

# The Yoga of Sri Vidya Sakta Tantra

**A Personal Report of Life-Transforming Experiences by the Divine Grace of Sri Amritananda Natha Sarasvati, Guruji of Devipuram**

by *Domagoj Orlic*

## **1. Introduction: The endless grace of the Great Goddess and Sri Amrita, Her Nectar of Immortality**

Sri Vidya Sakta Tantra is a form of Tantrika Sakta worship focusing on obtaining the Auspicious Wisdom (sri-vidya) of the Great Goddess Sri Lalita Mahatripurasundari Devi Mata. She is none other than Motherly Love pulsating in all of us as our spiritual Heart and is constantly shining as the one dimensionless point (bindu) in the midst of our being where all polarities of Life meet forming Her Holy Wheel, or Sri Chakra. It represents the Entire Universe evolving from Her and involving back into Her with each Cosmic Cycle of inhale and exhale She takes through us, as us. So, her mantra, known as Sri Vidya Mula Mantra, her yantra, known as Sri Cakra, and her tantra, known as Sri Vidya Sakti Sadhana, are the sonic, visual and relational means to approach the Benevolent Mother Goddess, Sri Devi Ma, who, in turn, bestows Her abundant blessings upon Her devotees, which are both material prosperity (bhukti) and spiritual freedom (mukti).

The essence of this path is Benevolence, Love, Generosity and Gracefulness, as it was epitomized in the life of the modern sri-vidya-guru Sri Amritananda Natha Sarasvati of Devipuram and expressed by him in these words: "I am in the business of happiness. If I exist, it is to make everybody happy. That is my purpose of life."

And the way to really be happy in this life is to do and live Yoga as "the technology of Love", as the modern Yoga teacher Mark Whitwell would put it. So Yoga is Tantra, and Tantra is Love, or the full flowering of our infinite capacity to feel Everything and Everybody in this Total Interrelatedness and Interconnectedness with the Whole of Being as human, cosmic and divine beings with a Heart (hrdaya). And our Heart is nothing but the Heart of the Great Goddess, the Heart of All Existence that we altogether are in all Her Splendor, Power and Beauty.

When I was around 13 years old I saw a Sri Chakra for the first time drawn in a book about Yoga. Something suddenly stirred inside me. That image was just a basic design, no color, and it was very intriguing to me although I knew nothing about it. And then I forgot about the Holy Wheel for some time. However, I continued exploring Yoga. Many years later, in the early 2000s, I met my Yoga teacher Mark Whitwell, a New Zealander trained in the Krishnamacharya-Desikachar tradition, who reconnected me with Sri Chakra, knowing about my interest in Tantra, by connecting my personal Yoga practice with it in many different and very exciting ways. He also taught me some Sri Vidya bija-mantras. The seed was sown and naturally I wanted to learn more about Sri Vidya in general and Sri Chakra in particular.

So, in 2006 I was diligently searching the Internet and found

the Devipuram Guruji's old website, and heard, for the very first time, Sri Vidya Mantras chanted by him. Something definitely changed inside me and I actually became a Sri Vidya practitioner overnight. In 2010, after a lot of research, I wrote him the first e-mail in which I introduced myself and asked for some guidance, but he didn't respond, probably due to his health issues at the time. I decided to be patient. Soon after that I had a beautiful initiatory dream in which Guruji connected me with the Goddess in Devipuram in no uncertain terms.

Three more years passed and then I wrote him again, encouraged by some of his students, describing my dream and asking formally for initiation (diksha). This time he answered promptly and told me to call him on the phone at the exact auspicious time during Deepawali festivities at the beginning of November 2013. I did and he gave me the initiation into sri-vidya-mantras, or sri-vidya-mantropadesa, in a 15-minute-long phone conversation, in which he also gave me detailed instructions on how to proceed with my practice of Sri Vidya (sri-vidyopasana), never asking anything in return. Sri Amrita first gave me guru, ganapati, bala and pancadasa-mantra-diksha and then instructed me on how to use the mantras in my personal practice. The instructions were straightforward and simple: "Do ganapati-tarpana for 44 days in a row to remove all the obstacles to your sadhana and then do sri-cakra-puja in the form that you know and love as much as you can and to the best of your abilities, adding power to it as you go. If you have any questions, I am here to guide you." And I did it; I am still doing it. And the most natural thing

was to integrate all that with my on-going daily Yoga practice that was already heavily influenced and informed by sri-vidya.

