

Puja For Nine Planets : Devata Worship –Vaidic & Tantrik Ritual

By Maha Yogi Paramahansa Dr.Rupnathji

Those who worship with the object of attaining a particular reward gain such reward which (however) is as destructible as a kingdom acquired in a dream. Those, however, who rightly act without hope of reward attain nirvana and are released from rebirth - Mahanirvana Tantra, XIII, 41 (By Maha Yogi Paramahansa Dr.Rupnathji)

Bahiryaga : Outer Worship

Puja (worship) can take many forms and is but one aspect of the tradition. It can be either performed externally or internally. A tantrik may perform daily puja to her or his particular devata and this can be a beautiful rite involving all the senses.

The daily puja, whatever the favoured deity, includes worship of the Sun, Shiva, Shakti, Vishnu and Ganesha. For details see Shri Puja and Subhagodaya on this site. The main concept in puja is that the god or goddess are considered to be actually present in the yantra or image used and are given worship and treated as honoured guests. All recitation, mudras and ritual elements are given to her/him. Yet she/he is one with the worshipper, not separate.

Various ritual accessories (upachara) are used in the daily ceremony, with the 16 principal items being asana (seat), svagata (welcome), padya (water for washing feet), arghya (rice, flowers, sandal paste &c), achamana (sipping water), madhuparka (honey, ghee, milk, curd), snana (bathing), vasana (clothes), abharana (gems), gandha (perfume and sandal), pushpa (flowers), dhupa (incense stick), dipa (flame), naivedya (food) and namaskar (prayer).

These may be multiplied up, depending on the devata. However, despite differences, all daily pujas follow a very similar pattern.

Other of the many elements in daily puja include meditation and recitation of the particular mantra of the devata, as well as worship of the Guru, considered to be one with Shiva.

Other types of worship include optional pujas (kamyas), usually performed for some particular object. According to the tradition, these may only be performed if daily puja is also done.

In the Kaulachara division of tantrika, the puja may take the form of worshipping a living human being as incarnating the god/goddess. See Virasadhana for more information.

Some tantriks also perform their own form of the Vedik homa sacrifice, with particular shaped fire-pits for the sacrifice.

There are other important components in the daily puja, such as the Gayatri. There are tantrik as well as vedik gayatris.

The mala or rosary is used in reciting the mantra of the deity. In nyasa or placing, the rites transform the body of the worshipper into mantra and devata. View Yantra. There are many examples of yantras on this site. But turn here for information on materials as well as an example of 'installing life' into a yantra.

When a sadhaka (m) or sadhvini (f) realises his or her oneness with the devata, there is no need for external puja, which can be considered a method of realising that oneness.

Inner Worship (antaryaga)

As with so many other aspects of the tantrik tradition, there is a gross, a subtle and a supreme aspect to worship. External puja, using either an image or another object such as a yantra or a lingam, is a dualistic form intended, however, to lead the sadhaka to the recognition that there is no difference between worshipper and the worshipped.

After a certain stage, outer worship may no longer be necessary, or may be further complemented with inner worship. Here, for example, offerings to the favoured god or goddess (the isthadevata), may be in the form of offering the senses and the other elements and functions of the human body, all taken here to represent shaktis.

This is also combined with meditation and contemplation of the essential oneness of worshipper and worshipped, and may include other elements of the outer worship including recitation of the mantra (japa).

In fact, the external puja points to the internal worship. The different nyasas, mudras (hand gestures) and other paraphernalia is intended to produce that feeling of oneness in the sadhaka or sadhika. The tantras proclaim the unity of macrocosm with microcosm.

According to the Tantrarajatantra, supreme worship is when the mind, which both accepts and rejects, dissolves into the still, deep source.

