



Knowledge & Action: Interior Homologies in Anuttarayoga Tantra

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‘From self-experiencing comes this knowledge...Like the sky it is pure and void, the essence supreme of non-existence and existence, a mingling of Wisdom and Means...it is the Unchanging One Supreme.’

Hevajra Tantra ch. x.

‘...give me beauty in the inward soul; and may the outward and inward man be at one.’

Plato, Phaedrus, 279B

The functions of *Sacerdotium*/Knowledge and *Regnum*/Action¹, equating with the Spiritual Authority and the Temporal Power, are mirrored via an interior homology



Vairocana Buddha

within the symbolic physiology of the subtle ‘body-mandala’ in the Buddhist esoteric traditions of *Anuttarayoga Tantra*. Therein we find described the channels and meridians of the ‘drops’ and the ‘energy-winds’ – the white channel (white being the colour of the *Sacerdotium*) is the *Lalana* which corresponds to *Prajna* – ‘Transcendent Gnosis’. The red channel (red being the hue of *Regnum*) is *Rasana* which corresponds to *Upaya*, ‘Skilful Means’ or ‘Method’. The white drop (*bindu*) or ‘white bodhicitta’ is situated in the *Lalana* channel and the red ‘drop’ or ‘red bodhicitta’ is accordingly located in the *Rasana* channel. Their state



Mahottara Heruka

¹ In the broader sense one can correlate the function of *Sacerdotium* with the mandala of the serene Dhyani-Buddhas and the function of *Regnum* with the mandala of the wrathful Herukas (Heruka being related to the Sanskrit element *rk* or *rg* denoting regality and kingly power) to epitomise the priestly-contemplative and regal-warrior aspects of the ‘Awakened One’. The Tibetan depictions of the assemblies of the forty-two ‘peaceful’ (*Zhi*) and fifty-eight ‘wrathful’ (*Kro*) deities of the *Zhi-kro* mandala are apposite to these considerations. The white Vairocana Buddha and the ruddy-brown Mahottara Heruka are shown in their principal positions in such images.

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of separateness is equivalent to the condition of *Samsara*.

As the Buddhist Tantric text ‘*Sadhanamala*’ says: ‘*Lalana is of the nature of Prajna and Rasana is of the nature of Upaya: the Avadhuti remains in the middle as the seat of the Mahasukha.*’ In the ‘*Hevajra Tantra*’ (trans. D. L. Snellgrove, Oxford 1959, p. 49) it is written: ‘*Lalana has the nature of Wisdom and Rasana consists in the Means, and Avadhuti is in the middle, free from the notions of subject and object*’.

The essence of the Highest Yoga Tantra is, via the control of the internal ‘energy-winds’ within the subtle channels, to conjoin the white and red ‘drops’ within the central channel *Avadhuti*, in the kardial locus of the ‘Heart-Space’, giving rise to the ‘Great Bliss’ (*Mahasukha*) of Nirvana – the effective attainment of the degree of Liberation or Deliverance.

In Hindu Tantras the ‘white drop’ would equate with the seed of Lord Shiva and the ‘red drop’ with the rajas-essence of Shakti (‘Power’) and thus in Vedantic doctrine with *Purusha* and *Prakriti*. This finds certain clear analogies and applications in the ‘mercurial science’ of traditional Indian alchemy (*Rasayana*) as witnessed in the 11th century alchemical treatise ‘*The Ocean of Mercury*’ (‘*Rasanarva*’) where the seed of Shiva is Quicksilver and the blood of Shakti is Sulphur or red arsenic, as it is written in ‘*Rasanarva*’ v. 34: ‘*You, O Goddess, are the mother of all beings and I am their eternal father. That which was generated from our great sexual union, that is rasa.*’ (‘*The Ocean of Mercury*’ trans. David Gordon White).² The alchemical conjunction of the white essence and the red essence, of Quicksilver and Sulphur, relate to what René Guénon has termed the ‘Power of the Keys’ in Hermetism where the alchemical wedding of the Moon and the Sun in the Middle Path of philosophical Fire is alluded to. The respective domains of the Lesser Mysteries or Royal Art and the Greater Mysteries or Sacerdotal Art are here to be equated with the ‘fixation of the volatile’ and the ‘volatilization of the fixed’. The *Avadhuti* is the central meridian, the ‘coronal artery’ called *Sushumna-nadi* in Hindu tradition: it is the path of the ‘solar ray’ by which Deliverance is realised via attainment of the Centre, accessing the path of the ‘Sun-Door’ which leads beyond all individual states of the being to Liberation and union with the Supreme Identity.

