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Wherever You Are
Is the Entrance

This path is not one of speculation; it doesn't get lost in the meanderings of esoteric discourses, nor does it shy away from elaborate expositions on the nature of reality; it is steadfast and tangible as it incorporates somatic experiences at the level of neurophysiology. Its lofty goal is not in contradiction with the material plane of existence, which sees the ultimate in recognizing immanence as an expression of one's own dear Self throughout all the planes of existence as well as non-existence.

The role our thoughts, emotions and feelings play in the drama of life is central to our happiness and it would be folly to argue otherwise. This is true even to those spiritual perspectives which place an emphasis on the need to forgo all this spectrum of human responses in order to arrive at the place where one is unperturbed by human drama. Even those rare few who have accessed true peace and equilibrium are not exempt from being subjected to emotional responses which bring forth certain feelings with greater force. Tremendous attempts were made to subdue human nature throughout our shared history which gave us a variety of psychological perspectives on what it means to be human and how to deal with it all. Some of these views are so diverse and perplexing in their approaches that one begins to wonder if there is a universal remedy to what takes precedence over anything else as that *human condition*?

This is where Tantra, as that progressive and timeless expression of *Vedic Thought*, has a lot to offer. The knowledge contained in the exposi-

tions of its principal doctrines is unparalleled, which makes an invaluable contribution to this field of study when it comes to the understanding of what it means to be human. This is of particular significance, for Tantra is known as an all-embracing path towards self-realization, with energy as its principal aspect. According to its main postulates, everything is considered to be a particular expression of energy. Therefore, *thoughts*, *emotions* and *feelings* are seen as forms of energy. Since everything is considered to be energy, Tantra does not shy away from the full gamut of approaches including that of rational analysis, intellectual insight, emotional introspection and inquiry into thought processes whilst taking into consideration the somatic nature of all experiences, and more specifically, the importance of sexual energy in the process—a perspective unique to Tantric tradition. To give it a contemporary understanding, Tantra could be spoken of as the neurophysiological path of transformation.

In modern Physics, the principle of the conservation of energy, also known as the first law of thermodynamics, states that energy is indestructible; it only transforms from one form to another. This echoes the Tantric understanding that energy cannot be destroyed, but it *can* be transformed. And this potential for transformation is in relation to everything, including the internal work we do individually. Whatever stands in the way of our freedom cannot be “gotten rid of”; it has to be transmuted.

The possibility inherent in the way we are wired synaptically means we have the potential to free ourselves from outlived habits, accumulated stresses, deep-seated traumas, psychic conditionings and ultimately, that sense of “separate self” which causes the greatest pain of separation. One of the ways of looking at spiritual work in terms of what it truly represents is in being able to metabolize undigested impressions and experiences and integrate them all into the fabric of our awareness.

To take a quantum leap in our understanding of the way energy works, we are invited to see that what is considered a hindrance can be used to advance on the path. To paraphrase one of Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī’s verses,

“...*When rust sets on the mirror, use it to polish it clean...*” (note: during that time, mirrors used to be made of polished metal and had to be regularly burnished to remove rust). The *polishing* here is of the “mirror of the heart” to reflect the image of the Beloved, a symbol used by Sufis as that daily reminder of the fallibility we call the human condition; it is the call to prayer to keep the heart in pristine condition for the divine to reflect itself in fuller measure and in our own image.

The voice of our current culture is at best a collective lamenting on this seemingly unbridgeable condition, this psychosis, this unbearable pain, yet to answer to the call of the Sufi mystic requires recognition that these impressions we are entrenched in are to be transformed. No impression, no experience is meant to be seen, let alone accepted, as an impediment to our freedom—this is the greatest limitation Consciousness can impose on itself.

From the Tantric perspective, all the limitations we are faced with in life are meant to be offered into the fire of self-awareness. Anything that stands in our way of freedom and happiness must be offered into that flame. We are encouraged to set ablaze our perceived sense of imperfection, not as a violent protest through self-immolation, but as an act of empathy born of understanding. Let it burn bright! This is the inner dimension of the *Homa*, the fire ritual performed by Vedic priests, and unless we consciously offer our limitations and obstacles into the fire of Awareness, the outer offering will always remain incomplete.

