TEACHING FREEDOM – A SCIENCE OF TANTRIC PEDAGOGY

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by

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DEDICATION

To my first teachers,
mom and dad—
Nothing, nothing at all,
Being possible without them.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Teaching Freedom - A Science of Tantric Pedagogy
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What would be the outcome if a student was taught to utilize schooling as a vehicle to his or her liberation? What if teachers assisted in the natural unfolding of students’ preexistent possibilities? What would happen if the intention of education was designed to better a student for the student’s sake rather than to better a student for society’s sake? What if education concentrated on students’ expression of creativity rather than students’ test scores? In other words, what ideas can be borrowed from the Tantras and the Upanishads to help contemporary education and overall global change? In Tantra, liberation is twofold: it is recognizing oneself in order to recognize a relation in the inherent interdependent nature of the universe. In this thesis, I employ a definition of liberation based on tantric and upanishadic texts in order to build a contemporary philosophy of education. After explaining what it means to be free, I show how tantric freedom’s application into a contemporary theory of education may contribute to solving the problems of traditional Amero-eurocentric pedagogy. To help with this, I outline the educational objectives and outcomes of a pedagogy based on tantric freedom and explain each in detail. Then I imagine a debate between Aristotle and Rudolf Steiner. Aristotle’s philosophy of education demonstrates the ailments of the traditional Amero-eurocentric pedagogy, whereas Rudolf Steiner showcases a 20th century opposition to the Aristotelian tradition, which remains the only well-known attempt to design an education system inspired by tantric-like freedom. In order to decide the effectiveness of a pedagogy based on tantric freedom—in an Amero-European setting—I propose arguments against tantric pedagogy and formulate rebuttals. This further defends the need to deconstruct the intention behind contemporary education and in the end argues for the application of a tantric intention.
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INTRODUCTION

Human thoughts are commonly preoccupied with notions of freedom. The intricacies of freedom are vast, and due to the conundrum of philosophical opinions on the subject, we are often left pondering what ‘freedom’ signifies. Is society free? Am I free? What does it mean to be free? Is there free will? Is this food free? Is my time free? What can I do to become freer? Whether we understand what it means to be free or not, historically people and their societies have aspired towards the attainment of freedom—whether political, spiritual, individual, psychological, familial, physical, etc. Freedom is a philosophical Hauptfach that has endured a long life of semantic convolution. It can and it does signify a number of material or metaphysical meanings to myriad of people. To outline and describe the many versions, interpretations, and expressions of what is called ‘freedom’ is an impossible task and not the goal of this thesis. Rather, the goal is to understand what it means to be free in one specific sense—a tantric sense—then apply that sense of freedom to a philosophy of pedagogy conducive to societal advancement. This tantric inspired way of teaching does not simply represent a change of curriculum or a more efficient way to administer generalized testing, but challenges the intentions behind the current intention of modern pedagogy—a change in intention whose long term implementation results in a freer, more functional society.

The idea of freedom, in a tantric sense, synthesizes both the practical (as it can be applied in a classroom to help a student) with the esoteric (the transcendental aspect of freedom as liberation, the soteriology of Tantra)—it is an interaction with a mundane truth intended to arrive at a higher, more absolute truth. This follows because Tantra traditionally allows for the practical emphasis of wisdom versus the use of wisdom for a more outlandish esoteric soteriology. With that said, the reader may see this as a practice rooted beyond the validation of empiricism. However, the focus of this thesis will be on the practicalities of such an approach. This should not be too confusing, whereby the application of the idea is thought of as a vehicle through the mundane. The use of tantric freedom is a functional tool meant to bring a spirit of clarity, both psychological and ethical, to education as the foundation of society.
The spirit of education naturally moves and changes as life and society evolve. As we witness ourselves stumble into a post-modern time, we are left starved for an education that is not only workable but working to heal, to improve, to bring fulfillment and growth to its pupils. When looking thoughtfully into contemporary pedagogy, one will observe how often ambitious pedagogues try new experiments and implement new rules into their schools. More than ever are educators bombarded with faddish waves of theoretical education. However, thus far, nothing has offered the vast change that might help what many teachers are calling the *Indoor Generation*. This observation tells us that we are searching desperately for a shift; perhaps that shift involves a reevaluation, a dismantling that can offer a new way to teach our students, a better way to be teachers. Many believe that traditional education is faltering and that the system ought to be built afresh. It seems that education, more than any other field, is in great need of deconstruction,\(^1\) which is the inspiration and character behind the primary argument presented in this thesis: The objectives of tantric freedom ought to be implemented into contemporary pedagogy for a better, more effective form of teaching that produces freer students, communities, and societies.

