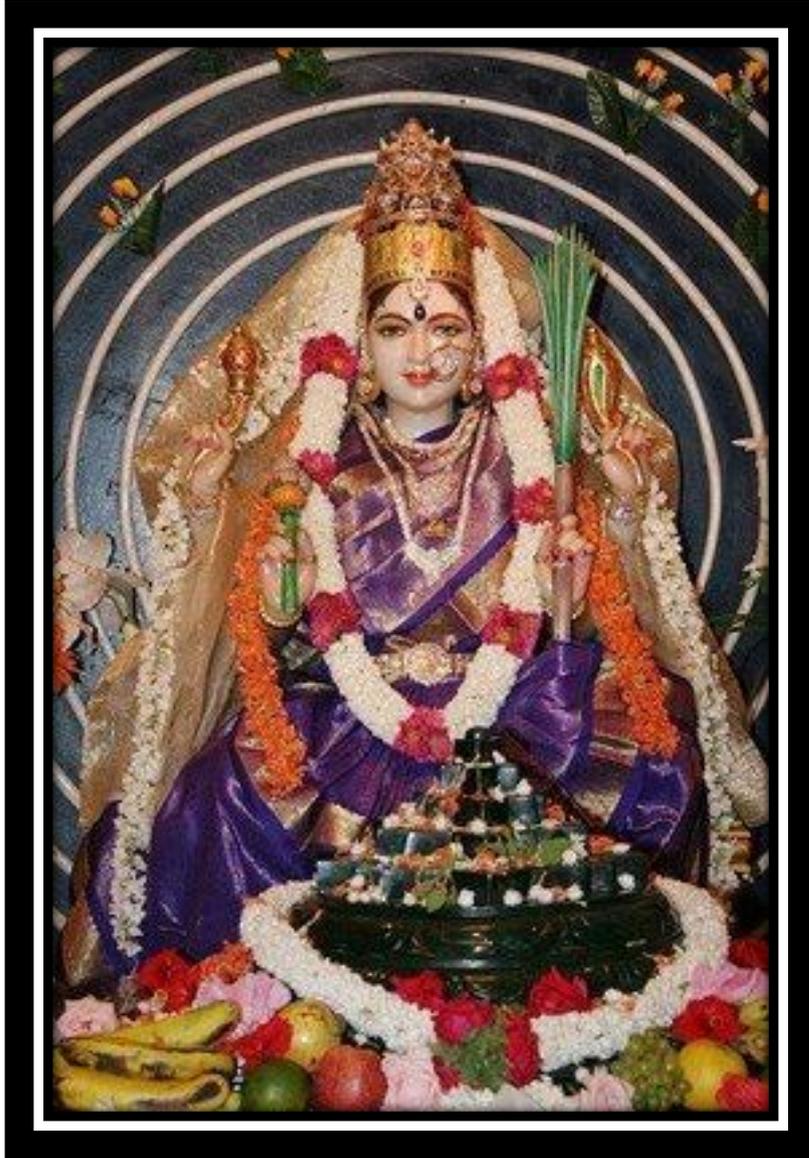


# Tantric roots of Hatha yoga



## **Tantric roots of hatha yoga. Interview with Hareesh (Christopher Wallis)**

**Christopher D. Wallis** was introduced to Indian spirituality at the age of six and initiated into the practice of meditation and yoga at sixteen. While traveling around the world in his early twenties, he felt an inner inspiration to study, teach, and practice Indian spirituality as the focus of his life. A highly decorated scholar with a Masters of Philosophy in Classical Indian Religions from the University of Oxford, he is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Sanskrit at the University of California, Berkeley. He has received traditional yogic education at ashrams in India, Thailand, and New York. Hareesh teaches internationally on meditation, yoga philosophy, Sanskrit, and chanting, and he also offers spiritual coaching. He is the founder of the The Mattamayura Institute for Studies in the Tantrik Arts and Sciences: [mattamayura.org](http://mattamayura.org)

*Ilya Zhuravlev*

**Interview with Hareesh (Christopher Wallis)**

in Oakland, California



*Ilya: Could you tell me briefly about your new book “Tantra Illuminated: The Philosophy, History, and Practice of a Timeless Tradition”?*

**Hareesh:** So, the book has an Introduction, which explains what is "tantra." This is a very difficult question to answer, so introduction addresses different ways of answering it. Then Part 1 of the book, which is 1/3 of the total book, covers the philosophy of non-dual Śaiva tantra - the vision of reality according to non-dual saiva tantra, explained in detail. Then 1/3 of the book is history, talking about the main two streams of tantra - right and left, non-dual (vāmāchāra) - dual (dakshināchāra) etc. The right-hand stream is in agreement with Veda and orthodox brahminical conduct, left-hand is not. Many of their differences are described there, in fact there is a diagram in my book, illustrating these differences between right and left tantra. It shows that they are not just two streams but there are a number of separate groups. On the left there is a greater emphasis on non-dualism, worship of the feminine, inclusion of women, transgression of social norms, mortuary symbolism (cremation grounds etc.) and charismatic gurus, meaning that they can initiate with just a look or thought (initiation). On the right there is an absence of all these. It should not be understood as two streams being so cut and dried, but rather should be viewed as a spectrum, because there are fewer of these things in some groups, with the Krama having all these taken to the extreme, Krama being the most extreme group of the left-hand groups. The Śaiva Siddhānta, on the other hand, is in total agreement with the Veda, they will do nothing to offend traditional Brāhmins.

*Ilya: But actually all of them are based on the Āgamas?*

**Hareesh:** Yes, that's right. So, when I say that they are in agreement with the Veda, I just mean that the Siddhānta followers will not offend the traditional Brāhmins and they will follow the practice that is non-offensive to Vaidikas (Vedic scholars). But their practice is also coming from the Āgamas and includes yoga, a detailed yoga, none of which is present in the Vedas. So, going back to the book contents -- Part 2 is a history section, 1/3 of the book. A lot is here on the Krama lineage, because it is not that well known and is very important, much more important than previously suspected. And then Part 3, the final 1/3 of the book, covers the theory of practice: what is Shaktipāta, Dīkshā, the role of the guru, theory of ritual, structure of Tantrik ritual etc. And then the Conclusion is on how do we practice tantra in the modern world and more to the point, what are the problems involved in doing so.