Food, Flowers and Perfume

Through mantra, mudra, nyasa, yantra, and all the other numerous elements of Tantric ritual, the initiates carve a sacred niche for themselves out of ordinary reality - Maha Yogi Paramahansa Dr.Rupnathji

The intricate forms of worship (puja) described on some of these pages often require the use of ritual accessories (upacharas), such as specific types of food, flowers and fragrances. For the way in which these are used in a daily rite, refer to the translation of Subhagodaya found on this site.

Some tantrik texts prescribe a whole range of different substances for occasional or optional rites which may include different scents, flowers, edible food and liquids to perform the pujas.

There are plenty of traps for the unwary. While these accessories can relate to external worship (bahiryaga), they may also be used as symbols for internal worship (antaryaga), and so can take a range of forms from the very simple to the very complex. For example, in the Kaulajnananirnaya, the flowers to be offered represent qualities to be cultivated.

"The first flower is non-harmfulness, the second [is] sense restraint, the third generosity, the fourth [is] right disposition, the fifth compassion and the sixth freedom from cruelty. The seventh flower is meditation and the eighth flower is knowledge. Knowing these rules relating to flowers, one should worship this mental lingam." (op.cit III, 25-26).

These flowers are related in this text to different chakras (wheels) or padmas (lotuses) in the human body.

The simplest accessories relate to the five elements of tantrika, and so, by extension, to the five senses. See, for example, the Shani puja, where scent is linked with the bija Lam and earth, flowers to aether with the bija Ham, incense with air and the bija mantra Yam, flame with fire and the bija mantra Ram, and water to liquid and the bija letter Vam.

This inner practice demonstrates two very important yogic elements of puja. The first is that the deva or devi, through meditation (dhyana), whether gross, subtle or supreme, is considered to be one with the worshipper. The second is that by offering the sense impressions to that devata, it encourages the perception that the person performing the rite is not wholly identified with her or his impressions.

These, along with the instruments of the impressions, the five senses, pull the inner self this way and that, and, as can be seen from the prayoga or practical application of the Bhavana Upanishad, are considered to be shaktis or attendants of Paramashakti, the supreme goddess herself. In this connection, it is also worth looking at this page, which describes the physical and metaphysical apparatus of a human being, as an embodiment of Shiva Shakti.

This underlies what some tantriks have described as the ulta sadhana, a reversal of the ordinary condition of the human being, who tends to wholly identify with one, two or several of the lesser shaktis, and so forgets her or his true nature.

The practice of daily puja and the use of these ritual accessories is, then, recommended in the initial stages of sadhana as a way of reminding an

individual of the unity of knower, knowledge and known - or worshipper, worship and worshipped.

Food and Liquids

Bearing these important considerations above in mind, we can turn to the elements used in puja. In the English introduction to the Gandharva Tantra on this site, chapters 16 and 17 allude to the ritual accessories (upacharas) which may be employed when worshipping Shri Shri Tripurasundari (Lalita).

Food offered to a devata becomes holy (prasad) but that doesn't mean it's put to waste and it can be eaten afterwards by a sadhaka.

It doesn't have to be vegetarian food. While most Hindus in modern-day India are vegetarians, some scholars consider this to be a consequence of the rise of the Vaishnavi movements. Bali (animal sacrifice) is viewed as an essential in many of the tantrik texts themselves, although even this has an inner meaning. The bipeds and quadrupeds to be sacrificed must be male.

"O dark one, wondrous and excelling in every way, becomes the accomplishment of those worshippers who living in this world freely make offering to Thee in worship of the greatly satisfying flesh, together with hair and bones, of cats, camels, sheep, buffaloes, goats and men."
Karpuradistotra v.19, Maha Yogi Paramahansa Dr.Rupnathji's translation

According to the Kaula commentary on this verse, the animals represent six enemies to sadhana, the goat standing for lust, the buffalo anger, the cat greed, the sheep delusion, the camel envy, and man pride and arrogance. This is all very well, but animal sacrifice is still practised today in nominally Shakta areas.