First we will begin with an exploration of Indian thought. More specifically, pre-Tantra (such as the teachings of the Upanishads) and Kashmir Shaivism’s Tantra and how they can and have been applied for a contemporary Amero-european mind. This primary discussion will reveal a working definition of tantric freedom—both the ancient practice and its contemporary application. Most of the first chapter will be spent explaining exactly what we mean by tantric freedom—in relation to the Amero-eurocentric paradigm and as it stands alone historically—rather than strictly arguing for its application. Tantra deserves in depth clarification due to its inherent complexity and newly unearthed meaning in the

\(^1\)The meaning of “deconstruction” in regards to tantric pedagogy is inspired by Derrida’s definition. Derrida first introduces ‘deconstruction’ when he writes, “The ‘rationality’ [...] which governs a writing thus enlarged and radicalized, [defining writing as all that gives rise to an inscription in general, including pictorial, musical, sculptural ‘writing’] no longer issues from a logos. Further, it inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos. Particularly the signification of truth. All the metaphysical determinations of truth, and even the one beyond metaphysical onto-theology that Heidegger reminds us of, are more or less immediately inseparable from the instance of the logos, or of a reason thought within the lineage of the logos, in whatever sense it is understood: in the pre-Socratic or the philosophical sense, in the sense of God’s infinite understanding or in the anthropological sense, in the pre-Hegelian or the post-Hegelian sense.” See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 10-11.
contemporary western world. The working understanding of Tantra for this thesis should be considered just that, a *working* definition. It is one person’s journey through the primary and secondary texts of a Hindu tradition— influenced by not only the great texts but the oral teachings of contemporary Indian and Nepalese Tantrics. It is a journey that has led to a definition meant to be applied practically for a philosophy of education.

This thesis’ definition of freedom has been derived from access to the following ancient primary texts and commentaries: *Vijñānabhairava, Kulārṇavatantra, Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam,* and the *Siva Sutras.* Tibetan (tantric) Buddhism also offers such texts as the *Kālacakratantra,* which will be briefly utilized. Some vedic and upanishadic texts have deeply influenced Tantric rituals and philosophies and are for this reason utilized in this discourse.

Because this thesis primarily focuses on a tantric definition of freedom in order to build pedagogical objectives, yet references a few pre-tantric texts, the usage of these pre-tantric texts ought to be briefly defended. Pre-tantric texts, such as the Upanishads, have already contaminated, displaced, and supplemented what Amero-europeans consider tantric because the upanishadic philosophy is arguably the foundational influence on the later tantric scholars of Kashmir Shaivism. Simply put, the Upanishads came first and were the celebrated philosophy that served as a foundation for thinkers during the historical time of Kashmir Shaivism. While upanishadic and vedic texts are not strictly “tantric,” Tantrics still hold these texts in high regard; this must be the case as many general notions from the Vedas and Upanishads are carried out in Tantra, whether ritualistically or philosophically. Furthermore, the Upanishads became the influence for the transmission of Tantra into the Amero-european paradigm in that most scholars of the 20th century who were writing about “Tantra” referenced the Upanishads (as opposed to, say, the *Siva Sutras* or the *Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam*—both tantric texts) to gain a public academic understanding of what Tantra is. Incorrect or not, because this thesis is a byproduct of an Amero-european tradition, written for and by a product of said tradition, this thesis is merely a stepping stone in the process of understanding what we mean by Tantra. Therefore, this thesis refers to pre-tantric texts if for no other reason than to follow suit with the tradition of importing “Tantra” for an Amero-european paradigm in a realistic and practical manner such as the field of education.
The application of tantric freedom in a classroom will be referred to as tantric pedagogy. The section on tantric pedagogy will explain the components borrowed from both Tantra and pre-Tantra. It will outline these components as objectives that make up a particular educational dynamic. After explaining the objectives of tantric pedagogy, the section will describe the outcomes that implementing those objectives will allow. The section is followed by the voice of opposition to the intentions behind tantric pedagogy. The opposition is represented by Aristotle in an imagined dialogue with Rudolf Steiner—two pedagogues of profound influence with two vastly dissimilar intentions. Rudolf Steiner, sharing similar intentions as tantric pedagogy, represents an already established attempt at a tantric inspired pedagogy in an Amero-european circumstance. Aristotle holds the more classic Amero-eurocentric approach, the approach ever pervading as the roots of Amero-eurocentric pedagogy; Aristotle therefore loosely represents the opposition to tantric pedagogy. Here we will examine both sides of the pedagogical picture to hone a more definite meaning of ‘tantric freedom.’ We will conclude with a discussion of points in favor of as well as opposed to tantric pedagogy.
WHAT IS TANTRA?

The word ‘Tantra’ will be mentioned frequently throughout this work. However, a flawless illumination of Tantra’s meaning is difficult to offer. One reason for the difficulty is that historical Tantra demonstrates no real linear growth. There seems to be no historical point of origin for Tantra. Furthermore, Andre Padoux argues it “would have emerged progressively through a process of ongoing evolution over an extended period of time […] we know nothing as to the nature and modalities of the process, and […] we do not know how and when it started.”2 ‘Tantra’ itself is often maintained as a category outside the Indian tradition—something superimposed by outsiders.3 While ‘tantric’ is a Sanskrit adjective, the substantive is not. It is often postulated that many of the tantric texts have yet to be discovered, translated or studied.4 The question, “What is Tantra?” is a vast inquiry, as there are a number of cultures from many different periods in time that scholars would consider Tantra. Many of these definitions—though they are culturally or temporally distinct—offer specific definitions that are helpful in creating a philosophy of education and will be granted meaning for the purpose of this thesis. Therefore, so as not to thoughtlessly homogenize the entire eastern tradition, this section will be organized as such: (1) the accumulation of what Amero-europeans consider Tantra and its both unconscious and conscious evolution through the western tradition. (2) Pre-tantric Upanishadic ideals that arguably support the philosophical foundation of Tantra and represent particular rituals and beliefs that are important to Tantrics, not to mention the pedagogy discussed in this thesis. (3) Descriptions of important aspects from Kashmir Shaivism’s Tantra.

