

PHILOSOPHY: Prakasha-Vimarsha

The Light of Consciousness: The Core of Tantrik Spiritual Philosophy

By Christopher Tompkins and Christopher Wallis

As virtually everyone who has heard the term "Tantra" is aware, the central dyad in Tantrik cosmology is that of Shiva and Shakti, the Divine in masculine and feminine aspects, coupled in eternal union. But this apparently sexualized and deity-focused imagery sometimes masks the deeper spiritual wisdom associated with this dyadic vision of reality.

Prakasha-Vimarsha

One of the central concepts of classical Tantrik philosophy is that of *prakasha* and *vimarsha*, the Light of Consciousness and the Power of Self-Awareness, respectively. Prakasha is associated with Shiva, which here is simply a name for the universal Consciousness that is the ground of all reality. Vimarsha, as a power (*shakti*), is associated with the Goddess (also *shakti*). Prakasha may also be translated "manifestation," for the Light of Consciousness manifests all things, which are never separate from that divine Light. However, the manifestation of the universal would be sterile and meaningless without Vimarsha, the power by which we know ourselves as individual expressions of that universal. Vimarsha is also translated as "representation" for it is the power by which the divine re-presents itself to itself—as us. We are each representations of divine reality, and when we know ourselves as such, we fully exercise the Power of Self-awareness (*vimarsha*). Finally, Vimarsha may be translated as "reflection," for it is the reflection of the Absolute in the mirror of awareness within a given individual that expresses specifically and concretely the exquisite beauty that inheres potentially within the Absolute.

So the entire universe is nothing but light and its refractions—that is to say, the one Light of Consciousness reflected as a myriad of unique and beautiful forms, some of which have the capacity to become aware of themselves—which is the only purpose behind spiritual practice. This apparently abstract philosophy plays directly into your

practice when you learn that accessing the pulsating flow of universal power we call the Divine is only the first step. The second is becoming aware of how that power expresses itself through you, in a manner wholly unique to you, which is the very reason for your existence.

An Experience in Cosmic Consciousness

Twentieth century master Paramahansa Yogananda vividly describes the enthralling vision of the universe that was granted to him as a boy by his guru, Shri Yukteshwar. After a tap on the heart by his Master, Yogananda's vision of reality become forever changed:

My body became immovably rooted...Soul and mind instantly lost their physical bondage, and streamed out like a fluid piercing light from my every pore...My sense of identity was no longer narrowly confined to a body...The whole vicinity lay bare before me. My ordinary frontal vision was now changed to a vast spherical sight, simultaneously all-perceptive...All objects within my panoramic gaze trembled and vibrated like quick motion pictures. My body, Master's, the pillared courtyard, the furniture and floor, the trees and sunshine, occasionally became violently agitated, until all melted into a luminescent sea; even as sugar crystals, thrown into a glass of water, dissolve after being shaken. An oceanic joy broke upon the calm endless shores of my soul. The Spirit of God, I realized, is exhaustless Bliss; His body is countless tissues of light. A swelling glory within me began to envelop towns, continents, the earth, solar and stellar systems, tenuous nebulae, and floating universes. The unifying light alternated with materializations of form, the metamorphoses revealing the law of cause and effect in creation...The divine dispersion of rays poured from an Eternal Source, blazing into galaxies, transfigured with ineffable auras.

Yogananda's brief but life-changing glimpse of the nature of ultimate reality offers us a nearly tangible experience of what it truly means to awaken to our highest Selves. After his vision, he realized that the restlessness of the active mind and breath acts as a veil to the true nature of reality:

No perception of the Infinite as One Light could be had except by calming those storms (of the mind and breath).

In Tantrik Yoga, the goal of practice is to quiet these 'storms', thus opening ourselves to an experience of Immersion (***Samavesha***) into the highest light of our own Consciousness. It is our very practice that opens the door to Self-realization. The Tantrik scriptures teach us that we do not have to *become* something other than what we inherently are in order to be truly free, to be immersed into what Yogananda calls the "Spirit of God." Our truest nature, it is taught, is nothing other than a re-presentation or reflection (*vimarsha*) of the one Light of Supreme Consciousness (*prakasha*). The reality that we experience on a day-to-day basis is simply determined by where our awareness is placed. Do we identify with merely the body and the egoic mind? Or do we see these as surface expressions of our limitless Selves? How deeply are we able to recognize who we truly are?

Tantrik Yoga uses the term 'Recognition' as its code word for enlightenment or liberation. Through the process of 'letting go' of limited frameworks of self-conception, we gradually (or suddenly) attune with the highest light of our own Being. Utpaladeva, the ninth century Kashmiri sage and author of *The Verses on the Recognition of the Supreme (Light)*, teaches that the entire manifest universe, with all of its seemingly separate expressions, 'rests' within the light (*prakasha*) of Supreme Consciousness. We might imagine this source-light as equivalent to the sun, which illumines our solar system with its many rays. Each ray is a reflection or refraction of the sun, just as each soul is a unique representation (*vimarsha*) of the one source light. Utpaladeva reveals to us that the "primary experience" of the light of Consciousness is the vibration (*spanda*) of reflective awareness. In other words, just as the sun, which seems to be fixed in space, is really scintillating everywhere, illuminating all of the forms of the universe through its many rays, so it is that the One Consciousness of the Universe re-presents itself (*vimarsha*) as the limitless, unique expressions of awareness that we find all around us.

Why then, do we seem to experience a world of differences? Why do we often feel separate from other beings? Here we return to the concept of Recognition. We can imagine that the One Consciousness, the source of the universe, to be similar to the ocean. Each expression of Consciousness represents an 'individual' wave that can be identified only in contrast to the other waves around it. Each wave gives rise to the next in a never-ending process of vibration (*spanda*) or scintillation

(*sphuratta*). All waves of 'individual' consciousness, in other words, are inter-dependently connected to other waves, just as each person is created from the vital essence of their parents and continues to be shaped by other waves, or the environmental influences that impact them. Ultimately, however, the wave is not different from the ocean.

Immersion (Samavesha) into the Depths of the Self

Most of us have adapted to a sense of 'individual' consciousness, identifying solely with our 'unique' qualities. Looking out through the eyes of this physical body, we see a world of many disparate waves that seem separate from us. Thus, our ability to *recognize* our deeper nature as the ocean is limited at this level of perception. But what if we go beyond this surface awareness? Tantrik yoga practices teach us to gradually let go of attachment to the world of the senses. Through the vehicles of breath regulation, sensory absorption, meditation, and inner attunement through chanting mantras, we can quiet our mind and breath, and open ourselves to the experience of Immersion (*Samavesha*) into the depths of the Self. In this way, we are lead to Recognize our deepest and most omnipresent reality. As we plunge the depths of the ocean of our Awareness, the experience of duality alone fades away and we experience the joyful interconnectivity of all things. Through inner yogic attunement, the reflection (*vimarsha*), or individual soul-wave, recognizes its that it is a uniquely beautiful expression of the one Source Light of Consciousness, as explained by another great 20th-century master:

Shiva (Supreme Consciousness) is the entire cosmos in the form of *prakasha* (the source light) and *vimarsha* (its expressions). Give up all involvements and entanglements. Stay where you are! All places belong to Shiva. In your own place, know your Self as your Self. The independent "I" that exists within you is Shiva, the perfect "I." By strengthening your awareness, lose yourself in That. Lose Yourself. To lose yourself is to find yourself....understand this once and for all. There is no Shiva without You. Without Shiva, there is no You.