

maximize pleasure and minimize pain. In the verticalist traditions, the worldling's hunt for pleasure, or gratification of the senses, is typically viewed as a by-product of spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*) and as the primary source of pain. As the *Yoga-Sūtra* (2.16) puts it succinctly, pain or suffering is what is to be overcome. The recommended way to accomplish this is by curbing the volatile senses through unwavering mental concentration and inward-mindedness (*pratyak-cetanā*).

While Tantra concurs that suffering is undesirable, it does not subscribe to the simplistic belief of the verticalist traditions that pleasure (*kāma*) is intrinsically wrong or evil. Rather, it views the natural human impetus to avoid painful experiences and encounter pleasurable experiences in a new, broader context. Pleasure, the *tāntrikas* realized, is a manifestation of the ultimate bliss, which is an inalienable part of our true nature. Put differently, our search for pleasure is, in the final analysis, a quest for the bliss of the Self (*ātman*). There is nothing wrong with pleasure as such. It is merely too limited, a minuscule trickle of the delight that is the energy packed into every single atom of existence. Moreover, pleasure is frustratingly temporary, and therefore it tends to make addicts out of us, for we want to recapture pleasurable moments again and again. This pursuit enslaves all of us to one degree or another and thus is a form of suffering all its own. Either we become addicted to pleasure or we become addicted to the struggle for recovering an authentic state free from suffering. In either case we obscure our intrinsic freedom and bliss.

The Tantric path is a genuine middle path that, at least ideally, cultivates the natural (*sahaja*) state lying beyond all naive ideas about pleasure and pain. Tantra seeks to expand into daily life those sacred moments in which we are in touch with a larger truth, a greater sense of being, just as it endeavors to expand ordinary moments of pleasure to the point where they reveal their true face, which is bliss. This is expressed well in the *Vijnāna-Bhairava*, a remarkable Kashmiri text of perhaps the sixth century CE or earlier. In this work (65), which is also called *Shiva-Jnāna-Upanishad* (Secret Teaching on the Wisdom of Shiva), we can read the following instruction:

15



Enlightenment and the Hidden Powers of the Mind

Goddess! The body is the temple of God.
The psyche (*jīva*) is God Sadā-Shiva.
Discard the dross of knowledge!
Worship with the notion "I am He!"
—*Kula-Arnava-Tantra* (9.41)

BLISS BEYOND PLEASURE

There are many ways to look at the Tantric *sādhana*. One way is to see it as the cultivation of bliss by magnifying pleasure to the *n*th degree. Pleasure and pain—*sukha* and *duhkha*—are the warp and woof of mundane experience. The ordinary person constantly seeks to

[The *yogin*] should remember the entire universe or his own body as being filled with his innate (*sva*) bliss. Then by means of his innate nectar (*amrita*) he should simultaneously assume the form of the supreme bliss.

The *Vijnāna-Bhairava* teaches 112 ways of “remembering” one’s ivine status. It gives methods for all kinds of situations, especially those in which a high amount of psychosomatic energy is mobilized, such as moments of great anger and passion. It is difficult to transform a mind dominated by the principle of inertia (*tamas*), manifesting as lethargy, apathy, and indifference. When the dynamic principle (*rajas*) holds sway, however, the energetic charge inherent in the unstable condition of the agitated mind can be put to positive use. To proceed from *tamas* to *sattva* (the principle of lucidity), one must first establish a presence of *rajas*. The following verses from the *Vijnāna-Bhairava* (69–72) clearly illustrate the Tantric approach.

The delight (*sukha*) associated with the penetration of the *shakti* at the peak of intercourse with the *shakti* is said to be the delight of one’s own brahmic Truth.

O divine Mistress, even in the absence of a *shakti*, there is a flood of bliss from the presence of the memory of the delight [one has experienced with] a woman by much licking and churning.

Or when one experiences great joy (*ānanda*) at seeing a relative after a long time, one should contemplate the arising joy and then merge the mind with it.

Upon experiencing an expansion of joy from savoring the pleasure produced by food and drink, one should contemplate the condition of being filled [with joy] from which will come great bliss (*mahā-ānanda*).