When two substances come together, it causes the birth of a new element—often at the expense of what went into it in the first place—this is alchemy. This active understanding invites creativity into everything we do, and that extends to our practice of meditation. We are the original cause and effect of all that is, and all that has ever been. This whole existence is for us to experience bliss as the very reason behind it all. Anything that stands in the way of that truth is consciously offered into the fire of knowledge. Being ready to offer our perceived limitations illuminates our understanding further, and opens it up to being able to offer our limited sense of self, speaking of that ultimate act of offering.

Before we can willingly part with our individuality we ought to make it into a wholesome offering: *I'm willing to offer myself with all these limitations. I'm willing to offer up whatever it is that prevents me from the joy of being here and now. Whatever has impeded this sense of freedom, I'm ready to offer that. I'm ready to be free of it all...* This is the way of *yajña*, the way of conscious *sacrifice*. Whenever we make a sincere offering, whatever it is that was offered is being made whole again.



Of all the movements that ripple the ocean of Consciousness in a myriad of infinite waves, two are of primary importance. The outpouring and the withdrawal are simultaneous movements in Awareness. Everything emerges and is reabsorbed by these two primordial movements.

And it is in meditation that we are given the most tangible ways to tap into these movements, the extroverted and the introverted ones. Perhaps experiencing reality in its extroverted aspect is already a gift given to us all. Whereas some form of spiritual practice is often required for being able to consciously ride the wave of that withdrawal. One of the reasons meditation is the surest way to take us inward is precisely because it turns the mind away from sensory input, into the domain where the mind has no choice but to remain on its own, and with the help of certain focal points of attention to serve as temporary assistance, the mind settles into its natural state of quiescence.

Withdrawal of the senses, to turn the mind inward is required in order to verify what is known in the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* as, *yogaś citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ: the cessation of the fluctuations is union*. In meditation, we experience the cessation of these fluctuations (*vṛttis*) on the surface of Consciousness, which is what the mind in essence is. There is another, perhaps more unapologetic way of putting it to cite one of the *Śiva Sūtras: the mind (in its quiescent way) is Consciousness*. It is as if the mind has these two aspects: the mind filled with thoughts and fluctuations,

and the cessation of these is quiescence. That state of quiescence is what the Buddhists refer to as *no-mind*. When that which constitutes the mind ceases to fluctuate, it reflects Consciousness clearly as the surface of a still lake reflects the moon.

For the mind to settle down, the senses have to be subdued. All forms of yoga understand this. We can have a meditative experience whilst being active, however, the working of the mind is inseparable from the activity of the body through the act of breathing. And although certain physical activities like dancing, running and swimming are accompanied by the lessening of mental activity, these are not suitable to provide the conditions for our breathing to become refined.

Samādhi—meditative absorption—is a state in which metabolic activity is reduced to almost nil. This is certainly true when it comes to samādhi without any fluctuations, when there is *no* metabolic activity. It is said that during these deepest withdrawals, the body is known to be in a state of self-preservation. Only a few and far between can go to these extremes in our day and age, and it's not really necessary.

Going back to the mind—to rehabilitate its status before we continue—if not for the mind there would be no possibility for the *Brahma Vidyā* (*Science of the Absolute*). The mind is a reflective aspect of Consciousness which gives us the possibility to contemplate the incomprehensible nature of the Absolute. The mind represents the lunar aspect—the quality of reflective Awareness. We contemplate the nature of the Godhead, the nature of Ultimate Reality *through* the mind. Without the mind, we cannot do that. We need the mind. The trick is not to be taken for a ride by the whirlpool of endless thought constructs, those *vṛttis* within the mind. It is what Ramana Maharshi, the great expounder of *Advaita Vedānta* spoke of as the need to dissolve these *vikalpas* (a synonymous term for *vṛttis*) that make up the constant fluctuation of the mind which conceals the cognition of Consciousness. We want these fluctuations to subside, not for the mind to disappear altogether. Once these whirlpools and ripples subside, what shines forth is Consciousness.