All of these traditions or interpretations offer a combination of meaningful insight into a Tantra that can be applied in a pedagogical context that will be explained in the following chapter, “Tantric Pedagogy.”

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E V O L U T I O N  O F  T A N T R A  I N  T H E  N O N - T A N T R I C  W O R L D

Oftentimes convoluted, confused, and obfuscated, the transmission of the ancient Indian wisdom has nevertheless traveled beyond its point of origin and has been reshaped in the language of many disciplines and has—unbeknownst to some of us—been greatly influential. Let us briefly visit the historical relationship of Indian thought with the world outside of India in order to shed light on the way in which it can be applied in other pedagogical and philosophical contexts for a western audience. As a professor at the University of Tübingen and a prominent Indologist of the 18th century, the father of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Joseph Schelling Sr. (1775-1854), studied Tantra and pre-Tantra deeply. His work greatly influenced not only the work of his son but his son’s contemporaries (e.g., Fichte, Hegel, Schopenhauer, etc.) and the broader discipline of German Idealism.5

The movement of Indian philosophy from the east came to the U.S. through literature as well. The literary philosophers Ralph Waldo Emerson and David Thoreau (practitioners of Rāja and Hatha Yoga) studied the Vedas, the Upanishads, and even some texts of Kashmir Shaivism and demonstrated their understanding of these texts in many of their works on transcendentalism.6 Emerson and Thoreau considered contemporary society to be stifled by conformity. They were famous for propagating an age-old tantric ideal, which urges each person to find, in Emerson’s words, “an original relation to the universe.”7

While Oxford University Press was publishing Max Müller’s canonic collection known as the Sacred Books of the East (between 1879-1910), Swami Vivekananda formally introduced Indian thought—by way of Rāja Yoga—to a crowd of 7,000 at the World Religion Conference in Chicago on September 11, 1893. Soon thereafter, the Theosophical Society gained popularity among scholars, and an explosion of publications concerning vedic philosophy and Tantra began to inundate western academia. In psychology, Carl Jung’s 1933

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6 Philip Goldberg, American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation: How Indian Philosophy Changed the West (New York: Harmony Books, 2010), 8.
7 Ralph Waldo Emerson, The Essential Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3.

In Literature, following the death of Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) and Herman Hesse (1877-1962), there came a noticeable suffusion of Tantra. In Huxley’s last novel, *Island*, he makes a caricature of an idyllic tantric society that becomes a response to the torment of *Brave New World*. The Tantrics of this story reaffirm life by putting importance on engaging in the mundane interactions to be free every day, not just for the afterlife or reincarnation. Much how Tantrics of Kashmir Shaivism responded to the orthodoxy of Hinduism, the Tantrics of *Island* responded to the orthodox life of contemporary society that negates meaning and stifles the present moment for later salvation. After the death of Hesse in 1962, a revival of his work inundated Europe and North America with the well-received rerelease of *Demian*, whose protagonist exists in a classic struggle between the world of illusion (which Hesse relates to the Hindu and tantric concept of *Maya* or illusion) and the “real world”—the world of spiritual liberation (*Moksha*). Overcoming the world of illusion, the protagonist eventually awakens into a realization of self (a very important goal of Tantra, and also an important component of tantric pedagogy, *Pratyabhijña*). Hesse’s pseudo-autobiographic novella, *Beneath the Wheel* - finally given a voice in the 1960s- popularized the rejection of public education for its squandering of the individual’s creativity and self-expression.

The sciences have also been touched by Indian thought in the medical findings of Herbert Benson, Robert E. Orstein, and Claudio Naranjo who popularized tantric style

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meditation as a western medicine. In other words, they used visualizations as a way to deconstruct and reformat consciousness. More recently, Rupert Sheldrake, a bio-chemist from Cambridge, has bridged the ancient concept of chakras and pranic flow (something irreplaceable to a practicing Tantric) with hard experimental science. In academia, White’s anthology, *Tantra in Practice*, represents a modern approach to the ancient teachings of Tantra and illuminates the everlasting permutations Tantra has left on western culture; his works are widely studied in religious academia today. Contemporary writers and scholars such as Arthur Avalon, Agehananda Bharati, Alexis Sanderson, Andre Padoux, M. P. Pandit, and many more have devoted their lives to uncovering the role of Tantra as a contemporary medicine for a socially induced human ailment. Their practice of translation and early interpretation lays the groundwork for a practical application of Tantric principles (such as freedom) in an important societal context such as education.

Tantra’s history outside India is now clearer, but the question lingers, what is Tantra according to the western transmission? Will Farnaby, the shipwrecked protagonist of Huxley’s 1962 novel, *Island*, finds himself on a tantric island and also asks, What is Tantra? Ranga, a young male offspring of the island’s tantric school, replies swiftly with breviloquence:

Tantra’s an enormous subject and most of it, I guess, is just silliness and superstition—not worth bothering about. But there’s a hard core of sense. If you’re a Tantrik [sic], you don’t renounce the world or deny its value; you don’t try to escape into a Nirvana apart from life, as the monks of the Southern School do. No, you accept the world, and you make use of it; you make use of everything you do, of everything that happens to you, of all the things you see and hear and taste and touch, as so many means to your liberation from the prison of yourself.