That, indeed, was pure grace, an act of true kindness and total love and acceptance. And we didn't even meet face to face! I felt really blessed and I still feel the benediction although Sri Amrita, as I like to call him, is no longer here in the physical body. His presence is now of a different order, that of my open Heart and his enlightening example of a life lived consistently and uncompromisingly for the benefit of all. My practice and understanding of Sri Vidya deepens daily guided by the endless grace of Sri Amrita flowing freely through me as the Nectar of Immortality, as Life Herself, as Sri Devi Ma, and constantly flowing out of me as sincere care about the well-being of the whole world, perfectly in compliance with Guruji's pertinent dictum that moved me most:

***"The end of pettiness is the goal of human life."***

## **2. The essence of the teachings: The principles of Tantra**

Sri Amrita Guruji (1934 – 2015) was a former nuclear scientist who, mainly in the 1980s and 1990s, had built now quite well-known temple complex called Devipuram. The founder himself defined it as a "global resource for goddess worship", housing a few unique temples (Kamakhya Pitham, Sivalaya, Dakshavati, Ganapati and Dattatreya shrines) with the central one in the form of Sri Meru Chakra – Sri Meru Nilayam – and it is the biggest of this kind in the world with Sri Sri Sahasrakshi Rajarajesvari Lalita Devi situated on top of it, in the jungle near the city of Visakhapatnam, or Vizag, in Southeast India.

However, what Sri Amrita was really after is the working knowledge of Tantra, which is mainly missing, is complicated or is not readily available in the living traditions, or is mostly diluted, compromised or perverted in the so

called Neo-tantric movements. So, an important part of Guruji's work was to clarify what Tantra actually is and then to delineate, as clearly as possible, the Tantrika practices of Sri Vidya that should be given to all people who are genuinely interested in learning and applying them. Guruji's wife, Sri Annapurnamba, or Guru Amma, and their three daughters, Anantalakshmi, Radha and Rama, as well as other devoted students of Guruji, are continuing the great legacy of their visionary guru in the vibrant Devipuram. Many others are spreading the message all around the world.

The esoteric etymological analysis of the word "tantra" already reveals its essence; namely, the word can be analyzed as being a coinage of two verbal roots, tan(oti) and tra(yate), meaning the special kind of secret knowledge that expands consciousness and by doing so liberates it from all its conditioning. The principles of this very old, very special and very precious knowledge of Tantra, on the basis of the teachings of Sri Amritananda Natha Sarasvati, can be formulated like this:

1. You, the seer, are what you see, the world.
2. You are the Auspicious Great Mother Goddess – Sri Maha Devi Ma.
3. Divine consciousness is the cause of all matter, and they are essentially One Actuality (samvit).
4. The Union of Opposites (siva-sakty-aikya) is the very root of existence, which is one integrated, immanent and transcendent Whole (Brahman).
5. The seen Universe (visva) in no different from the unseen Source (bindu).
6. There is an unbroken and unbreakable continuity (tantra) between awareness (siva/cit) and power (sakti/ananda) that are actually the Absolute (chit-shakti/sat).
7. The essence of existence is the identity (ekatva) of pure consciousness (prakasa) and its reflection, self-consciousness (vimarsa), whereas the life of the Universe is the Divine Interplay (daiva-lila) between the one timeless source (parama-siva) and the many transient beings (maya-sakti).
8. The aim of all Tantrika practices is to restore the original balance between the opposites (siva-sakti-samarasya) and to have a transformative realization with the whole body that Siva and Sakti are one and the same reality, and that the aspirant is that. All the techniques are practiced at three different levels of concentration on the body/matter (sthula), mind/energy (sukhma) and spirit/cause (karana, or para) as long as all the misuses of the human life are corrected and all the traumas healed. Then the aspirant gets firmly anchored in her/his own spiritual Heart (hrdaya) and feels the Source Unity of All Existence (maha-bindu/maha-yoni).
9. Renunciation (sanyasa) is not necessary to achieve complete freedom (sarvatantra-svatantra) since enjoyment (bhukti) and liberation (mukti) are one integral whole – Samsara is ultimately nirvana, or sensuality is essentially spirituality.
10. The task of the aspirant (sadhaka/sadhika) is to evolve from beast to human, and from human to God. That is, s(he) has to break free from social conditioning by cutting off the eight enslaving ropes (ashta-pasa) – hatred, doubt, fear, shame, aversion, family, status and convention. In this way, a person who summons the courage to end his/her pettiness recognizes his/her cosmic integrality.
11. This spiritual journey of self-exploration and self-

transcendence starts with the empowerment (diksha) given by the grace of the guru (guru-prasadana) rooted in a tradition of transmission of spiritual knowledge (guru-sishya-parampara/sampradaya) and progresses by the virtue of the disciple's sincere effort (sishya-prayatna) to realize that the guru, mantra, devata and atman are all One.