The recommendation contained in the first two stanzas of the above quotation has been fully explored by practitioners of the left-hand and Kaula schools. They have used sexuality, which affords the greatest conceivable pleasure for most people, yet without allowing that pleasure to overrun the mind. The *tāntrikas* have always looked

for a more profound truth in sex than that of mere orgasm. In fact, the fleeting thrill of orgasm spells the end of pleasure through the sexual organs. It involves an ejection of life force (*prāna*) and characteristically leads to a diminution of awareness. But the preservation of the life force and the careful cultivation of awareness are what the Tantric adepts are most interested in, because they understand that both energy and acute wakefulness, or lucid waking, are the means to bliss.

Our true nature, the transcendental Self, is supreme Being-Consciousness-Energy. It is also innately blissful. This bliss is not mere experience, for experiences come and go, but bliss (*ānanda*) is stable and eternal. Just as we can taste a semblance of this bliss in the sexual act, we can also discover or rediscover it in any other circumstance so long as we arrest the motion of the mind’s conveyor belt.

The *Tri-Pura-Rahasya*, an outstanding scripture of the Shri-Vidyā tradition of South India, acknowledges that we all at least intermittently experience our true, blissful nature. It speaks of momentary ecstasies (*kshana-samādhi*), in which the Self shines through into our consciousness—if only we can learn to capture those moments. Instants that reveal the Self are the short intervals between waking and sleeping and between one perception and the next, or one thought and the next, or at the height of terror or extreme anger.

These fleeting ecstasies are instances of spontaneous ecstasy or *sahaja-samādhi*, which is highly valued in the *Tri-Pura-Rahasya* (10.1–23a, 36–40), as the following story bears out.

Hemalekhā saw that her beloved husband had attained the desired supreme State and did not disturb him. After three hours, he awoke from the supreme Condition. He opened his eyes and saw his beloved and the surroundings. Eagerly desiring to rest in that Condition once more, he closed his eyes.

Quickly grasping his hands, she asked her beloved in a beautiful ambrosial voice, “Tell me, what have you found to be the benefit by closing your eyes or the loss by keeping them open? What happens when they are closed? What happens when they are left open? Tell me this, my dearest. I would like to hear about your experience.”

Asked in this manner, he said to her, lazily or reluctantly, as if he were drunk on wine or made slow from idleness, "My dear, I have at last found complete repose. I find no rest in external things, which are filled with suffering. Enough of such activities, which are [habitual] like constantly chewing cattle!

"He who is blinded by misfortune, which lies outside oneself, does not know true joy within himself. Just as someone goes begging for food because he does not know about his own treasure, so did I, ignorant of the ocean of joy within myself, again and again go after the pleasure obtained from things as if they were most excellent, even though they are overflowing with massive suffering and are transient like lightning. I deemed them permanent by force of habit.

"He who is stricken with suffering does not attain repose. So, people unable to discern between joy and sorrow always uselessly accumulate a mass of suffering. Enough of such efforts, which merely enhance the experience of suffering!

"My dear, I beg you with folded hands, be kind to me! I want to find repose in my Self's innate joy again. Oh, you are unfortunate because even though you know this State yourself, you abandon that repose and instead engage in useless activity leading to suffering."

Thus spoken to, the wise woman smiled and said, "My dear, it is you who does not know the supremely holy State, knowing which the learned of pure heart are no longer deluded. That State is as far removed from you as is the sky from the surface of the Earth. You know next to nothing. Realizing that State certainly does not depend on closing or opening one's eyes! Nor is it ever attained by doing or not doing something. Nor is that State realized by any coming or going.

"How can the Whole possibly be attained by doing anything, going anywhere, or closing one's eyes? If it were located inside oneself, then how could that State be the Whole? Myriads upon myriads of universes exist in one corner alone. How can these be made to disappear by the mere opening or closing of an eyelid measuring a digit's width? Oh, what can I say about the amazing magnitude of your delusion?

"Listen, Prince! I will tell you what is the essential truth. So long as the knots [of ignorance] are not cut, [true] joy will escape you. There are myriads of knots, which form a rope of

delusion. . . . Get rid of the knots and confine the notion 'I perceive' in your heart. Uproot the very tight knot 'I am not this.' Everywhere behold the undivided, blissful, expansive Self. Behold the whole world in the Self, as if it were reflected in a mirror. Do not think that there is more than the Self that is everywhere and everything. Entering everything, abide as that which also is within by means of the innate Self."

Thus listening to what his beloved said, the brilliant Hemacūda was rid of his misconception and understood that the Self is the Whole, which is everywhere. Gradually he stably realized this by becoming absorbed into the Whole itself and lived happily ever after with Hemalekhā and a host of other maidens.