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16 Chakra means wheel and is meant to signify the areas on our body where energy circulates and congregates.
17 Prāṇa is the energetic life force, much like Qi in Chinese medicine and philosophy.
19 White, *Tantra in Practice*, 3.
20 All the above mentioned authors are listed by author in the references section alongside their books that were deeply influenced by Tantra and therefore deeply influenced this thesis.
So, in Tantra, freedom is “liberation from the prison of yourself.” That liberation comes in the form of knowledge. To know oneself truly is to be free because it helps one realize the illusion of self and come to know a higher understanding of a more collective self; this type of knowledge is wisdom. To live out one’s life in a manner that outlines the meaning of oneself is tantric. Knowing oneself and overcoming the fetter of neurosis—be it societal neurosis, familial neurosis, or even pedagogical neurosis—is being truly free. The meaning of neurosis varies. In this thesis, neurosis is applied using the Jungian definition, describing a relatively normal person who misunderstands or is ignorant to the meaning of her life. Jung mentions in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, “I have frequently seen people become neurotic when they content themselves with inadequate or wrong answers to the questions of life.”\(^{22}\) He goes on to say, “The majority of my [neurotic] patients consisted not of believers but of those who had lost their faith.”\(^{23}\) Given that this thesis understands a neurotic person to be someone who misunderstands or is ignorant of the true meaning of her particular life, it is not too far-fetched to claim that most people suffer from some sort of neurosis some time in their lifetimes. Being “free” is to know, understand, and be one’s true self—being one’s true self is being free from neurosis. We might go further to say that being neurotic is not who one’s true, or higher, self is.

In Tantra, a major characteristic of knowledge is its inherent divinity. Knowledge of the self is advantageous because it is an experience of happiness and functionality; it allows us to break through illusory chains and make the most of life in the way we want and know is right. The ultimate state of a human creature is to represent its own expression, and in that slice of expression lives a freedom that fulfills the ultimate purpose—what some might even consider the meaning of life. Ranga explains the difference between Will Farnaby’s (traditionally Amero-eurocentric) philosophy and the island’s tantric philosophy:

> Western Philosophers, even the best of them—they’re nothing more than good talkers. Eastern philosophers are often rather bad talkers, but that doesn’t matter. Talk isn’t the point. Their philosophy is pragmatic and operational. Like the philosophy of modern physics—except that the operations in question are psychological and the results transcendental. Your [western] metaphysicians


\(^{23}\) Ibid.
make statements about the nature of man and the universe; but they don’t offer the reader any way of testing the truth of those statements. When we make statements, we follow them up with a list of operations that can be used for testing the validity of what we’ve been saying. For example, tat tvam asi, ‘thou are That’—the heart of all our philosophy […] it looks like a proposition in metaphysics; but what it actually refers to is a psychological experience, and the operations by means of which the experience can be lived through are described by our philosophers, so that anyone who’s willing to perform the necessary operations can test the validity of tat tvam asi for himself.24

The operations Ranga speaks of are inclusive of many activities in life such as talking, walking, laughing, meditation, Gong Fu, basketball, literary theory, eating, or even the science of pedagogy. So long as the tantric pursuit of self-truth is pursued and expressed, a moment of freedom is taking place—an individual is free and recognizes his own greatness in this state of awareness.

**PRE-TANTRIC CONTRIBUTION**

The Upanishads and the Vedas supplied an orthodox foundation to which the Tantrics of Kashmir Shaivism would respond. Though the pre-tantric and tantric tradition can complement one another (for example, they have shared rituals and philosophies), it is important to note the main distinction. The pre-tantric philosophy is oftentimes a negating philosophy, whereas Tantra is affirming. For example, while there are monks and ascetics of the pre-tantric school, Tantrics are not monks. They are not ascetics. They enjoy themselves—sometimes to the point of hedonism. They affirm life’s offerings instead of denying them. Philosophically, this is true as well concerning some of their logic or linguistic philosophies (a thesis topic all its own). Despite the blatant differences, as Indian thought suffused Amero-european society, the signifier “Tantra” was often used to describe what was not necessarily tantric. *Tat tvam asi* is a pre-tantric phrase, as its origin is upanishadic. Nevertheless, it helps digest an already complex concept that Tantra follows and goes beyond. Understanding *tat tvam asi* will be important in understanding Tantra’s application in pedagogy as the chief concern of this thesis.

*Tat tvam asi* means ‘the divine thou art’—or as explained in the Upanishads, “That which is the subtle essence (the root of all) this whole world has for its self. That is the true.

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That is the self. That art thou.”; 25 “I am Brahman [God]”; 26 “The Brahman is the self.” 27 The upanishadic axiom, tat tvam asi (thou are That) comes from the sixth chapter of the Chāndogya, “the most ancient of the extant Upanishads.” 28 The utterance is repeated in an exchange between father and son. The son, Svetaketu, was sent away at twelve years of age to study with a teacher until he was twenty-four. He studied all of the Vedas—he learned them all well. Upon returning home, his father said to him:

‘Svetaketu, my child, you who are so full of your learning and so censorious, have you asked for that knowledge by which we hear the unhearable, by which we perceive what cannot be perceived and know what cannot be known?’