12. The spiritual practice (sadhana) is a gradual or instantaneous realization of one's innate divinity (divya-bhava/sahajavastha) by a careful and personalized use and combination of all effective tools (upaya) available to and appropriate for the aspirant.
13. The principal means of Tantrika practice (tantra-sadhana, or sakti-sadhana) are mantra, yantra and tantra. Mantra is a vibratory/sonic emanation of Divinity, yantra is a visual/geometric manifestation of Divinity and tantra is an intricate/esoteric method of connecting mantra and yantra to the whole body (kula) of the aspirant in such a way as to awaken the transformative power of spiritual involution (kula-kundalini-sakti) hidden in the depths of one's being and realize that we are Divinity Herself.
14. The chief characteristics of Tantrika practice (upasana) are its resourcefulness, expediency and comprehensiveness, and it is usually divided into two major parts or phases: the outer ritual (bahir-yaga/puja) and inner meditation (antar-yaga/manasa-puja). The ritual usually focuses on the worship of a deity in an anthropomorphic representation (murti/vigraha), a geometrical form (yantra/mandala) or a living person (siva/sakti) and culminates in a total dissolution of the conditioned mind (mano-laya/bindu-bhedana) that leads to spiritual liberation (moksha/mukti).

15. Sexual symbolism, especially that of yoni (the female regenerative organ representing Sakti) and linga (the male reproductive organ representing Siva), or their interaction (yoni-linga pedestal), is a useful tool to probe deeper into the real nature of existence. The sacred eroticism of various sexualized rituals may be used in a symbolic or literal way as a means to empower the aspirant for an actual male-female relationship. It can also be an appropriate occasion to break free from the limitations of the socially conditioned mind and plunge into a meditative absorption/identification with the deity evoked in the partner and a sense of union enacted in the ritual.
16. The primary spiritual practice, however, is actual care, sincere generosity and deep compassion, and that in time or instantaneously leads to total freedom (svechachara) based on the ultimate principle "do as you wish", which is true creativity, humanity, spontaneity, love and freedom.

Traditionally, the tenets of Tantra are implemented in three ways or at three different levels of human endeavor: 1. True knowing (jnana-yoga), 2. righteous living (karma-yoga) and liberating devotion (bhakti-yoga). It is evident that all three have Yoga as their basis and cannot be lived without the action of yoking, which is the oldest known meaning of the term. In Tantra, it is generally and primarily done through "freedom rituals" in which the experience of union with the Divine is the main goal. It is a dynamic transformative process where the practitioner, instead of being isolated and bound, feels connected (tanoti) and free (trayate), with his/her consciousness creatively expanding and his/her compassion constantly deepening, which is the very essence of Tantra. Or simply expressed by Sri Amrita:

***"Have no fear. Do what you like."***

### **3. The Yoga of Sri Vidya Sakta Tantra: Connecting with the Mother Goddess and living the fullness of our Divine Humanity**

The key concept in the practice of Sri Vidya is connecting with the Mother Goddess in order to realize, gradually or suddenly, that we are Her, and nothing but Her. And this is also the basic concept of Yoga in the Hindu traditions; namely, connecting with something, or somebody, that deeply inspires as in an act of intense concentration leading into sustained contemplation and ending with total absorption into the object of our meditation and devotion. Connecting with oneself, the other person, the Whole of Existence, or the Great Goddess, is a powerful unitary movement of the whole human potential towards the actualization of our inherent divinity. In Sri Vidya, this process is usually seen as having three phases with specific sets of Yogic procedures adapted to each particular practitioner:

#### **1. Subtilizing consciousness – mantra**

1. Beginning with the external and then internal worship of Sri Lalita Devi
2. Understanding the evolution of Cosmos as sound/vibration
3. Doing mantra-japa

#### **2. Transcending the limitations of the mind – yantra**

1. Familiarizing with the mother of all yantras
2. Designing Sri Chakra and learning the appropriate rituals
3. Doing sri-chakra-puja

#### **3. Merging with the Source – tantra**

1. Spiraling through the vital lotus body and visualizing the process of involution
2. Effectuating the spiritual ascent and experiencing the descent of the Divine Grace

### 3. Doing tantra-yoga

Different traditions and different teachers emphasize different things, but the key for success in any kind of tantra-sadhana lies in adapting it to the changing requirements of each aspirant. Sri Amrita was deeply aware of that and did it with all his students, including me, giving each what was the most appropriate at the moment. No two persons are identical, so it is illogical and ineffective for them to have an identical practice. That is one of the reasons why there are so many practices and so many ways in which they can be continually modified and adapted to each unique individual. All Yogic techniques of Sri Vidya can be further divided into four parts, and the details of the practices come directly and only from one's personal Guru:

#### 1. Divinizing the body – sthula

1. Asana (establishing a firm and comfortable position for worship and meditation)
2. Nyasa (placing appropriate mantras into sensitive body parts in special ways)
3. Mudra (communicating with the deity by means of sacred gestures)

#### 2. Feeling the breath – sukshma

1. Nadi-suddhi (purifying the subtle energy channels in the body by the breath)
2. Bhuta-suddhi (purifying the constituent elements of the body by the breath and appropriate mantras)
3. Pranayama (breathing deeply and consciously in conjunction with the mental repetition of appropriate mantras)

#### 3. Dissolving the mind – para

1. Dhyana-bhavana (visualizing the deity with a relaxed and concentrated mind)
2. Svatantra (freeing the mind by appropriate rituals and meditative techniques)

3. Mano-laya (dissolving the mind into formlessness and timelessness)

#### 4. Surrendering to Heart – paratpara

1. Sakti-puja (worshipping one's partner as a deity)
2. Sarvatantra-svatantra (experiencing total freedom within and without)
3. Maha-bindu/Maha-yoni/Hridaya (becoming One with the Whole of Life)

It is evident that surrendering to our own Heart is the final goal of tantra-yoga. And our spiritual core to which we are supposed to surrender has many different names in Sanskrit – hrd, hridaya, hrtakasa, hridaya-pundarika – but it is essentially the metaphysical point of spiritual integrity where all polarities dissolve, especially the root polarity between the Transcendent Source (siva) and Immanent Reality (Sakti). The central idea is to engage the power of our ability to feel the Essence of Life (hridaya-sakti) both into circulating freely inside our body as the life-giving force and into emanating spontaneously outside our body as our deepened interactions with the world in which we live. The progression is therefore threefold: ritual (sri-cakra-puja), meditation (sri-vidyopasana) and interaction (sakti-sadhana). And all this is predicated upon returning to the Source, to the Universal Original Point (maha-bindu), or Cosmic Matrix (maha-yoni), first in a ritual setting and later on in a meditative context of one's sadhana, making possible a high level of self-awareness and a high-quality relational life.

So, spiritual ascent is actually reconnecting with the Sacred, or returning to the Source, which is the vertical transcendence of the seen reality that leads to the descent of Grace into immanence onto the reintegrated body-mind complex. This is the true and full spiritual liberation that is then

naturally implemented in our equally sacred horizontal relatedness, within all the challenges of our everyday life, where our inner freedom gets really tested and truly blossoms if it is authentic. And the essential message of this awakening is that infinite love supported with true dignity definitely is our human potential and is our divine task regardless of whether we are a Sri Vidya practitioner or not. The compassionate Sri Amrita expressed the same sentiment sixteen years ago like this:

“Right now, we are mostly living like beasts of burden. Our main concerns are food, sleep, fear and sex. You have to rise above that, to the human levels of self-awareness first. Then, you have to extend your abilities and concerns to know and feel for others. That is what really makes you great, managing your destiny instead of being tossed in its rivers. That is the road map for you: beast to human, human to God. You must assert your divine nature.”

(The Concept of Shakti Sadhana – Or you are born to be free, 2003)

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This is how Devi held Guruji's hand and "masterminded" Devipuram. On this sacred occasion of Devipuram's third Mahakumbhabhishekam, I offer my heartfelt prayers to Devi and Guruji to help us install the guiding inspiration of Devipuram in each of our hearts so that we can all, individually and collectively, be a conduit of the Divine Will.

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#### About the author

**Mr Domagoj Orlic** is a yoga teacher, author and translator based in Croatia. He has been translating various texts from and into English, mainly philosophical and literary works. A disciple of Guruji from 2013, Domagoj is also an artist.