*Ilya: This is all very interesting indeed, because with a certain effort we can find the scriptures and translate them, though usage of*

*Sanskrit may be different from conventional due to the fact that many tantric authors used an allegoric language, the so-called twilight language. It means that in case the translator doesn't know the context, translation could not be done properly.*

**Hareesh:** This is especially true for mantras - mantras are written in a special code. Can we go back to an ancient scripture and find the practice and start practicing it? There must be a transition, a transition mediated by a master practitioner. It is the same with mantra - for a mantra to work for you you have to receive it from somebody, for whom it has worked or for whom it is working. In other words, if a mantra is alive for me and I have attained some mantra-siddhi, some fruit of mantra, and then I transmit this mantra to a person in practice environment, it can work for that person as well. If you get it out of a book then it's just words, except for the rare occasion for some people - they are so ripe, so ready that the mantra comes alive for them spontaneously. We see this happen sometimes - somebody opens the book and the mantra almost jumps out of the page and the mantra comes alive, it starts to vibrate in the body. In this case the person can use this mantra, because the person didn't get it from a book but actually from Shiva, the books were just the means. But you can't start doing the practice based on an intellectual interest, there has to be an initiation; but if you pick up some ancient scripture and your heart really responds to some practice you can start doing it. But there has to be a vibration in your being, this is my belief. So, you can have two sources for an initiation: one is a guru, or a teacher, who is living the teachings, and the other is a scripture if it comes alive, that's the key - it really has to come alive for you, it can't be just in your head.

*Ilya: But in the modern western world it's not that easy to find a person who can give an initiation, it's much easier to go to the library and even to study Sanskrit in order to read scriptures.*

**Hareesh:** That's true, but that will not work. In fact, I will argue that you can't get anything out of the book or scripture if you haven't already had some meeting with the teacher. For example, in my case I met a powerful teacher when I was young and I received an initiation.

*Ilya: At this point, could you tell us a little more about your background, perhaps starting from your childhood?*

**Hareesh:** My parents started practicing traditional forms of meditation when I was 7 years old. Many hippies of the 60-s and 70-s

were interested in meditation and I`m lucky that my parents found a path that was authentic, traditional path. They studied with Baba Muktaṅanda, and when I was 16 years old I met Gurumayi Chidvilāsānanda of Siddha yoga. As you know she releases videos and publishes books, but in her ashram it`s a fairly traditional ashram environment. She gives training in mantra yoga, and I lived in her ashram for two years. When I first met her I had a powerful inner awakening, which is called Shaktipāta, that changed me from the inside. So when I was 24, I had never gone to college, never gone to any university, I decided I love these teachings so much I want to study them full time and that`s what I did. That was 14 years ago, and then I also started teaching (with the permission of my guru). So I`m one of those people, I had a practice background that was relatively superficial, of course I meditated and everything, but compared to what I know now, it was quite superficial. The spiritual tradition of Siddha Yoga has many beautiful teachings, but they couldn`t teach the practice of Tantra, but only quoted the tantric scriptures, meaning they knew some of the doctrines of Shaivism, but not the actual practices. For practices they just said: repeat Om Namah Shivāya, match it to your breath, set very simple instructions, which was great, but I also wanted to know about the secret practices. They didn`t teach those and they didn`t know them either. So I went to study with scholars who were also practitioners, like Paul Muller-Ortega, who was a devotee of Maharshi Mahesh Yogi of TM (Transcendental Meditation) and also Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, but he was really devoted to Abhinavagupta and he received a kind of initiation from Abhinavagupta and this is the part some people are skeptical about. But I believe, it is possible to receive an initiation from an ancient master if you are lucky. So, both myself and my teacher Paul had an experience of reading Abhinavagupta in Sanskrit and receiving what feels like an initiation from him. If Abhinavagupta is a Mahāsiddha he is not bound by time and space, so we can receive living initiation from him. This is my experience, or how I interpret my experience. So, I`ve studied Abhinavagupta very closely and he provides a lot of guidance in practice too, he is not just a philosopher, as many people think of him, but most of the Tantrāloka is on ritual and also a lot on yoga, it`s just that the part of Tantraloka that gets quoted are the first few chapters, that`s philosophy, because first you have to lay out the view of reality and then you get practices. But most of Tantraloka is practice, but people would never know that because it is not translated, but that will change soon in the next few years.

*Ilya: I heard some people`s opinions that Kashmir Shaivism lineage stopped with the death of Swami Lakshman Joo, because he didn`t give guru diksha [abhisheka] to anybody.*

**Hareesh:** I agree with that.

*Ilya: Really? I think that may be he wasn't the only one but merely the most famous in the West.*

**Hareesh:** es, but you see, the thing is Shaivism is gone in Kashmir now. I've been there and the last families, who knew something about this tradition have moved to Dehli. So, the tradition is gone in Kashmir but only recently during the last 10-20 years. Still, it continues in other ways: those who studied with Lakshman Joo closely, like John Hughes, Bettina Baumer, and Alexis Sanderson, and also masters like Swami Satyānanda in Bihar and others in Tamil Nādu, who continued other lineages of the tradition. Kashmir was not the only place that non-dual Tantra flourished, it just had the most famous lineages. So the end of "Kashmir Shaivism" is not the end of non-dual Tantra.