‘What is that knowledge, sir?’ asked Svetaketu.

His father replied, ‘As by knowing one lump of clay all that is made of clay is known, the difference being only in the name, but the truth being that all is clay—so, my child, is that knowledge, knowing which we know all.’

‘But surely these venerable teachers of mine are ignorant of this knowledge; for if they possessed it they would have imparted it to me. Do you sir, therefore give me that knowledge.’

‘So be it,’ said the father. […] And he said, ‘Bring me a fruit of the nyagrđoha tree.’

‘Here is one, sir.’

‘Break it.’

‘It is broken, sir.’

‘What do you see there?’

‘Some seeds, sir, exceedingly small.’

‘Break one of these.’

‘It is broken, sir.’

‘What do you see there?’

‘Nothing at all.’


27 Ibid., 208.

The father said, ‘My son, that subtle essence which you do not perceive there—in that very essence stands the being of the huge nyagrodha tree. In that which is the subtle essence all that exists has its self. That is the True, that is the Self, and thou, Svetaketu, art That.’

‘Pray, sir,’ said the son, ‘tell me more.’

‘Be it so, my child,’ the father replied; and he said, ‘Place this salt in water, and come to me tomorrow morning.’

The son did as he was told.

Next morning the father said, ‘Bring me that salt which you put in the water.’

The son looked for it, but could not find it; for the salt, of course, had dissolved.

The father said, ‘Taste some of the water from the surface of the vessel, How is it?’

‘Salty.’

‘Taste some from the middle. How is it?’

‘Salty.’

‘Taste some from the bottom. How is it?’

‘Salty.’

The father said, ‘Throw the water away and then come back to me again.’

The son did so; but the salt was not lost, for salt exists for ever.

Then the father said, ‘Here likewise in this body of yours, my son, you do not perceive the True; but there in fact it is. In that which Is the subtle essence, all that exists has its self. That is the True, that is the Self, and thou, Svetaketu, art That.’

This story illustrates the method by which knowing oneself may be applied usefully as a way of life, a philosophy, or even in pedagogy. One who would like to understand the “That” which is “thou” must look inward. In its most literal interpretation, the Advaita\(^\text{30}\) (non-dualism) school believes that tat tvam as\(\text{\textit{i}}\) alludes to the illusion of plurality and differentiation. This is illustrated when the fatherly sage uses the metaphor of a seed to point to the multiplicities and speaks of the subtle essence to understand what is truly there beyond multiplicities.


\(^{30}\) Advaita refers to the identity of the Self or Atman and the Whole or Brahman in the school of non-dualism.
Tat tvam asi teaches us that the union of self with divinity is not merely a combination or joining of two different things. On the contrary, the self and the divine are in actuality identical and due to our ignorance we assume them to be separate. This story helps us come to this conclusion, because the salt water represents humanity—we are a mix of both divine and non-divine, the subtle energy and the physical form of the body. It is also an important story because the realization of this arises outside of the traditional schooling from which Svetaketu had just returned. His father, being a wise sage, supplemented what his son learned away at school. He teaches his son that he can perceive “that” only by intuitive experience, completely outside objectivity, or mundane knowledge. He calls it a “subtle energy” inside of his body. This subtle energy cannot be inferred from some other bit of knowledge. “Rather than attempting to see through or transcend the world, the practitioner comes to recognize ‘that’ (the world) as ‘I’ (the supreme godhead): in other words, s/he gains a god’s eye view of the universe, and recognizes it to be nothing other than herself/himself.”

KASHMIR SHAIVISM

The opinions of most contemporary American academic circles tell us that there are three categories of Tantraism. Keep in mind these divisions ought not to be viewed as a rule seeing as the debate is an active one. We will discuss what is now known to scholars such as M.P. Pandit, Andre Padoux, and David Gordon White as specifically tantric and how it is understood historically and conceptually throughout the non-Asian tradition so to apply this definition to Amero-eurocentric pedagogy. As we have learned, Tantra—once transmitted to Europe—was given a contemporary definition. Nevertheless, it is helpful to see the formal distinctions. There is the non-dualistic school focused on private worship (ātamārthapūjā); the Āgamas, more often than not dualistic—focused on strict, devout, monastic-like worship (parārthapūjā); and Vaisṇava, qualified non-dualism (viśiṣṭādvaita). The amalgamation of these three traditional categories later was infused into a category of contemporary interpretation. David Gordon White poignantly explains a contemporary (not to mention

32 Ibid., 33-34.
more popular) interpretation, “[T]here are the Western dilettantes, the self-proclaimed Tantric entrepreneurs, who have hitched their elephant-wagons to the New Age star to peddle a dubious product of Tantric Sex, which they (and their clientele) assume to be all there ever was to Tantra.”\(^3^3\) This contemporary version White refers to is not considered of practical use in this thesis.