Sahaja-samādhi is open-eyed ecstasy in which *nirvāna* is recognized in *samsāra*, or to put it differently, in which both these concepts are transcended. The sage who has attained this level of realization is perpetually happy. In his magnum opus, the *Tantra-Āloka*, Abhinava Gupta speaks of the following seven levels of bliss:

1. *Nija-ānanda* (written *nijānanda*), or "innate bliss," consists in the realization of the Self as totally separate from the objective reality and is due to the *yogin's* concentration on the subjective side of emptiness (*shūnyatā*) at the heart.
2. *Nirānanda*, or "trans-bliss," arises when the *yogin* focuses on the external reality. It results from the ascent of the life force (*prāna*) to the psychoenergetic center at the crown of the head.
3. *Para-ānanda* (written *parānanda*), or "supreme bliss," is the realization of the Self as containing within its infinite compass all objects, which are grasped individually. It is caused by the descent of the life force in the form of *apāna* from the crown center to the heart.
4. *Brahma-ānanda* (written *brahmānanda*), or "brahmic bliss," is similar to *para-ānanda*, but here objects are grasped as a totality. This state is caused when the life force assumes its *samāna* form at the heart.
5. *Mahā-ānanda* (written *mahānanda*), or "great bliss," consists in the realization of the Self transcending all objective forms

as a result of the ascent of the life force as *udāna* in the central channel.

6. *Cid-ānanda*, or "Consciousness bliss," is the realization of the Self as subject, object, and means of cognition and comes about with the conversion of the *udāna* life force into its *vyāna* aspect.
7. *Jagad-ānanda*, or "world bliss," is the realization of the Self as including absolutely everything within and without. This is the most complete type of enlightenment.

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

India's spiritual traditions are all *moksha-shāstras*, or liberation teachings. In the words of a much-quoted Upanishadic prayer, they seek to guide the aspirant from falsehood to Truth and from darkness to Light. The final goal is conceived differently in the various traditions. In Patanjali's *yoga-darshana*, for instance, liberation is conceived as the irrevocable separation of the eternal principle of Consciousness (called *purusha*) from the eternal principle of unconscious nature (called *prakṛiti*). For this reason, one of the commentators on the *Yoga-Sūtra*, King Bhoja, even defines Yoga as "disunion" (*vijyoga*). In the ordinary, unenlightened state, the *purusha*, or spirit, deems itself entangled in the processes of nature, forgetting its perpetual freedom. The goal of Pātanjala Yoga is, through discernment (*viveka*) and dispassion (*vairāgya*), to separate the unfettered *purusha* from the automatic machinery of nature (including the brain-dependent mind). The final state is called *kaivalya*, or "aloneness," meaning the transcendental isolation of the spirit.

This is not the conceptualization of the spiritual goal in Tantra. The Tantric masters, on the contrary, constantly speak of the ultimate identity of *purusha* and *prakṛti*, or Shiva and Shakti. For them, as we have seen, nature is not mere unconscious matter that like a giant rock weighs down the spirit, but a living manifestation of the very same Reality that also includes the principle of Consciousness. There-

fore liberation cannot have the same meaning in Tantra as it has in Pātanjala-Yoga.

For Patanjali, liberation depends on the resorption (*pratiprasava*) of the primary constituents of *prakṛiti*, the *gunas*, back into the transcendental ground of nature, whereupon the entire body-mind in all its levels of manifestation is dissolved. Thus, for him, liberation inevitably coincides with the death of the bodily envelope and the disappearance of the mind associated with it. The individual cosmos ceases to exist, just as in Hindu mythocosmology the entire universe vanishes at the end of a cosmic age, when the Creator-God Brahma falls asleep. The only significant difference is that the universe reemerges when Brahma reawakens, whereas upon liberation the individual body-mind is forever negated. Transcending as it does space and time, the *purusha* is without body, and its identification with a body-mind is merely an inexplicable self-inflicted illusion of dire consequences. That misidentification can be compared to a person mistaking his or her mirror image for the real "I."