As recently as 1980, a goat was sacrificed to Kali at her temple at Amber fort in Rajasthan, a practice banned by the government, which does not, however, seem to have taken similar steps against Pizza Hut or MacDonalds in India. (Sacrifices of quadrupeds to the multinationals seems to be OK, just as long as no religious element is involved.)

In practice, it seems that many tantriks are happy to use substitutes for real animals, such as cucumbers, brinjals and the like.

The Gandharva Tantra classifies food into four types, including liquids, and because it is to be offered to the goddess Tripurasundari, must be of the best quality and also served suitably, depending on the abilities of the practitioner. Fruit, sweetmeats, rice and other dishes are offered to the Devi while reciting a mantra.

The liquids used for worship range from pure water right up to wine, with the Gandharva even including recipes for the alcoholic substance. While wine is an integral part of the panchatattvas, in the chapters on the secret sadhana found in the Devirahasya, mantras and rituals must be performed in order to remove curses on the liquid uttered by Brahma and Shukra. Wine, in this latter tantra, has its own divinity, Suradevi, and she has her own dhyanas and mantras.

Wine, being the Devi herself in liquid form, can be understood as a symbol for the bliss arising from the realisation from work on oneself. A number of tantras caution against taking the text to advocate wholesale drunkenness (Kularnavatantra). When a pot of wine is seen, one should bow to it, as if to the Goddess herself (Kulachudamani, Brihadnilatantra). The Kularnava pours scorn on those who take tantrik texts literally, pointing out that if merely drinking wine, copulating and eating flesh and fish produced liberation, then

many humans would already have achieved the state. This last passage refers to the rite known as panchatattva, the five things - often referred to as the panchamakara. These are the five elements starting with the letter "m" are madya (wine), mamsha (meat), matsya (fish), mudra (grain) and maithuna (sexual intercourse). There is a great deal of discussion in various tantrik schools about the significance of these elements in Virasadhana, but most agree that it is a special method prescribed only for heroes and heroines (vira), and unsuitable for the common herd (pashu).

Aside from being a swipe at Brahmin orthodoxy, which views some of these elements with deep abhorrence, some important tantras, including the Kularnava, give them a metaphysical meaning. Some tantras vary the substances depending on the varna (Brahmin, Kshatriya etc). The Yoginitantra and other important texts also give the makaras a symbolic meaning.

There is no agreed view on these matters. It is hard to take some verses of the Yonitantra or the Brihadnilatantra metaphorically, while the commentary on the Karpuradistotra, referred to above, specifically advocates the consumption of semen after ritual sexual intercourse. The Chandamaharoshana Tantra (see Bibliography), a text of the Vajrayana which is, however, spoken of as a source in the Kaulavalinirnaya, is as explicit as you can get about these matters. Maha Yogi Paramahansa Dr.Rupnathji says in his introduction: "The text goes on to say that there are people who regard semen and menstrual fluid with disgust (Vicharayet), but they forget that the body by which they hope to attain Liberation is composed of these two forms of matter, that the narrow, bone and tendons have come from the father and the skin, flesh and blood from the mother. It further says that there is no reason for man's disgust for excreta or urine, for these are nothing but food or drink which has undergone some change and contains living creatures and the Brahman substance is not absent therefrom. The purity that man ought to cultivate is that of the mind. All things are pure. It is one's mentality (Vasana) which is evil."

There is a variety of other, somewhat less contentious, liquids often referred to in tantrik texts which require some explanation. The panchagavya are the five products of the cow, including dung and urine. These are often consumed, although some texts also ascribe an inner meaning to these substances, related to Shakti.

The Gandharva describes padya (water for washing the feet), achamana (water for sipping), madhuparka (a sweet mixture of water, ghee, honey and other substances), and arghya (an offering to the Sun, poured over the head).

Flowers, Scents, Perfumes and Incenses

There is a huge variety described in the literature, which almost merits a book of its own.