The union of *Prajna* and *Upaya*, of the ‘white drop’ and the ‘red drop’ in the ‘heart-space’ of the central channel is synonymous with the attainment of Nirvana – it is the initiatory realisation of the ‘Great Symbol’, *Mahamudra* which is cognate with *Wei Wu Wei*, the transcendent degree of ‘Actionless Activity’ in Taoist esoterism, the non-manifest station of the ‘Motionless Mover’ at the Centre from whence the ‘Action of Presence’ is exercised. The conjunction or wedding of Knowledge and Action, of Transcendent Gnosis and Skilful Method, at the Centre restores the primordial indifferenciation of the Sacerdotal and Regal functions, resolving them into their original unity.³

² ‘*In the ancient Indian alchemical tradition the white bodhichitta symbolizes the semen of Shiva as mercury and the red bodhichitta the menstrual blood of Parvati as cinnabar or sulphur.*’ (The Encyclopedia of Tibetan Motifs and Symbols’ Robert Beer, Chicago 2004, p. 146)

³ As René Guénon has stated: ‘*In reality, at their origins and prior to the division into castes, the two functions, sacerdotal and royal, did not exist in distinct and differentiated states; they were both contained in their common principle which is above castes...*’ (‘*Perspectives on Initiation*’, ch. 40 ‘*Sacerdotal and Royal Initiation*’). In the oneness of the two functions consists the realisation of the

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The tantric biunity or hierogamic conjunction of the ‘white drop’ and the ‘red drop’, imaged under the symbolism of the union of Buddha and his Consort, the Guru and the Dakini, the *maithuna* of Shiva with Shakti, echoes the archaic marriage of Brahmana and Kshatram encountered in the oldest Vedic tradition. The ‘Mixta Persona’ in the ancient Vedic ritual of the Divine Marriage, is embodied in the *dvandva*-pairing of Mitravarunau. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in his pivotal 1942 study ‘Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government’ traces these themes back to the words of the archaic marriage formula uttered by the Purohita, the Brahminic priest, to the King according to the ‘Aitereya Brahmana’ VIII. 27.: ‘*I am That, thou art This, I am Sky, thou art Earth*’ – Coomaraswamy asseverates the fact that the Royal power ‘is unquestionably the “feminine” party in the “marriage” of the “Sacerdotium (*brahma*) and the Regnum (*kshatra*)’. (Thus the traditional symbolism of ‘woman’ and of the ‘feminine’ which attaches to Kshatriya initiations.) As well as Mitravarunau this *dvandva* or *syzygy* is also personified in the figure of Indraghni, for Agni as the sacrificial Fire, Atmanic Self, Solar Comprehensor and the ‘Golden Person’ (*Hiranya-Purusha*), represents the Sacerdotal function and Indra the Regal function and we see these two functions of the ‘Counsel and the Power’ manifested in the Platonic principles *philosophia* and *dynamis* (conjoined in the ideal of the Philosopher-King) and in the Islamic doctrine of the Divine Qualities of ‘Beauty’ (*Jamal*) and ‘Majesty’ (*Jalal*). These are depicted in the Mundaka Upanishad by the symbolism of the two birds: ‘*Like two birds of golden plumage, inseparable companions, the individual self and the immortal Self (Atman) are perched on the branches of the selfsame tree. The former tastes of the sweet and bitter fruits of the tree; the latter, tasting of neither, calmly observes...When the seer beholds the Effulgent One, the Lord, the Supreme Being, then, transcending both good and evil, and freed from impurities, he unites himself with him*’ (The Upanishads, trans. Swami Prabhavananda and Frederick Manchester, NY, 1957, pp. 46-47).

The two functions are embodied in the aspects of the Inner Sage and the Outer King as Chinese tradition terms them. The restoration of the hierarchic-equilibrical and harmonic disposition between the function of Knowledge and the function of Power is the essence of the hierogamy, of authentic initiatic attainment and spiritual realisation. As Ananda K Coomaraswamy commented: ‘*As the individual is assimilated to the Self, the woman to the man, so is the Regnum to the Sacerdotium*’.

primordial state of man before the Fall, of the ‘Perfect Man’ as Priest and Sovereign in the paradisiacal state.