*Ilya: Do you think the end of Shaivism in Kashmir was due to the Civil War?*

**Hareesh:** Well, Muslims have been pressing on them [the Kashmiri Brahmins] for 700 years now, so the number of Kashmiri Shaiva Brahmins has been declining slowly since 1300. So, there is a historical process that has been going on for 700 years and just now it comes to an end in the last 20 years. So, first of all I would like to say that we should stop using the term Kashmir Shaivism, this Shaivism is not the product of Kashmir it was a pan-Indian tradition. More than India, it is also found in Nepāl, Indonesia, Bali, Cambodia and other kingdoms. Kashmir Shaivism only means the writings of the great Kashmir masters of this tradition, but Trika itself was also practiced even in Tamil Nādu and in Mahārāshtra, so it's not just Kashmiri. But as far as we know Swami Lakshman Joo was the last guru of the Trika. He didn't give the abhisheka, he didn't create a successor, but he did initiated Mark Dyczkowski, Bettina Baumer, Rameshvar Jha and others. Many people received powerful initiation from him that continued his work, even though there is no successor. Meanwhile Shaivism also survives in other forms- it survives in some version of Śrīvidyā in the far South and so on. I think that if people start to understand that there is no separate religion of Shaktism - yes there are some forms of Kālā worship in Bengal that are exclusively Shakta, but the thing is that if you want to separate Shaiva and Shakta, then Abhinavagupta himself is more Shakta than Shaiva, he only uses the name Shiva when he is speaking to the

uninitiated people. To his disciples he is a goddess worshipper, he worships Parā Devi, Parā Vāk [the Supreme Goddess, the Supreme Word] and in his secret inner practice he was a worshipper of Kālī. So, the point is that in his actual practice and worship Abhinavagupta worshipped only the goddess. So, it's a completely incorrect myth to call him just a Shaiva or to say that Kashmir is Shaiva and Tamil Nadu is Shakta, because the tradition is a Shakta-Shaiva tradition and always was. It was always part of the same thing.

*Ilya: What are the earliest scriptures that describe the system of subtle anatomy - system of chakras, nādīs, which was adopted and described in such writing like Hatha Yoga Pradīpikā and some Yoga Upanishads - Yoga Kundalinī Upanishad, Amrita Nadu Upanishad etc? For example the system of chakras – the most known text is 19-th century translation of Shat-Chakra Nirupana by Arthur Avalon.*

**Hareesh:** Yes, this is a very important subject and there is a section in the book about this. So, the chakras in ancient times were also called ādhāras or sthānas, as in Mulādhāra, ādhāra means a focus point of meditation and they go by other names as well. The earliest chakra systems date from the 7th century, perhaps the eighth. They were systems of five or six chakras.

*Ilya: But if we take such text like Siddha Siddhānta Paddhati it describes chakras and ādhāras as separate concepts, where ādhāras are points in a body for concentration and chakras like we know.*

**Hareesh:** Yes, but in ancient times they were not different, they were just synonyms. So, this subtle body physiology was developed completely within Tantra. Of course we have a couple of fleeting references from other earlier sources, like in Yoga Sūtras we have an idea of nādī, chakra and we have a kurma-nadi, which must mean the central channel, but Patanjali makes no explanations of this and just refers to them in passing: one possible chakra, one possible nadi; a few references in early Upanishads, but just tiny ones. May be there is an oral tradition, we don't know for sure, but what we do know is that the complete systematic descriptions of the energy body comes only in Tantra. So, we find it in a number of early sources, Abhinavagupta also gives a system of 5 chakras.

*Ilya: That is interesting because Tibetan Tantra also uses 5 chakras and not 7.*

**Hareesh:** In classical Tantra 5 is always the number. Why? Because of the Pancha-Mahābhūtas. For the Tantriks the Hatha Yoga chakra system is crazy, because you run out of elements at the throat - you get to the throat and that's space, and then what? Space must be the crown of the head - this is chid-ākāsha - the sky of consciousness, so you can't have space at the throat level. This is the classical Tantra view - you must have 5 primary chakras. You could have many chakras - 28 chakras is fine, but only 5 primary chakras. So the triangle, also known as yoginī vaktra, the mouth of the yogini near the base of the body, later would be called mulādhāra, so this is earth, water [at the "kanda"] and then fire is in the heart in this system, which makes a lot of sense and here [at the heart] is the sprout of flame. This sprout of flame is the beginning of kundalinī. There are two kundalinīs - the lower kundalinī and the upper kundalinī, where lower kundalinī is the sexual energy. So, it says that lower kundalinī must be raised but upper kundalinī must be lowered. In fact in most authentic practice lineages this was preserved. Very important that transcendental energy must ground down into embodiment and animalistic sexual energy must rise up and they usually meet in the heart. And that's why they have this flame, which is called the sprout of flame, that is born from that meeting. The heart lotus opens, the sprout of flame arises.

This is not the only system in classical Tantra, we have multiple systems. So, for example, in the Siddhānta texts there are no lower chakras, because they didn't want to work with the sexual energy and their 5 chakras are: heart, throat, palate, third eye and crown. So, there are several different systems - originally all had 5 main chakras, the other chakras being less important. Of course, these are places where you focus your energy in meditation. What do you focus there? Prāna, visualisation, mantra, when those 3 come together that makes yoga in the classical Tantrik system. So, you vibrate a mantra, bringing the prāna there and visualizing some element, colour, etc. Very important for us is the Kubjikā Tantras, because they present the chakra system that influenced Hatha Yoga.

A couple of scholars have shown now, it's not widespread knowledge yet, is that Hatha Yoga almost definitely comes out of a south Indian Tantric lineage called Shambhavānanda lineage. These people worshipped Kubjikā and her consort Navātmabhairava, they also worshipped Shrividyā [Lalitā]. They focused on bodily practice especially, which eventually passed over into Hatha Yoga. How do we know this? Well, we have many sites, one of them is in Mahārāshtra, where we find the Nāth Siddhas and the Mahasiddhas, painted on the walls and we also find Kubjikā and Lalitā in the same caves, in the same practice environments. We also have a newly translated very important

scripture, called Matsyendra Samhitā, dated 1300, which claims to be the teaching that Goraksha received from Matsyendra. What are the mantras given in this text? They are the mantras of Kubjikā and Shrividyā. So, this is a key text in the transition from Tantra to Hatha Yoga. Then in the Hatha Yoga system we get practices that originated in this tantric environment and often they present 7 (6+1) chakra system that later gets popularized in the West. And so we have this big problem now, because westerners think this is THE chakra system. They don't realize this is only one of many possible systems and there are even living lineages that teach this system, because it was transmitted from Tantra and Hatha Yoga and down to the modern times. So, what's been lost is the diversity of knowledge. That's where westerners get confused. Westerners are very dogmatic compared to ancient Indians, modern Indians are very dogmatic too. By dogmatic I mean that they want to know which one is "true" - 7 chakra system, 5 chakra system or some other? They are all correct, depending on what the practice you are doing is. When it comes to subtle body - there are many ways to work with it. So, in the Tantras they present more than one chakra system, more than one map, which is not a problem, because each one is appropriate to a given practice. Their question is - what practice do you want to do? It is very simple and straightforward, but the confusion arises because there is lack of lineage, westerners look at all these sources and they seem to be in conflict, but each guru traditionally presents what the disciple needs for their practice and there is no conflict.