Incense (dhupa) is frequently employed in the daily puja, and this may and often is accompanied with various unguents (anjana), sweet smelling powders, oils (such as sandal oil) and other substances.

Most of the tantrik texts available give pride of place to five fragrances, which, according to lists in Maha Yogi Paramahansa Dr.Rupnathji's Cyclopedia of Yoga, are for Shakti or Devi agaru (aquilaria agallocha), karpura (camphor), kumkuma (crocus sativus), rochana (convolvulus turpenti) and jatamamshi (asparagus racemosa).

Sandalwood (chandana) and other pleasant fragrances often find themselves on the lists.

Flowers for the worship of Shakti, should normally be red, although this may vary depending on the type of rite, with other colours, including white and orange, often being employed.

As by now we've come to expect, the vamachara tantras interpret flowers and scents in a way all of their own. Flowers (pushpa) has a similar meaning in Sanskrit to English, and are taken by some texts - for example the Matrikabheda Tantra, the Mahakalasanghita and other texts, to refer to menstrual blood. These are classified in different ways, depending on age and the qualifications of a Shakti.

Some of these may have the same name as other fragrances and scents - a trap for the unwary, who in this, as in all other matters, is to be guided by the guru. The Matrikabheda describes the use of menstrual fluids in a somewhat mysterious alchemical process - similar passages are to be found in the alchemical chapter in the Brihadnitya Tantra.

Nyasa – divinity in the body

Mental worship is superior, and external worship is inferior. By worshipping Devata, a sadhaka is himself honoured - Niruttara Tantra

The word Nyasa means placing and refers to a large component of tantric ritualism in which the practitioner touches various parts of the body at the same time pronouncing a mantra and visualising a devata or a bija (root) mantra. Nyasa is supposed to "divinise" the body of the worshipper.

There are many types of nyasa, with some being very complex and elaborate. One example on this site is Mahashodha nyasa where a sadhaka or sadhika places planets, constellations, sacred sites and other elements of Lalita's cosmology on her or his body. This demonstrates the identity of macrocosm and microcosm in the tantrik tradition.

The types of nyasa most often encountered in tantrika ritual are Rishi Nyasa, Kara (hand) Nyasa, Matrika Nyasa and Sadanga Nyasa. Every mantra has a Rishi or seer who first pronounced the mantra, thus giving birth to a line. According to many tantrik texts, using mantras which you take from books is fruitless, although this rule does not hold for Mahachinachara and, say some, the worship of Shri Shri Kali.

Matrika Nyasa is a form where the 50 letters of the Sanskrit alphabet are placed on the body. As this is done, the practitioner uses various hand gestures (mudras). The letters are prefixed with Om and suffixed with namah.

Sadanga Nyasa uses bijas connected with long vowels of the Sanskrit alphabet. Again, there are many examples here on this site.

The worship of different devatas introduces forms of Nyasa tailored to the particular divinity. For example, in the ritual worship of Bala, there are optional forms such as the Nine Yoni Nyasa, relating to the nine triangles in her yantra and an Arrow Nyasa, related to the five flowering arrows she holds in one of her hands.

And in the worship of Jvalamukhi, there is a very extended Nyasa which relates to the 21,600 breaths a human being takes in a day and a night. This is related to the position of the chakras within the human frame.

The worship of Kali is very ancient and there are hundreds of forms of related Nyasas. In an appendix to the Guhyakali section of the Mahakalasanghita, we find a multitude including Kalikulakrama Nyasa, Yogini Nyasa, Yajnamaharaja Nyasa, &c. &c.