Another contemporary category, subject to both Asian and non-Asian manipulation, was the attempt to restore the original meaning of Tantra, the origination of the “right-handed” (the more philosophical approach involving monogamous sexual rites) and the “left-handed” (transgressive in views and sexual rites) Tantra. In all this confusion and scholarly attempts to grasp someone who is tantric adept, we lose the real Tantra that is fluid and influential in terms of praxis and conditions. Depending on which angle one looks at Tantra, one will have a different understanding. For our purposes, Tantra may be considered a science whose concept of freedom has inspired the theory of pedagogy outlined in this thesis.

The Upanishadic axiom tat tvam asi reinforced what we find in the Vijñānabhairava texts of Kashmir Shaivism,\(^3^4\) as that text is teaching about overcoming the illusion of multiplicity by both discussing and witnessing the dialogue and union of Bhairavi and Bhairava (Sakti and Siva): “The burning fire is not accepted as separate from fire even after full consideration.”\(^3^5\) Full consideration plays a great role. Tantrics understand that a linear and dualistic conception of knowledge cannot be true knowledge. Knowledge is therefore understood to be absolute and whole. This knowledge can be apprehended by meditation. Consequently, in the ancient tantric texts, the emphasis is on dhyāna (focused meditation) and not on intellectualizing. This is why many of the Āgamas focus on meditation. As the Tantrics explain in the Vijñānabhairava:

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\(^3^3\) White, *Tantra in Practice*, 4.

\(^3^4\) The *Vijñānabhairava* texts are a part of the ancient Tantras. They take place as many of the Āgamas do—a discussion between Narrator Siva and listener Paravati concerning liberation. It is a manual like text meant to outline the practice that is in accordance with Saiva Āgamas (meaning Siva is the god-head).

All things are revealed by *jñāna* i.e. knowledge or Self and the Self is revealed by all things. By reason of their nature being the same, one should contemplate on the knower and the known as one and the same.\(^{36}\)

Serial apprehension does not constitute learning, and the summation of a serial thought cannot be wholesome knowledge. The process of dropping or peeling off the layers of superficiality is actually the meditation (*dhyāna*) described. Linear or structured methods of thinking critically will not gain one access to the fullness because ontology is far beyond the nature of logos. In other words, actual being is not subject to the use and manipulation of language.

Abhinavagupta in the non-dual Shaivism of Kashmir emphasizes the heart as the ultimate reality. It is “the very Self of *Siva.*”\(^{37}\) To be precise, the heart is where the union between the Goddess and *Siva* takes place; it is the transcendence of duality. It is the sacred fire-pit of *Bhairava.*\(^{38}\) To talk of the heart in Kashmir Shaivism is to enter a different paradigm of mind-body than one might be accustomed to. The heart, where the ultimate union takes place, can be quite simply understood as consciousness. In Tantra, it is emphasized because this union is profound and completely ineffable; the heart is a poignant symbol that travels very much beyond linguistic signification. It is the center of your body that is in a constant state of vibration. The heart continually contracts, beats, throbs. The life force emanates throughout your biological system very much the way the Goddess is “emissional and expansive, as well as centripetal, that is, absorptive and unitive.”\(^{39}\) When we talk of a union or transcendence in Tantra, it is helpful to think of the heart because everyone has a heart and experiencing the Ultimate is a personal experience. In other words, if the goal of Tantra is to experience the Ultimate and the Ultimate is not something that can be imagined, or suggested, or taught in a textbook, it is something that must be experienced for oneself as personal experience.

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\(^{39}\) Ibid., 29, 140-141a.
Tantra’s emphasis on personal experience calls upon two very important concepts of Kashmir Shaivism: Svātantra and Pratyabhijña. In a nutshell, Svātantra and Pratyabhijña mean ‘free will’ and ‘self-recognition’ respectively. Both of these concepts are centripetal to the aspect of Tantra that is transmittable into a contemporary pedagogy because they highlight personal experience as the ultimate goal of Tantra. These concepts stand alone and work in union to facilitate the individual based, life-affirming nature of Tantra. Because Kashmir Shaivism was an unorthodox response to an orthodox tradition, these two concepts of free will and self-recognition put the power of the positive back into the worship—seeing as the orthodox tradition (to which Tantra was a response) was oftentimes focused on ascetics and life negation. These two concepts bring a focus to the self that is irreplaceable in tantric pedagogy. They are utilized to build the educational objectives of the contemporary philosophy, for this reason Svātantra and Pratyabhijña are explored in much greater depth within the contemporary pedagogical context of the following section.

In the Saiva tantric paradigm, initiation is found at the center of religious life. The Tantra was ultimately something into which one had to be initiated. There are four levels of initiation: samaya, sadhaka, putraka, and acharya. Samaya is a set a vows or precepts meant to be given to students on the beginning of their path. Sadhaka is one who pursues the goal of Tantra. This means it is the aspirant who seeks self-realization. Putraka is the state of becoming the child of Siva, when one is given access to the divine scriptures. Acharya is the spiritual leader or guru. “It is […] through the power of initiation that both ignorance and impurities are removed, and upon their removal the individual is graced with self-knowledge.” Within the paradigm of Trika Shaivism, there is a need for grace and self-effort in the initiation process. It is the grace of God, which directs the individual’s self-effort towards a guru who facilitates the path towards liberation. At the moment of initiation from the guru, the adept qualifies for discipleship. This process of initiation is organized in order

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40 Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Siva*, 51.
42 Ibid., 242.
to reach the goal of self-realization. In other words, the initiation process is initiated by the guru in order to eradicate impurities from the disciple or student.