*Ilya: We came to a very important point here - in the beginning of a spiritual path disciple might not know what is best for him. And it is the role of a guru to decide and guide him. Nowadays, the western world is a consumption world and westerners treat different practices likewise - I don't like this practice and that one looks appealing, as if these were goods in a supermarket. So, a very interesting question arises. The traditional way, which looks too disciplined for the westerner mind and the possibility to choose, which is a better way for the spiritual practice? For example, we were born in the West and we choose ourselves, whereas in ancient India it was not possible - if you were born in Shaiva family you would become a Shaiva, sometimes different was possible but not on a common basis.*

**Hareesh:** Well, in fact, it [converting to a different path than the one of your parents] was more common than you would think and that's why in Shaivism there was an important ritual called the Lingoddhāra ritual, designed for people converting from another faith. This was

common enough that they made a special ritual for it and inflected that ritual for which faith a person was converting from, but the point is that you had made specific commitments in that faith, so there is a ritual to free you from that karma and to consecrate you into this new path. Certainly people were making choices, though of course the default, as you say, is to do whatever your father did - he is Shaiva and that's what you are, but as the texts tell us, many people felt pulled from the path they were born in and many people did convert. Of course, when they choose, they choose a whole path, it's not like Americans do. As you say this problem of "I'll take a little of this and a little of that" - they chose a path and they gave themselves to it. And, as you say, the guru was absolutely crucial, because the beginner practitioner didn't know himself well enough to choose his own practice. I would say, if you are creating your own practice out of what you read, hear and see, without the direct guidance of a master teacher – 99% chance of failure. It needs to be someone who sees with sharp vision your psychology, your weaknesses and creates a practice that helps you and also challenges you. Helps you by challenging you.

*Ilya: Yes, because by choosing only things that are comfortable to you, you won't develop, you will stay in this comfortable state of mind for all your life, with all your mistakes and weaknesses.*

**Hareesh:** Yes, and people [wrongly] think that the purpose of spirituality is to make me feel better about life.

*Ilya: What I see here, in the US, understanding of yoga is that people want to enjoy, so the practice is only for fun, it shouldn't be hard, it shouldn't transform you in an uncomfortable way. It should be a light and fun way of spending your time.*

**Hareesh:** Well said. I would say this is the number one problem in practice of yoga in the West, that people think that the purpose of yoga is to feel good. All the original authorities agree that the purpose of yoga is to transform yourself into somebody who can see things as they really are, see yourself as who you really are, see reality as what it really is. You discover that at the core you are divine, you are a manifestation of God. But in order to find that core you also have to see all the places in yourself where you are lying to yourself, inauthentic. Of course, that is painful, transformation is challenging and painful. These people practicing yoga to feel good and have fun - that is fine unless they think it will bring them to final liberation and full awakening. Then they are deluded. But if their goal is to have fun then there is no problem. So, this

is the tantric attitude - not to put down or condemn anyone's practice, instead it just tries to show when the practice is not aligned with the desired fruit. Any good teacher would ask you what you want and help you choose a practice that will lead to that. Because there is not sort of Christian way to think that everyone should want highest liberation, many people don't want that because they don't want to give up their comfort, their comfortable idea of themselves. In some other life they will realize that nothing but the final liberation will be ultimately good for me, and they will go for it. And if they are not ready for it, then the tantric guru says fine, let them have some enjoyments with some pain and suffering, as long as you know what you are choosing. Obviously, one that chooses final liberation chooses uncomfortable transformation to reach Ānanda. Whereas a person doesn't want to choose that, prefers less challenge and also ultimately less happiness.

*Ilya: My next question is about the Yoga Sutras and Tantric Yoga. It's a very interesting question, because Yoga Sutras is the most well-known scripture in the West and most of the people, including modern Indian teachers use this scripture as the main philosophical text of yoga tradition, even teachers of Hatha Yoga, which is not described in Sutras. I've read that these are two completely different systems - like yoga of Rishis and Munis is close to the Vedic tradition and tantric yoga, which is different. I have doubts about this. There is an opinion that Sutras is a dualistic text - about division of Prakriti from Purusha and Tantric texts are about union. Do you think these are completely different traditions or merely two points of view on one subject?*

**Hareesh:** This is a very important question that almost nobody understands the answer to, because of lack of research, lack of investigation, of real evidence. First of all we have to note that the modern interest in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra is artificial in a certain sense and it comes from not realizing that the sources for modern yoga are to be found ultimately in Tantric yoga. The practices of hatha Yoga and modern yoga (other than concentrative meditation) can't be found in Yoga Sutra, as you have pointed out, except for the brief mention of pranayama, whereas in Tantric texts we have a detailed description of many pranayamas. So if you look for the roots of modern practices it's Hatha yoga type traditions and tantric yoga before that - but the problem is that by the time of the 19th century Tantra had an extremely bad reputation, because the original wisdom had been forgotten and Indians thought Tantra meant some kind of black magic. And British thought Tantra meant some kind of a weird sex and black magic. Nobody wanted to look at those texts, which are so many and so hard to read

and they thought there is nothing valuable to read in them anyway. So, there is an artificial revival of Patanjali when modern practitioners looked for a scriptural authority in 19th and 20th century, and this revival obscures what really happened historically.

What happened was this - all of Patanjali's practices get adopted and developed further in tantra. They clearly know his Ashtānga Yoga, they cite his Ashtānga Yoga, they discuss it and give much more elaborate instruction on it, as well as other practices that are not found in Patanjali, mainly visualisation subtle body practices and energy practices, that's what Tantra adds that is very different from Patanjali. But they incorporate all of Patanjali's work and they don't incorporate his philosophy. Of course Tantra does incorporate the 25 tattvas (of Samkhya), but that became part of a much more elaborate philosophical system, that is very different from Patanjali, focusing on unity. There is no duality not only in terms of spirit and matter, because of course the Tantra says this matter is just a denser form of energy, which Einstein ended up proving -- so matter and energy are one and both are forms of spirit, a single divine consciousness in the Tantra philosophy. So, what we find quoted in Tantra is always just Patanjali's practices, not his philosophy. Result -- we get to the Hatha Yoga period and what is actually being taught in the times of Hatha Yoga is Patanjali's eight limbs plus more, such as a 15-limb yoga, with the sources for the additional seven limbs being Tantras. Moreover, we can prove that people in the 16th-18th centuries didn't differentiate between Patanjali and Hatha Yoga, because we have sources that say Patanjali's yoga and Hatha Yoga are synonyms. What I'm trying to say is that Patanjali does not survive at all as a separate school, nobody is preserving Patanjali's practices apart from the Tantra-influenced Hatha Yoga schools.

*Ilya: But could it be the case that Patanjali didn't even mean to establish a separate school but merely wrote a book on the subject?*

**Hareesh:** Well, it's hard to say now, records are too early, but what we do have is a list of 6 shad-darshanas, including Sāṅkhya and Yoga.

*Ilya: But this shad-darshana list was created by Max Muller, some other darshana could also be found.*

**Hareesh:** Yes, we do find this shad-darshana list in original sources, but you are right to say that this was not a dominant theme

before Max Muller. In sources of the 16th century (like the Sarva-darśana-sangraha) we find mentions of Pātanjala school, but what I'm trying to say is that it was preserved by historians but is no longer practiced as a separate school. Let me correct myself, of course there were a few lineages that still kind of preserved Patanjali's original dualistic spirit and matter separation and for example Swami Hariharānanda did this commentary on Yoga Sutra in the early 20th century published by SUNY press. He is a rare example of somebody interpreting Patanjali and Sankhya with no tantric influence. My point is that in general all these practice and ideas were being interpreted under Tantric influence, even Vedanta came under tantric influence, this is how powerful tantra was.

*Ilya: Of course, because Shankaracharya himself was practicing Shri Vidya, even now all Vedantic Pithaks practice Shri Vidya like personal Sadhana.*

**Hareesh:** There you go. So, what we find is Shrividyā colonising Vedānta, but not the other way around, because in the classical Tantric sources Shankara is never quoted, none of the Vedantic masters are quoted, only one, if you call him a vedantin, and that is Bhartṛhari, a very early sort of proto-vedanta figure and him they quote approvingly. So, when we see Tantra appearing in later vedantic sources, but we don't see Vedanta appearing in any Tantric sources, then we know the direction of influence -- tantra influencing Vedanta and not the other way around. It is very important to establish direction of influence. For example, this is another big topic, but we know that tantric practices were borrowed by Buddhism from Shaivism and not vice versa, because we can see that pieces of Shaiva scriptures are borrowed and put into Buddhist scriptures and we can prove that that's the direction. Of course Shaivists took some philosophy from Buddhists, but all the tantric practice went this way- from Shaivism to Buddhism. Only now we can prove this because Sanderson did the necessary textual studies to show this.

Back to the main point - if it wasn't for misunderstandings about Tantra and the refusal to look and research Tantric sources, we wouldn't now have this strange situation of the artificial revival of Patanjali. Yes, in Ashtanga Yoga [Pattabhi Jois] classes people pray and invoke Patanjali, but historically this is very strange, because if they want to look at the guru most influential on the modern yoga that should be Goraksha. Of course, there are many people contributing to this tradition, but if you want to look to one man, who was most influential on our modern yoga-

Goraksha and his guru Matsyendra, but Goraksha is the one who wrote it all down, not Matsyendra. And when you look beyond Goraksha you find Tantra, because Goraksha himself knew and practiced tantric mantras and traditions. But what he saw around himself in the 13th century was that the Muslims have come and conquered and there is no more funding, which used to support institutions, universities, temples, many things and Shaivism had developed this huge complex mantra system that needed scholars and experts to perpetuate it. So what Goraksha sees is that there is no way we are going to keep this complex religion going with no state support, now that the Muslims have come. So, what does he create? And this is a simplification of course, he with the others create Hatha Yoga, creating a simplified form of yogic practice and leaving aside the complex mantra system, which they knew was going to be too complex for this new situation. So they take, what they felt was the most essential practices and create this Hatha Yoga systems, a lot was lost, of course and if you read Hatha Yoga texts and compare them to Tantric texts on yoga they are very simplified. But that is exactly what we would expect from the culture where there is no longer state support for the religion- simplify or else it's going to die out.

So, this is what I show in my book: Tantra goes to Hatha yoga goes to modern yoga. There is a lot of work to be done, but we can trace out the general progression. Why is it so important? Because people will understand this- they will look to the Tantric texts and to the older Hatha Yoga texts for information that has been lost, whereas if they think that Patanjali is the guru of our yoga, then they will just keep looking at Yoga Sutra, which is crazy, because there is so much that's not there. We have over a hundred translations of Yoga Sutra in English and we have almost no translations of Tantric sources. That's why I think that this historical understanding must become widespread, so that the attention starts going to where the practices really are- untranslated tantric sources.

*Ilya: That's interesting that among the Indian yoga teachers, who spread Hatha Yoga in the West no one belonged to Nath Sampradaya. Krishnamacharya was from Shri Vaishnava Sampradaya, Sivananda and Satyananda belonged to Sarasvati order (Advaita Vedanta) etc. A few years ago I was searching around India but Natha yogis don't seem to practice Hatha Yoga anymore.*

**Hareesh:** No, they don't and this is very important that you know this, because in fact the Nāths have not been practicing Hatha Yoga for 400 years. Do you know James Mallinson? He is a very important scholar of Hatha Yoga, because he not only reads Sanskrit very well, but

he has lived with yogis, sadhus and naga babas in India for many years, so he sees the current reality and he also reads the ancient texts. He shows that for some reason Nāths have stopped practicing real yoga and they are called Jogis, which is just the caste name, they don't practice yoga. Who preserved the yoga practices? Some yoga practices were preserved by Dasnami Sannyasis, some by Śrī Vaishnavas and especially by the Ramanandi. That is where we look for the preservation of these practices. When the Dasnami orders became more and more dominant and powerful, if you want to be a full time practitioner you become a sarasvati or a giri or whatever. The thing is that those Dasnamis are renunciates, so this obscures the fact that the original tantric tradition was not practiced by renunciates, but mostly by householders. And it would still be practiced by householders except the economic reality who is going to support that. Before there was a lot of support for that but in the past several hundred years you had to become a renunciate, because then you can get some support, whether from begging your food or from organisations from Sarasvati orders or other orders.

*Ilya: Going back to our previous talk about chakra systems and nadis. In the Tibetan Tantra channel system the main three nadis are not crossing each other but parallel, whereas in Indian systems we can find pictures showing crossed channels, which are quite late dating back to 18th-19th century. What do you think about this? Do you think that perhaps Tibetan preserved more early and correct system?*

**Hareesh:** No, both descriptions are found in ancient sources, but the sources that give the most thought to the question describe the channels as alternating. This is discussed in a very early source in a lot of detail, so the description that I find most convincing is that the chakras, the energy centres are located where many nadis converge -- so the nadis cross back and forth and the point where they cross that's the chakra. So, it's like the intersection of many nadis. But for example the pingalā nadi is definitely dominant on the right side and idā on the left side. Even though they are intercrossed sometimes they are visualised like this [parallel], because the energy of pingala is so much stronger on the right, and the energy of ida on the left. So, actually I don't think there is much of a contradiction here.

*Ilya: I studied a little bit of Tibetan practices and always nadis were visualised as straight lines - pingala was of red color, ida - moonlight and sushumna nadi was blue like a flame of a burning gas.*

**Hareesh:** And that is the same in Shaiva thought, probably they got this tradition from Shaivas. Abhinavagupta describes this in detail. The inhale comes in through ida nadi and that is the "lunar inhale." The exhale is the solar, so central channel can be blue fire or it can also be orange fire, because the idea is that red and white merge and that makes orange. So, when Sun and Moon merge it becomes Fire. We see this in a technique where you visualize the crescent moon above your head, you inhale down and the moon grows as it comes down and become a full moon in the heart and then it sets and you visualize the sun rising in the heart, like the morning sun rising, exhale the sun up, release it, again visualize the moon, bring it down etc. So, the internal kumbhaka (full moon setting and sun rising and you are supposed to fuse those two energies in kumbhaka) and fire surges up the central channel. This is all in Abhinavagupta.

*Ilya: This sounds very similar to Tibetan Tantric tradition.*

**Hareesh:** Yes. The more information is known, such as when my book comes out, the Tibetans are going to read my book I hope and say something like this is almost the same as us! And they will realize that these two traditions were side by side sister and brother, almost no conflict actually.



**Ilya:** Now, let us talk a little bit about the sexual practices. As you have already mentioned before in Western mind the term Tantra is associated with some kind of an exotic sex, which is a wrong and oversimplified understanding and yet it still exists. There are numerous advertisements of various exotic Tantric workshops, all connected with sex somehow. So, let us bring some light to this matter. And would you please explain what part of Tantric tradition is connected with sexual practices? Hatha Yoga Pradipika mentions vajroli mudra, but it is very difficult to understand however the role of this mudra and many misinterpretations arise. Even in India no one knows exactly. And yoga teachers try to avoid this subject, because sex has always been a closed and suppressed matter since the Muslim invasion and this knowledge seems to have been lost over the time.

**Hareesh:** Let`s clarify this with reference to three areas: neo-tantric sexual practices, original Tantra and Hatha Yoga. So, what is taught under the name "tantric sex" today, these techniques cannot be found in the original sources and they come from westerners, making some things up, reading some Taoist material, and they have been doing this for a long time now. The first person who wanted to teach something like tantric sex was probably Alistair Crowley around a hundred years ago. It seems that he knew about the work of Arthur

Avalon, so he heard about tantric sex but he had no access to the original sources and made something up and transmitted it. So, today we have teachers of so called tantric sex and they teach something they have got from their teachers, from their teachers etc. They think it is original lineage, but it in fact started only a hundred years ago. Scholars call this neo-tantra. What is the difference between neo tantric and original Tantric sexual practices? There is a big difference, because in the original scriptures there are no sexual techniques given at all, meaning there is no description of techniques for how to make sex more enjoyable, last longer, nothing in common with Kama Sūtra at all. This fact shows how confused modern people are. They think that Kama Sūtra is related to Tantra, which shows that they have no idea what they are talking about. So, we don't find sexual techniques in the original Tantra, but what we do find is the idea of sexual meditation. It is mentioned in many sources and detailed only in Tantrāloka chapter 29. And there the beautiful ritual is described, the practitioner must be advanced, this is an advanced ritual with a sexual intercourse, but no information is given about how to have sexual intercourse, this is just what you meditate on, you meditate on this [sexual] centre and merge all energy into that centre, instead of having 5 different senses, you should have just one sense, the sense that you are a mass of blissful consciousness. The goal of the Kula-yāga, which is the name of the sexual practices, is to become one mass of blissful consciousness. But Kula-yāga doesn't mean sex, it means sexual meditation. The two practitioners and their divine essence all become one in the practice. Some people instinctively know how to do this, but most people must practice it. So, Abhinavagupta says, and this is the interesting part, you must not practice this with somebody that you desire, because if you have desire you will objectify the act, you will objectify the person and if anything becomes objectified, he says, this will not work. See how different this is from neo-tantra. In fact, he says that only the advanced practitioner could do this with his wife, that he is attracted to, because you have to know how to completely drop that kind of physical desire, because the purpose is full awareness and liberation.

In Hatha Yoga system we have something else going on. Hatha Yoga is interesting in preserving and sublimating the sexual energy, which is a different thing. Abhinavagupta doesn't talk about holding in the semen, in fact you must ejaculate in his practice, because the mingled sexual fluids are then offered to the deity as the most sacred offering possible, fluid of man and woman together are offered to the Linga as the highest possible offering. But Hatha yogis are interested in siddhis that came from keeping in all the sexual energy and fluids, so

they are interested in raising the bindu, a subtle sexual substance, to the crown of a head. For example, vajroli mudra and so on are not found in Tantric sources, only in Hatha Yoga sources, and in early Hatha Yoga sources this is the primary concern, how to pull the sexual energy and fluid upwards.

*Ilya: Hatha Yoga Pradipika mentions that for the successful performance of vajroli mudra a yogi should be with a desired woman and have plenty of milk.*

**Hareesh:** Here is the difference, because the Kula-yāga, that Abhinavagupta talks about, is a sexual meditation for liberation and in a Hatha Yoga source this usually is for siddhis -- there is also a source for that in tantra, which I didn't mention. Almost nobody knows about this source. This is Brahmayāmala tantra, where the practice is described, which is an early tantra.

*Ilya: I know only Rudra yamala tantra.*

**Hareesh:** Brahmayāmala tantra is a way earlier source, mentioned even in the early version of Skanda Purāna. So there is a practice, called "the observance of the razor's edge." [It is described in a new article by Shaman Hatley.] This is a very different sexual practice. The ascetic yogi obtains a woman to help him with this practice by bribing her with as much jewelry he can afford and so she agrees to do this practice with him. He must do this mantra and copulate with her, but not ejaculate and if he does ejaculate he has to start all over again and do many mantras to make up for that. This is called difficult even for gods to practice, but the goal is siddhi. It is a kind of a practice, where the woman is not an equal practitioner, whereas in Abhinavagupta's Kula-yāga the woman is theoretically an equal practitioner, both going for liberation, whereas here there is an ascetic using a woman like an instrument, with her permission of course. And throughout the Brahmayāmala the goal is usually siddhi. So this is a very interesting thing, in the tantric context ascetic yogis, living like sadhus, were usually going for siddhi, and household yogis were usually going for liberation. Very clear division in that sense. So, then in Hatha Yoga we get strange combination of these goals, you want siddhi but also you want liberation and things get more mixed up, I would say. But in terms of real sexual sadhana getting transmitted, I think this only happened in oral transmission, because it didn't get transmitted in the texts, and I have never seen an example of sexual sadhana that is authentic to the tradition except for one, which is given by Dharmanidhi of Adi-yoga [in

Loei, Thailand]. With permission of his guru he recorded a CD, where he gives an important sexual saadhana, which may go back to the original tradition. Dharmanidhi says that he searched all over India for the real sexual sādhanā and finally found a couple of people to initiate him. This nine-hour CD starts as a lecture and then gets practical. So he describes a very interesting technique, where two practitioners are becoming one, so if they know how to do it right they can generate a sushumnā nādī between them. So, they are like one being with a sushumna nadi between them, where the woman becomes the idā nādī, and the man the pingalā nādī. He says, that he has done it so powerfully that they could both see and feel the sushumna nadi appear between them. And again, it has nothing to do with pleasure, it may be pleasurable but that is a side effect. I don't know any other modern source for authentic sexual sādhanā in the tantric tradition. Of course, there are some in Taoist tradition, but that's different.

*Ilya: Let us pass on to the last question about Indian tradition in India and in the West. As I see it, and I have spent a lot of time in India, modern Indians are not so much interested in spirituality, even Hindu worship is gradually becoming less and less important for them. They are more interested in developing the material aspect of their lives, whereas the opposite trend can be seen in the West. Westerners, who have obtained sufficient level of material comfort, they start to feel urge for spiritual knowledge. It seems to me, that spirituality is gradually shifting from India to the West. I have recently read an article, I don't know whether it is true or not, that nowadays there are more Buddhist monasteries in the US than in Nepal and India. What is your opinion about the future of a spiritual tradition?*

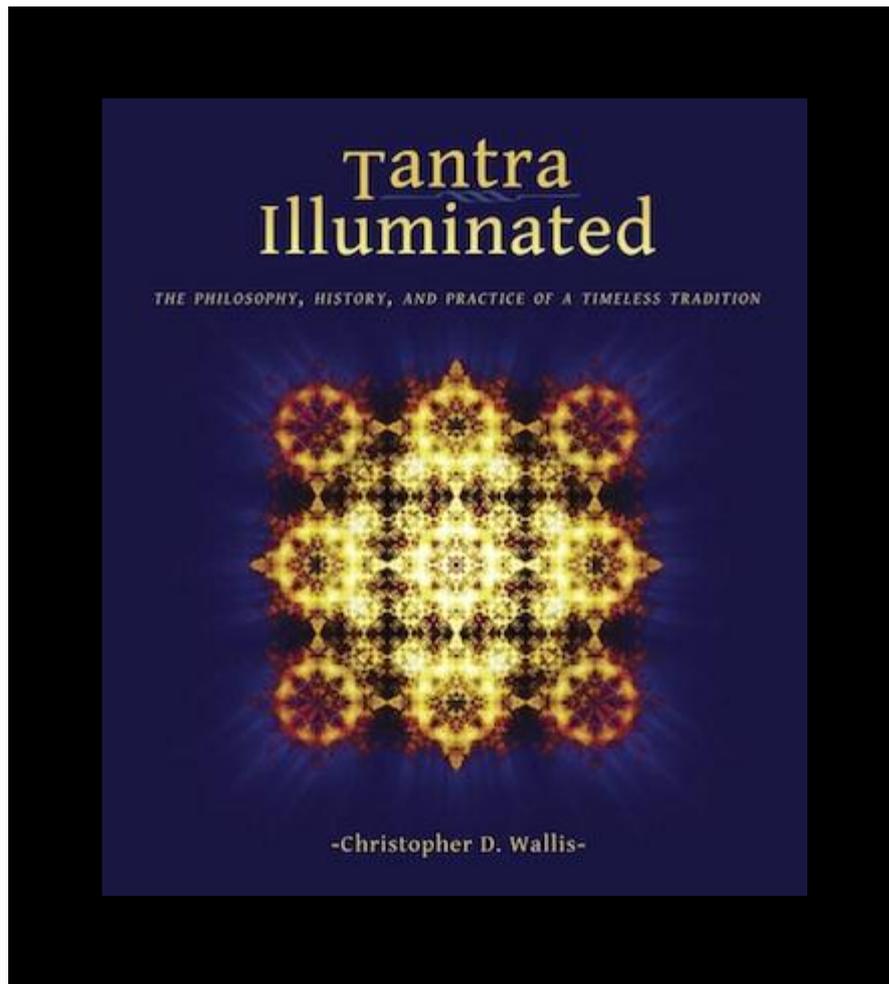
**Hareesh:** First of all I would say that we are in the era of globalised culture and thank God for that, because otherwise these spiritual teachings would have been lost, because modern India doesn't have an interest in them. The reasons for this is extremely complex, but partly is because Indian culture underwent a kind of re-set, a reboot with the Muslim conquest and then British conquest, there was such a contraction of Indian religion, meaning that so much knowledge and wisdom was forgotten and lost that the religion became a simplified version of itself, centred on the temple culture and people going to temple, essentially not for spirituality but for good luck. This is a big problem, because the nature of the Indian tradition is that it asserts that the religion is eternal, Sanātana Dharma -- this phrase is misleading, because it implies that our dharma, our religion has been unchanging throughout time, but in fact it has changed enormously, but if you believe

it's unchanging then you do not go back and look for the knowledge that has been lost. And what we see in modern India is that those people who are interested in religion, they know a little bit about it and think that they know everything. Which is, as Abhinavagupta says, the worst form of ignorance. If you know a little bit, but think that it's all that there is to know, you are not open to more, you don't go looking for more. We have an Indian government, which is not funding research into India's past, which was more glorious in the sense that huge amounts of funding were going to pay people to meditate, you know, and to research these things. That's why we have thousands of scriptures, but nobody in modern India is reading them and there is no interest in them. At the same time, as you said, the interest has been growing in the West ever since Vivekānanda came in 1893. America and Western Europe are most economically successful countries, which is important, because people have made enough money to enjoy the comforts of life and find that they are still not very happy. So, it's not a coincidence, because India, except for a few people, does not have all the modern comforts and so they want them. The West already have them, so they want spirituality, because they have already discovered experientially that they are not really fulfilled by money and comforts. This is a common idea that money can't buy happiness, everybody knows it but it's very different to experience this for yourself. And that's what we are talking about -- you have to have an actual experience. If we look at who is sponsoring this huge growth of Buddhism in the West, it's wealthy educated individuals, who discovered that all their education and wealth didn't really fulfill them, but when they started doing Buddhist meditation they have a much more rich and beautiful experience of life.

*Ilya: And why do you think Buddhism is more popular in the West? I read an article by David Frawley in which he says that many western yoga teachers prefer meditation techniques according to the Buddhist teachings rather than tradition Indian ones. What is your opinion on this?*

**Hareesh:** Just as a preface I don't want to say Buddhism versus India, because Buddhism is Indian in its origin, even Tibetan Buddhism is Indian in its origins. But why modern people turn to Buddhism and especially Tibetan Buddhism? One, is that Buddhism is a religion that seeks converts, Indian traditions that we lump together as Hinduism don't seek converts and often don't even welcome converts. So, that's one important reason. Another important reason is this issue I keep alluding to about the historical shift that happened with lack of state support for the Indian religions. There was that state support for Buddhism in Tibet all the way up until the Chinese conquest of Tibet.

What that means is that you have a lot more highly educated practice teachers, you have lineages of scholar-practitioners, so when westerners who are educated want a practice that is intellectually convincing as well, there are many Buddhist lineages that are intellectually very well thought out compared to the Indian lineages. Of course, many practice lineages survived in India under the Muslims and British, but with a greatly reduced and simplified intellectual component. It doesn't matter for some people and it does for the others, that's why people like myself are trying to bring back the rich intellectual component to the non-Buddhist yogas, so that they become an attractive option for people. When there are more books like this one that I've written that present this Śaiva Tantric view in a very intellectually sophisticated way - - which is not made up by the way because this is how it was presented originally, originally it was as intellectually coherent as the Buddhist view. They were equals in debate, Shaivism and Buddhism, and in fact we see that many times the Shaivas won. We are just bringing that back, so that it becomes a more respectable option, because what you see in India today is just yoga teachers with a very superficial and vague understanding of philosophy and it's just not very convincing to westerners. Sounds like there is just pretty language about "we all one with God," but ultimately you want more than that, you want a better and deeper understanding.



***Ilya:** And also many Indian yoga teachers are merely trying to create commercial cults.*

**Hareesh:** Yes, it's a huge problem that opportunistic Indian gurus have tainted things for westerners in many ways. So, we have a lot of work to do to kind of undo that damage, which will slowly happen, I think.

***Ilya:** Going back to the question about the future of Indian tradition. We have already discussed that in modern India it is oversimplified, but here in the West there is the danger that it will be oversimplified for the commercial purposes. What is your opinion on that?*

**Hareesh:** It's a big problem, because not only is it simplified it is distorted, because what sells is feeling good. So, you get the "feel good" kind of yoga, because yoga is the business and that's what it sells. So, that's why a few teachers and hopefully more in the future are saying that it's fine if you feel good and find some teachers that make you feel good about yourself, but ultimately if you want to avoid the pitfalls and

actualise your potential in this path you will need the deeper teachings. So some people like myself are signaling to Americans that the superficial version of things is not going to take you all the way, you must be in a deep relationship with the teacher in which you receive the deeper teachings that can take you all the way. And if only 1% of the people want that that's fine. It's just that what there was in ancient times and what there should be now is a graduated curriculum. So, in ancient times they said here is the teaching for the masses, like the mythology was for the masses, stories of the gods and stuff, and Abhinavagupta even says that's for children and simple-minded people -- little stories of the gods with the moral at the end -- fine, but everyone should know that there is another level that they can be initiated in. In Shaivism in ancient times there were 4 levels -- uninitiated and then 3 levels of initiation. Everyone knew that if they wanted to go deeper that was available to them, but now we have the problem that people don't even know what an initiated practice really looks like and they don't know what is necessary to achieve their goals.

So, as we started developing yoga in the West-- it's absolutely fine to have commercialised superficial version as long as the deeper version is also available to those who really want it, and that is not determined by how much money they offer but by dedication of their being. For this to happen and work we must have more teachers that really know what they are talking about, that reserve the higher practices and teachings for their initiates and who only give initiation to somebody who has a really dedicated spirit, regardless to whether they are rich or poor. I don't know if the West will be able to develop yoga in this way, but that's what I'm working for.

[Order "Tantra Illuminated" book by Christopher Wallis](#)