Yantra and Pranapratishtha

The complex nature of yantra syntax corrects the views of some scholars who have wrongly labelled all yantras 'magic diagrams'. Diagrams used for occult purposes form a separate category which has evolved within the tradition, and the role of such yantras is peripheral in comparison with that of yantras for meditation - Maha Yogi Paramahansa Dr.Rupnathji

The suffix 'tra' in Sanskrit means instrument. Yantras are the geometrical form of a divinity in the tantrik tradition. Images (murtis) and mantras are other, more gross and subtle, representations. Yantras can be drawn, engraved or painted on a variety of substances. The classical eight tantrik surfaces are gold, silver, copper, crystal, birch, bone, hide (which can include any type of paper), and Vishnu stone (shalagrama).

The yantra shown left is for Kali, and can be used to illustrate the basic geometrical concepts used. The point or bindu at the centre, generally represents the deity, or sometimes Shiva and Shakti united. The triangle normally represents the three gunas, or in the case of the tantrik tradition, the three bindus. Triangles usually face downwards in the case of female yantras and upwards in male yantras. There are exceptions - the Shri Yantra is one such. Triangles are often surrounded by enclosing circles and a group or groups of petals, in which are the attendants of the Devis or Devas. See the Mahamrityunja yantra for a complete example. Finally, the whole is often

enclosed in a bhupura, a word which means earth-city. These are the enclosing walls, fenced by the guardians of the directions and the intermediate directions (dikpalas). Some traditions use the yantra in puja from the outside inward, and others from the inside outward, depending on the nature of the deity. There are many other yantras which have their own individual shapes, often used in magic (prayoga). One such shown here is an akarshana (attraction) yantra from the magical Kamaratnatantra.

A yantra is only truly vitalised when it is engraved with the bija and other mantras and surrounded with the matrikas, or letters of the Sanskrit alphabet. Before use, it must be installed with life, a rite called Pranapratishtha (establishing breath). The following is an example.

Installation of Life in a Shri Yantra

Before any yantra is a suitable object for puja, it must be given life (pranapratishtha). The following, from Nityotsava, describes the process. This, process, incidentally, also holds true for initiation of a candidate into Shri Vidya. The rite installs the 35 tattvas into the yantra. It also gives the yantra the full set of senses and the Antahkarana, or subtle body. It is said that engraving a Shri Yantra on gold is said to hold good for life, on silver for seven years. The process also imbues the yantra with the matrika, the letters of the Sanskrit alphabet which are the goddess as sound.

The Yantra Gayatri is Yantrarajaya Vidmahe Mahayantraya Dhimahi Tanno Yantrah Prachodayat.

Brahma-Vishnu-Maheshvara are the Rishis of this great mantra installing life into the Shri Yantra; Rg, Yajur, Sam and Atharva are the Metres;

Consciousness is the Devata; Am is the Bija, Hrim the Shakti, Krom the Kilaka. The application is installation of life into the Shri Chakra.

Aim Hrim Shrim Am Kam Kham Gam Gham Nam to Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Aether, Am to the thumbs Namah.

3 Im Cham Ccham Jam Jham Nam to Sound, Touch, Sight, Taste, Smell Im to the index fingers Namah.

3 Um Tam Tham Dam Dham Nam to Hearing, Touch, Eyes, Tongue, Nose Um to the middle fingers Namah.

3 Um Tam Tham Dam Dham Nam to Speech, Hands, Feet, Genitals, Anus Aim to the ring fingers Namah.

3 Om Pam Pham Bam Bham Mam to Talking, Giving, Moving, Enjoying, Excreting Aum to the little fingers Namah.

3 Am Yam Ram Lam Vam Sham Sham Sam Ham Lam Ksham to Manas (mind), Buddhi (intellect), Ahamkara(ego), Thought, Inner Cause, Ah to the palm and back of the hands Namah.

(Thus Heart &c. Nyasa)

Aim Hrim Shrim Om Am Hrim Krom Yam Ram Lam Vam Sham Sham Sam Haun Ham Sah may Life exist here in the Shri Chakra!