Initiation is seen as the initial spiritual movement whereby the disciple is empowered with certain divine powers through yogic exercises and rituals. Prior to initiation, the preceptor engages in a certain purificatory rite with the intention of establishing a series of identifications which, when translated into actual acts, would mean that the preceptor, before anything else, brings about esoterically identification between himself and the disciple, and thereby establishes the disciple in the path which the preceptor thinks to be appropriate. Once identification between the preceptor, who is the visible sign of Siva on earth, the disciple and the universe is established esoterically, there then occurs the illumination of non-duality, which is the ultimate soteric goal of the Trika adept.43

Soon thereafter, a student will use yogic exercises that help the student obtain an “introversion of consciousness.”44 “He who follows this pathway in dikṣā [initiation] will reach thereby the highest level of knowers: the extinction of all desire and repose within the Self.”45 The levels of initiation are also found in the Buddhist Tantras. In each of the levels, the same truth is revealed, and the movement through these levels depends upon the level of the aspirant.

It is not entirely useful to the purpose of this thesis to explain in detail the meaning of each and every initiation step because it is not the stages of initiation that are useful to transmit into a contemporary pedagogy. Rather, what we learn from tantric initiation are these two general, but crucial, aspects: (1) Each step of tantric initiation is accessed depending on the individual student as opposed to the expectation of a greater system. In other words, the student will move to the next level when it is suitable for that particular student. (2) Each step is as important, informative and relative to the success of the student. This means that every step reveals a truth that is just as important as the truth found in the next steps.

44 Ibid., 254.
45 Padoux, Vāc: The Concept of the Word, 365.
TANTRIC PEDAGOGY

Now that we understand a few tenets from the pre-tantric tradition structured by the Vedas and Upanishads, which led to the unorthodox response of Kashmir Shaivism and eventually how Tantra evolved in North America and Europe, we can now highlight the aspects of these traditions and their evolutions in order to utilize them to provide a “Tantric Pedagogy.” The pedagogical maxims or presuppositions within these traditions give us a number of objectives that would behoove contemporary education. The objectives of learning applied in this thesis will be outlined according to the traditions mentioned in the preceding section.

The objectives of tantric pedagogy are as follows:

1. Cultivate *tat tvam asi* as a dynamic in the classroom.
2. Teach students *Svātantra* and *Pratyabhijña* as borrowed from Kashmir Shaivism.
3. Emphasize the importance of the *guru* while giving each student an intimate, long-term relationship that allows for a teacher-student dynamic that is comfortable and stable so that teachers can transmit experience as opposed to transmit only knowledge.
4. Organize an *initiation* system based on (1) a student’s individual progress and (2) equality between the levels of the system.

The outcomes of each objective are as follows:

1. Cultivating *tat tvam asi* as a classroom dynamic teaches students about the importance of their own path, their relation to the greater good, which can give students the confidence and urgency to pursue their deep and most honest desires.
2. To teach students *Svātantra* and *Pratyabhijña* will engage students’ paths of self-recognition and activate free will. Activating free will will engage students on the path of self-recognition.
3. By emphasizing the long-term relationship between *guru* and student, a student has the nurturing and comfortable environment needed to cultivate Objectives 1 and 2.
4. Allowing students to grow and evolve based on the individual students’ *initiations* removes standardized expectations, reduces performance anxiety, and encourages students to move at their own pace. The result of creating each level of *initiation* equally diminishes competition between levels, builds trust between guru and students, and allows students to concentrate on their present so not to look towards the future as a distraction from the present educational goals.
5. As a result of Objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4, the process that Jung calls *Individuation* is overcome at an earlier age, neurosis may be overturned, and higher levels of consciousness can be accessed.

All of the aforementioned objectives are to be understood as interdependent functions. They work together to create an educational dynamic that opens a student to freedom in a tantric sense. They do not work alone or one at a time. They all happen in one dynamic. Without one, the others will become less complete, less useful. They occur in no particular order because they work together to create one constant dynamic. What follows are the explanations of each objective and the outcomes of said objective.

**TAT TVAM ASI**

In order to give a student the confidence to pursue his or her deep and most honest desires, tantric pedagogy develops *tat tvam asi* as a classroom dynamic. To understand *tat tvam asi*, it is best to build a context. Divinity is the skeleton of *tat tvam asi* and ought to be explored first. In the Indian tradition, there is a very important correlation between knowledge and divinity because divinity is the source of knowledge. The Hindu goddess *Sarasvatī*, for example, is the allegorical depiction of *jñāna*, or knowledge. *Sarasvatī* is called upon when a young child becomes a student on the path towards knowledge, during a festival known as the *Sarasvatī puja*. This ritual is still practiced today at the beginning of a student’s education around the age of six. The *Sarasvatī* ritual shows a child that knowledge offers a doorway to the divine. On the day set aside by the Vedic calendar for the worship of *Sarasvatī*, the child or the adherent is given a ritualistic bath in the morning and the *acharya* (spiritual teacher) takes the child to the shrine to pray to the divinity *Sarasvatī*. Before the arrival of the child, the idol is cleansed of the previous day’s garlands, bathed, and redecorated for the ceremony. Then the *acharya* places a vessel full of water on the altar near

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46 *Puja* means “consecration.” Rituals are ancient in India. Tantrics consider the *Grihya Sutras* as commentaries of the *Veda*, and they adhere to the Vedic ceremonies with minimal variations. Often the whole of the *Samskaras*, or Vedic sacraments, are followed. Rituals are found in the earliest Indic and Vedic works, such as the *Rig Veda*, which includes hymns used even today in conducting important ceremonies for marriage, conception, funeral, etc. The *Atharva Veda* provides mantras that are employed in conducting marriages, funerals, *upanayana* or spiritual ceremonies, etc. The *Kalpa sutras* describe the *Samskaras* in great detail. The *Samskaras* describe the naming ceremony, tonsure ceremony, the initiation or *Upanayana*, the *Vivaha* or marriage ceremony, etc. *Upanayana* is of special importance to mark the entry into the *dharma* or teachings and the release of karmic bindings.
the idol. Sarasvatī is then asked to enter into the water vessel, which becomes a symbol for Sarasvatī and her body. Her body is the body of knowledge, or jñāna. After establishing these rites within the ritual context, she is propitiated by being adorned with new garments, ornaments, etc. Then she is worshiped as an allegorical depiction of divine knowledge, which means that the child being initiated learns to approach knowledge as a personalized being with whom he or she has a divine relationship.

Making a ritual of education is not necessarily religious because it can be interpreted allegorically. The intention is to allow a student to feel privileged to have the opportunity to learn, as if his or her connection with the depiction of knowledge will pave the path to a unique learning experience. The child comes to realize that knowledge has the innate ability to overcome one’s limitations; knowledge is seen as a tool of deliverance while sharing sacred moments with the mother of knowledge. Knowledge, becoming wisdom, is so great that it becomes godly and when attained becomes a personal expression of the divine. Because this relationship with knowledge is personal, as opposed to socially scripted and structured, students are free to define and explore what they will learn and how they will learn it. This ritual enables students to overcome the burden of external achievement (in a rigid examination, for example) by recognizing their own great potential, so they are emancipated to be pedagogically successful. Since the students’ first encounter with knowledge is a moment of personal “divine intervention,” students can relate to knowledge in a unique and individual way without relying entirely on scripted learning and structure.

In tantric pedagogy, there is no hierarchy to confuse the power relation between student and teacher, as reflected in the following verse sung as an invocation at the beginning of every teaching session:

\[
Om sahanāvavatusahanaubhunaktusahavīryakaravāvahai
\]

\[
Tejasvināvadhītamastumāvidviāvahai||
\]

\[
O śāntiśāntiśānti.47
\]

47 The Peace Chant is read at the beginning of the Katha Upanishad and again at the end of the text. Although this Upanishad has been relegated to the post Vedic era, Tantrics understand the Katha Upanishad as another commentary pertaining to the Veda and therefore read the above mantra as an aspect of the Veda rather than in terms of its historicity. It is well known that Tantrics do peruse the Vedic mantras and take the Vedic culture as theirs. See Arthur Avalon, *Tantra of the Great Liberation: Mahanirvana Tantra* (London: Luzac & Co., 1913).
The English translation reads as follows:

- May he [the Supreme Being] protect us both, teacher and taught.
- May he be pleased with us.
- May we acquire strength.
- May our study bring us illumination.
- May there be no enmity among us.
- Peace, Peace, Peace.\(^4^8\)

*Sarasvatī* need not be regarded as an historical, strictly religious figure, in the way Christians view Jesus. She is a metaphor for knowledge. In *the Rg Veda*, *Sarasvatī* is a river, suggesting the primordial water where the creation begins. This is equated with the self. Hence, it can be interpreted that the goddess *Sarasvatī* represents the essence of the self, cognized. Water is that which gives life; to know one’s essential self is to know how to live one’s life (in a tantric sense).

The *Sarasvati* ritual shows a child that knowledge involves no hierarchy or power struggle. Knowledge is not possessed or owned. Knowledge is passed down from teacher to pupil through the *guruparampara*, i.e., the guru lineage, not because the teacher is sole proprietor of said knowledge but because the knowledge is infinite; it is divine, and the teacher’s lessons are divine expressions. The knowledge the teacher passes to his or her pupil does not belong to him or her. Using divinity as a metaphor for knowledge implies that knowledge of this kind is infinite and the student tends not to use it for finite or limited purposes; the student will not squander this knowledge. This is the kind of knowledge that accurately embodies the axiom once sung by the revered Mahatma Gandhi as “*Satyameva Jayate*”: “it is the truth [knowledge] that conquers.”\(^4^9\)

Tantric pedagogy is the expansion and the application of the upanishadic concept *tat tvam asi* in the classroom. *Tat tvam asi* in the classroom provides a foundation meant to uncover one’s true nature so as to bring about inner peace and wisdom. It is interpreted in this thesis as the freedom from aversion, neurosis, or unfair social restrictions. Understanding

\(^{48}\) Swami Paramananda, *The Upanishads* (Boston: The Vedanta Center, 1919), 39.

**tat tvam asi** is a process meant to bring a student to a higher level of consciousness that allows for a greater, happier life.

**SVