacred texts still exist; most were destroyed during the many invasions and occupations of the Asian subcontinent by warring armies
 - thus, academics are left trying to solve a puzzle with many of its pieces missing
- There is general agreement between all factions of the historical debate that *sruti* (eternal or revealed word) is rendered in two distinct forms—*nigama* (which, become the teachings of *Veda*) and *agama* (which become the teachings of *tantra*).
- The term *agama* (“that which has come to us”) refers to tantric-like texts that existed prior to the “Tantric Period.”
 - the origins of the agamas can be traced to the Indus Valley period of about 2,500 BCE
 - they are the primary source and authority for yoga methods and instruction
- *Nigama* (*Veda*) is the knowledge in which ritual is prioritized.
- *Agama* focused on practice, methods of temple construction, worship, philosophical doctrines, meditative practices, including *mantra* and *yantra*, attainment of the six-fold desires and four kinds of yoga.
- *Agama* is referred to as “*sadhana shastra*” (practical or practice-based scriptures), prescribing the means by which happiness may be attained.



- these become a primary source and authority for yoga methods and instruction and ultimately for the attainment of Divine experience through worship and practice
- The teaching of *agama* is also the source of *jyotish* (vedic astrology), *ayurveda* and other vedic and tantric sciences.
- Discovered in the *Saraswati* River/Hindu Valley, Harappa was one such pre-Vedic, *agama*-based civilization.
 - it is the site where archeologists find hand-carved seals of yogis practicing *asana* that are at least 4,000 years old, along with the first signs of *Shiva* being worshipped
 - Harappa culture is at its height in 2,800-2,600 BC, but satellite photographs suggests that it may be as ancient as 8,000 years old
 - Harappa is the first instance in the history of the region where there is evidence of many people of different classes and occupations living together
 - it became a thriving economic center with cities of 15,000 – 25,000 occupants
 - cities were laid out in a grid-like pattern, with streets and buildings intentionally oriented according to the cardinal directions
 - sewage emptied into larger mains and eventually deposited fertile sludge on surrounding agricultural fields
 - Harappa boasted many drinking water wells, a highly sophisticated system of waste removal and houses equipped with latrines and bathing houses



- evidence shows that they educated their youth
- the worship of both the feminine and masculine was also evident
- Harappa, guided by *agama*, had no restrictions regarding those who could practice: servants, women, *shudra* (lowest of the low in the caste system); anyone who wanted to hear, read or participate in the revealed knowledge were able to
- It all sounds and demonstrates a worldview and approach to life and spirituality that is remarkably tantric-like.
 - and it existed at least 4,000 years ago!
- Some *agama* (*tantra*) and all *nigama* (*Veda*) traditions run parallel to and accept *veda* as revelation. These are identified as *ashtika*.
- The tantric traditions that do not accept *Veda* as revealed knowledge are called *nastika*.
- As said earlier, *tantra* includes both dualism and non-dualism.
 - dualism is applied in the practices of yoga, *ayurveda* and *vastu* as well as in the worldview that embraces *Shiva* and *Shakti*, Seer and seen, masculine and feminine, matter and consciousness, finite and infinite
- Through practice, you move from dual to non-dual.
 - *Shiva/Shakti* become One
- The process of moving from the many to the One is a systematic endeavor in which you transition, through practice, in stages, from...
 - matter—where you identify with the world and your physical body, to...
 - energy—where you increasingly identify yourself as life-force, non-material, vital presence to...

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- transcendence, where all subjective and finite objects dissolve, merging into the One/the Infinite
- ParaYoga's focus with *tantra* is on reweaving all your layers of consciousness through yoga, *pranayama*, meditation, visualization, *mantra*, contemplation, ritual, subtle anatomy, senses and *diksha* (initiation), along with working with nature's cycles.
 - work with the forces of nature to positively influence the direction of change
 - focus on the micro level (yourself), so you can affect your relationship with the macro
 - link to cosmic forces to change your thoughts, behavior and feelings
 - build transformative or assimilative energy to subsume your psycho/emotional dysfunction
- Thus, you become capable of entering and worshiping at the inner altar; your body becomes—what it was designed by nature to be—a sanctum for worshiping Spirit.
- *Tantra* maps this path, leading to direct experience, worship and oneness with the Highest Good—the singular Truth or Reality.
 - you find these teachings through various tantric schools, including *kundalini* yoga and *Sri Vidya*
- The realization of this ultimate goal leads to:
 - worldly achievement/attainment (*riddhi*)
 - fulfillment (*bhoga*)
 - freedom (*apavarga*)
 - capacity (*shakti*), increasing power of will and determination, knowledge and spontaneous right action



The Reach and Scope of *Tantra*

- Yet another meaning of the word *tantra* is “body of knowledge” or “treatise.”
- In as much as tantra’s goal is to help you overcome your limitations and achieve prosperity, the tradition births numberless texts and teachings, making it one of the most comprehensive spiritual systems ever developed.
- For these reasons the scope of Tantra’s teachings touch upon practically every aspect of life.
 - in each context, the ancient scriptures outline—in astounding detail—the methods and practices, which when followed precisely lead to success and auspiciousness
- The following list enumerates just some of the subjects upon which the light of tantric wisdom has provided enlightened guidance for achieving more abundance, fulfillment and freedom.
 - consciousness (*cit*)—detailing the various states, their unique characteristics and the means by which you progress to the Highest
 - the creation and destruction of the physical universe—providing profound insights into both the manifest and non-manifest universe
 - worship of deities (*devi puja*)—leading to direct experience, embodiment or materialization of divine forces as well as the height of love and devotion
 - classification of beings—delineating the seven categories, both material and non-material
 - astronomy
 - astrology—contextualizing the forces of *karma*, both individually and collectively

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- the different realms (*lokas*)—distinguishing between heaven, earth and all the realms between and beyond
- the psychic centers and pathways (*nadis* and *chakras*)—maps the subtle body and provides a body of knowledge by which you can positively influence mind and body and ultimately merge with Spirit
- laws and duties in society—discerning your roles in life (e.g. seeker, wife, teacher, parent...) and how to prioritize them in such a way as to achieve the greatest success and happiness
- sacramental rites—a numberless array of unique rituals and practices designed to link worldly milestones to spiritual awareness
- consecration of the forms of deities (*murti*)—in which abstract, divine consciousness is given form, allowing it to become comprehensible and material
- invocation (*mantra*)—the sound body/bodies of Divinity
- mystic patterns or visual networks of consciousness (*mandala*)—a means of illustrating the journey of spiritual evolution
- symbolic and invocative gestures (*mudra*)—the science of embodying and attracting divine intelligence
- spiritual practices (*sadhana*)—systematic application of practices, working synergistically with an array of means (e.g. time of day, intensity and duration of practice, coordinated with diet and other observances) to heighten the overall effect of practice



- consecration of locales, including sacred sites—a methodical approach to establishing harmony with the environment and conductivity to achieving desired goals
- details of holy shrines—includes architectural plans for the engineering of sacred space, detailed elements of design to invoke divine forces
- magic (*yoga maya sadhana*)—methods and practices to affect the laws of nature in support of the greater good
- ceremonial rites and initiations (*diksha*)—description of the methods whereby spiritual energy is transferred to or seated in the one receiving initiation
- yoga—including *asana*, *pranayama*, meditative methods
- medicine—from surgery to medicinal herbs, and including *ayurveda*, the focus is on both the prevention of disease and its cure
- alchemy for the use of living a rich and fulfilling life—can include either external and/or internal practices
- the use of sexual energy to unfold higher awareness—called *maithuna*, some tantric traditions utilized sexual energy to awaken spiritual experience; these methods were highly detailed and specific, requiring the guidance of an enlightened master willing to teach them—exceptionally rare in this modern age; despite the public's fascination with these teachings and the attempt at popularizing them, they make up but a fraction of traditional tantric wisdom



Schools of Tantra: Kaula, Samaya and Mishra

- Consider the breadth of subject matter and all the profound details that it explores...
- Some tantric traditions are steeped in external ritual, others are entirely internal and meditative; some (theoretically, at least) use conscious sexual coupling as a practice for spiritual awakening; others simply rely on the methodical use of *mantra* to achieve the same aim.
- Some approaches utilize yoga *asana*; others do not; some emphasize external achievement, others are primarily concerned with spiritual emancipation.
- There are orthodox and non-orthodox approaches as well as varied traditions and sub-traditions.
- *Tantra* can easily appear to be an unwieldy body of knowledge, all but impossible to categorize.
- Compelled to differentiate amongst its countless techniques and approaches, *tantra* categorized the whole of the science into three unique schools and two distinct paths.
- The three schools of *Tantra*:
 - *Kaula* (external)
 - *Mishra* (mixed)
 - *Samaya* (internal)
- The two paths of *tantra*:
 - Left Handed (the path that departs from accepted orthodoxy of *Veda*)
 - Right Handed (the path that follows the accepted orthodoxy of *Veda*)



- All approaches, all schools and paths, to varying degrees, ultimately embrace both *bogha* and *apavarga*.

The World of Matter as the Means: *Kaula* School of Tantra

- “*Kaula*”—meaning “family,” calls out the unique methods and practices that developed within individual villages, communities and sects.
- The use of external or material objects is the distinguishing feature of this school (e.g. worship and practices utilizing substances such as minerals, plants, animals, gems and other substances found throughout nature, including the use of *yantra* or *mandala*, fire worship, pilgrimages to holy shrines, etc.).
- Traditionally, this school was meant for householders, as their worldly/material responsibilities shaped a natural predilection for identifying with their body and worldly things.
- Adepts would often initiate students into *kaula* after some preliminary practices, perhaps beginning with *mantra*, then progressing onto tantric ways of meditating on *mantra* and perhaps adding *yantra* (wherein the teacher might ask the student to draw, carve or inscribe their *yantra*).
- Many of the *kaula* practices are considered “forbidden,” in as much as they do not conform to vedic orthodoxy.
- These include the practice of *pancha* (five) *makara* (element), the ritual in which five constituents, including sexual coupling, are utilized synergistically:



- *maithuna* (sexual union)
- *madya* (wine)
- *mamsa* (meat)
- *matsya* (fish)
- *mudra* (parched grain, a different meaning of the word)
- a *kaula* practice, this is the prescribed method for utilizing sexual union as a practice to awaken spiritual experience; all the elements listed above, along with a very detailed sequence of actions as outlined by the tradition, are engaged methodically during sexual union
- note: many modern interpretations of *maithuna* have little authentic connection to the traditional teachings, which were applied as a method of profound spiritual awakening, not merely an exotic form of sensuality
- Note: the use of any and all of these five is prohibited to Brahmins. Indeed, while the practice is meant to powerfully engage the senses and lead to awakening of dormant capacities, it is considered “forbidden,” an unorthodox practice, completely contrary to accepted vedic tradition.
- The key principles of the *Kaula* school, that inform its approach, include the following:
 - everything is Divine
 - to not be aware of Her (the Source of life) is to suffer
 - embodying this philosophy throughout every aspect of life is the highest achievement
 - trying to constantly distinguish between positive and negative (divine and profane) impairs the mind and weakens the nervous system



- thus, there is no orientation to separating good from evil, since the Divine pervades all and is not confined to the good
- in fact, given that “all is Divine,” the intention of this school is to dismantle the wall standing between good and bad, sacred and mundane
- Before you can live according to these radical precepts, you must determine;
 - if you are fully and consistently aware of the Divine, of that which transcends good and bad, finite and infinite
 - if you are not constantly aware of non-dual reality, attempting to adhere to this school can lead to delusion, indulgence and a complete loss of spiritual discernment and growth
- Thus, the first step of *kaula* is to analyze yourself, your consciousness and determine whether or not you realistically embody this philosophy.
- In order to be truly prepared to practice within the *kaula* school, your goal should first be to establish yourself in non-dual, singular awareness. This is vital.
 - too often this point is missed by modern students
 - additionally, teachers who are uninformed or lacking in authority—“making things up” as they go—often attempt to convince modern seekers that *tantra* is a course of spiritual practice that prescribes complete sensual indulgence
- Invariably, those who are ill-prepared to lead or be led down this path experience a loss of discernment, self-empowerment and integration.



- Remember: *tantra* is not a short cut, rather it is a path that, when understood and practiced systematically, leads to utter and complete freedom and success in every aspect of life.
- The primary aim of *kaula* is primarily *bhoga* as well as *apavarga*.

The World of Mind as the Means: *Samaya* School of *Tantra*

- *Samaya* can be defined as “one with Her.”
- The emphasis of this school is internal practice. This is the pure yogic path, using mind and awareness to link to the objects of meditation.
- Since a pure mind has access to everything in the universe and can experience any and all objects more completely in their non-material form, there is no use for external objects or rituals, according to the *samaya* school.
- There is scientific evidence to support this approach: meditate on a lemon, and your body creates the same enzymes it does when you eat a lemon, simply by meditating on love or other positive attitudes your body is positively affected—the exact same responses as if you were in love.
 - tantric literature includes an array of tales in which a devotee, who mentally creates an atmosphere of devotion, is regarded as superior to one who requires material objects to reach a similar state
- The *samaya* school regards the body as *yantra*.
 - it embraces the yogic concept of *nadi*, that the body consists of 72,000 energy channels
 - the points where at least three of these channels converge are significant power centers, e.g. *chakra*



- additional points of intersection are called *pitham* or seat, a point of power in which consciousness is even more concentrated
- finally, *tantra* recognizes the most auspicious sacred sites within the body; these are called *tirtha* ("a crossing point") which, as expounded upon in great detail in the tantric tradition of *Sri Vidya*, are the most sublime places to practice internal worship
- In short, from the view point of *samaya*, no external objects are required to access Divinity; practices like *pancha makara* or external worship of *yantra*, *murti* (physical statues that represent Divinity) or even *agni hotra* (fire worship) are unnecessary.
- However, because of the clarity and sensitivity that this approach requires, preliminary practices are necessary.
 - practices that prepare you for *samaya* are indeed yogic techniques, such as *asana*, *pranayama*, *bandha*, *mudra*, meditation, visualization, *mantra*, etc.
 - in fact, only after *kundalini* has been awakened are *samaya* practices to be undertaken, if they are to be truly fruitful
- A key feature of this approach is meditation at the crown, where, from the viewpoint of the *samaya* tradition, the entirety of both our inner universe and outer universe is seated.
- The emphasis of practice leading up to *samaya* is to apply yogic techniques so that consciousness rises through the central channel, then flows into the eyebrow center and ultimately becomes fully established at the center in the crown.
- The primary aim of *samaya* is *apavarga*, with significantly less emphasis on *bhoga*.



Mind and Matter as Means: *Mishra* School and Two Paths of *Tantra*

- The third school of *tantra* is *mishra*, meaning “mixed.” This school utilizes both internal and external, material and non-material object-centered practices.
- This is the approach that is ideally suited for most students—those who have not yet fully accessed their inner, subtle realm of consciousness.
 - skillful introduction of external objects in practice to gain access to the inner realms
 - usage of a combination of physical body (e.g. *mudra*), external and internal practices and external and internal meditative techniques
- In the *mishra* school, the primary focus is at the heart center.
 - e.g. in order to meditate on the heart, one could draw a *yantra* related to the heart on their palm or simply experience it internally at the heart
- The goal of *mishra* practice is a balance of *apavarga* and *bhoga*.
- In addition to the three schools, the ancients introduced two distinct paths to further clarify the diverse approaches of the various tantric traditions:
 - right hand path (*dakshina marga*)
 - left hand path (*vama marga*)
- The distinguishing feature of these two paths is determined by how one responds to desire. The left-handed path suggests:
 - that all urges are intrinsically Divine; therefore, they should not be renounced or restrained in any way—to do so would be to suppress Divine will



- this means that in *vama marga*, tantric practitioners seek to not suppress their urges, whether sensual or materialistic or biological
- they strive to attain *siddhi* (miracle-like powers) by all possible means, including *pancha makara*
- This path dispenses with *yama* and *niyama*, asserting that you can be spiritually awake, yet not necessarily moral or ethical; this is a difficult one for most of us to assimilate—spiritually and morality seem to be inextricably linked.
 - if this seems too far-fetched or fundamentally against your perspective, you can turn to...
- The view of the right-handed path:
 - some desires are helpful and some are not, some help you evolve and approach Divinity and others embed you more deeply in your current level of awareness
 - this path takes the yogic approach—cultivate discernment and an increasing capacity to master your thoughts as well as your deep seated patterns that aren't always helpful
 - through a systematic practice applied over time, the desires that lead you away from Truth become less distracting and your will aligns with infinite intelligence
 - it develops the sensitivity and self-control to respond more frequently to healthy urges and less so to those that are unhealthy
 - there is a clear commitment to the underlying value of ethics and morality—continuously refine yourself so you are more in-line with virtue



- therefore, in addition to the usual practices of *asana* and meditation, the right hand embraces *yama* and *niyama*
 - attain powers by developing *sattwa* and *sattvic* forms of Divinity
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- The right-handed path comprises the majority of modern Tantric teachings.
 - It is also the basis for ParaYoga.
 - More specifically, ParaYoga is a *mishra* school of right-handed *tantra*.
 - *Samaya* and *kaula* are not two distinct traditions; they are different disciplines within the same tradition.
 - Right-hand teachers are far more common. Authoritative left-handed teachers are extremely rare and even more rare are those who are willing to teach and share their knowledge of the left-handed path.
 - Traditionally, *kaula* is imparted in three stages: the first two lead the student into the right-handed path; the third and final stage unveils the mysteries of and provides access to left-handed *kaula*.
 - Generally, left-handed disciplines constitute the final stage of *sadhana* within the *kaula* school.
 - In conclusion, to put these ideas into a viable and helpful practice, it is vital that you:
 - understand what *tantra* is and what it is not
 - discern authoritative teachings, teachers and traditions from those which are not



- reflect on the tantric approach to which you are best suited and from which you will be led to the greatest amount of freedom and fulfillment
- recognize that the "sexual practices" (*maithuna*), so often associated to *tantra*, make up a fraction of its totality and that without ever venturing into these practices, you can achieve all that *tantra* offers
- Our approach to this sacred science will emphasize its yogic applications—the right handed path.
 - we draw from its wisdom, principles and practices that are practical and accessible and that empower you, the practitioner (or teacher) to transform any and all aspects of life