Tantra, too, acknowledges that such a misidentification occurs but understands it differently. The mirror (i.e., nature) is as real as the person gazing in it. The mistake is made when the mirror image is taken to be oneself exclusively, when the image is separated from the imaged being. The Tantric authorities never tire of reiterating that Shiva and Shakti are distinct entities only in our conceptualization of them but are identical at the level of absolute Reality. Thus our senses show us not an altogether illusory external world but a half-truth. Likewise, our mind presents us not with an illusory internal universe but something that simply is not entirely true. When we see things as they truly are (*yathā-bhūta*), all opposites—such as inner/outer, subject/object, spirit/matter—melt away. What remains is the finally incomprehensible One, which encompasses all the countless distinctions that the senses and the mind can possibly conjure up.

The *Kula-Arnava-Tantra* (8.109) explains the state of ecstatic transcendence, or *samādhi*, as follows:

The time at which the union (*samāyoga*) of Shiva and Shakti is accomplished, [which is] the "juncture" (*sandhyā*)¹ of those devoted to the *kula*, is described as ecstasy.

The “juncture” is the paradoxical point of being omnipresent while apparently animating a finite body; of being omniscient while apparently possessing limited knowledge; of being eternal while apparently being manifested as a human being with a finite span of life; of being infinitely blissful while apparently experiencing pleasure and pain. This is the point of liberation, which is no point at all, as it transcends space as well as time. The liberated adept is fully illumined and yet is simultaneously present in the world of darkness, the world of ignorance and suffering.

The *Kula-Arnava-Tantra* (9.14) also gives another, contrasting definition of *samādhi*:

The mind does not hear, smell, touch, see, experience pleasure and pain, or conceptualize. Like a log, he neither knows nor is aware of anything. The person who is thus absorbed in Shiva is said to abide in ecstasy.

This is a good description of *nirvikalpa-samādhi*, or transconceptual ecstasy, which ensues when there is not the slightest movement in the mind and when Consciousness stands stripped of all false superimpositions. This must not be confused with liberation itself, however, because this elevated state still excludes the external world. The ultimate ecstasy is called *sahaja-samādhi*, which is identical with liberation. It does not require the demise of the body-mind but is realized here and now. This superlative condition is known as living liberation (*jīvan-mukti*).

The *Kula-Arnava-Tantra* (9.23) states that after the supreme Self (*parama-ātman*) has been realized, “wherever the mind may turn, there it is collected (*samādhaya*).” In other words, the enlightened mind is ecstatically centered on whatever object may arise to its attention. Although this scripture does not specifically contrast *nirvikalpa-samādhi* with actual liberation, its descriptive account implies this important distinction. Speaking of the liberated being, the *Kula-Arnava-Tantra* (9.22) declares:

He who abides in the single state of the Self,² his every activity is worship, his every utterance is a true *mantra*, and his every gaze is meditation.

For such a one, the text continues (9.26), nothing remains to be done. And yet precisely because the liberated being is no longer subject to the constraints of karma, as manifesting in the habits of the ego-driven personality, he or she enjoys supreme freedom to pursue any goal and engage in any action without planting anew the karmic seeds of ignorance and suffering. The liberated being is truly a free agent—at least from the ordinary human perspective. From the vantage point of liberation itself, the question of freedom and bondage does not arise at all. It could even be said that the liberated being acts under the constraint of the totality of existing forces.

Thus when the Indic texts claim that the liberated person could annihilate the universe in an instant, this is undoubtedly true but ought not to be understood in a conventional manner. As an individual, the liberated being is completely incapable of such a deed. But since he or she no longer is an individual but the Divine, the destruction of the whole cosmos lies indeed within “his” or “her” range of possibility.³ In any case, no mental decision or personal impulse would be involved. Omnipotence is not merely personal power multiplied infinitely but is of an entirely different order.

The same can be said of omniscience. The liberated being is by definition omniscient, since he or she is all knowledge, but this is true only at the level of absolute existence. Here in our realm of distinct phenomena, the liberated adept may well be ignorant of many things but has access to knowledge as and when needed in the scheme of things. This is another instance of the paradox of liberation. These thoughts take us to the subject of paranormal powers.

PARANORMAL POWERS AND THE POWER OF PERFECTION

Just as there is ecstasy and ecstasy, there also is power and power. *Samādhis* that are not liberating are nevertheless greatly enjoyable and enriching and in most cases even necessary steps toward full enlightenment. Similarly, the numerous paranormal abilities, called

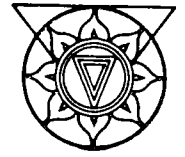
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Tantra

THE PATH
OF ECSTASY



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S H A M B H A L A

Boston & London

1998