3 Om Am Hrim Krom Yam Ram Lam Vam Sham Sham Sam Ham Ham Sah my individual existence be here in the Shri Chakra!

3 Om Am Hrim Krom Yam Ram Lam Vam Sham Sham Sam Ham Ham Sah may all the senses be here in the Shri Chakra!

3 Om Am Hrim Krom Yam Ram Lam Vam Sham Sham Sam Haum Ham Sah, may Speech, Mind, Eyes, Ears, Tongue, Nose, Breath come inside this Shri Chakra! May Happiness stay long here! Svaha.

Internal meditations

Yantras may also be visualised internally. That, for example, is the case with the Shri Yantra, with the different mandalas starting at the base of the spine and going to the top of the head.

Different rituals exist for the purification of a yantra for the eight materials mentioned above. This which follows is drawn from the Devirahasya. Shiva is the Seer, Trishtubh the Metre, Parashakti the Devata, Shrim the Bija, Hrim the Shakti and Klim the Peg. The application is the purification of the given yantra.

After doing hand and limb nyasa, one should meditate on the throne of the given Devi as being in one's heart. One should draw, engrave, or paint the yantra, and place it on a gold colour pedestal, installing breath into it.

It can be smeared with Kunda, Gola or Udbhava flowers or with the eight scents. The mantra differs for each material:

Gold: Aim Sauh Aim Sauh Chakreshvari Yantram Sauvarnam Shodhaya Shodhaya Svaha. (Aim Sauh Aim Sauh, O Lady of the Chakra, Purify! Purify the gold yantra! Svaha)

Silver: Om Rum Om Rajatam Yantram Shodhaya Shodhaya. (Om Rum Om Purify! purify the silver yantra)

Copper: Om Krom Om Strim Om Krom Tamreshvari Yantram Me Shodhaya. (Om Krom Om Strim Om Krom, O Lady of Copper, purify the copper yantra for me!)

Crystal: Om Shrim Hrim Om Kulambike Shodhaya Shodhaya.

Birch bark: Om Hum Shrim Hrim Prim Ruddhesvari Parayantram Shodhaya. (Om Hum Shrim Hrim Prim O Lady of Trees, purify the yantra!)

Bone: Om Aim Klim Sauh Kapalamalini Yantram Shodhaya Svaha. (Om Aim Klim Sauh O Thou garlanded with skulls, purify the yantra! Svaha)

Hide: Om Shrim Om Aim Klim Citasane Yantram Shodhaya Svaha. (Om Shrim Om Aim Klim O Thou Whose seat is the Pyre, purify the yantra! Svaha)

Vishnu Stone (Shalagrama): Om Hsau Aim Sauh Klim Shrim Shrim Nitye Vishnu Shila Yantram Shodhaya. (Om Hsau Aim Sauh Klim Shrim Shrim, O Eternal One, purify the Vishnu Stone Yantra)

After using the appropriate mantra, the yantra should be placed on a pedestal (pitha), and bathed with the substances previously described, whilst the appropriate root mantra is recited. One should then offer scent and flowers, and should worship the appropriate Devi in the usual form within the yantra. This all should be done at night.

Carrying a Yantra. This is considered to be a highly potent way of concentrating magical power. The time to do this is during an auspicious astrological period. The yantra should be drawn using the eight Kaula perfumes. Outside the yantra the root mantra should be written.

On the outside of this the armour (kavacha) and 1000 names should be written. The Devi should be invoked into the yantra in due form. All good substances are to be used. The yantra is then entwined with gold and silver thread, and placed into a metal holder and may be worn on the person.

Yantras should always be used on the level. If drawn on paper the colours preferable are red, orange, yellow or a combination of these. A yantra without bija mantras is dead. They can be drawn to whatever size is required.

The two main types of yantra are Bhu and Meru. The former is flat, two dimensional, the latter is of pyramidal form. When not in use they should be stored carefully. Metal ones should be regularly cleaned to prevent corrosion &c. In worship they should be placed level on a pedestal or pitha. This may be as ornate or as simple as required.

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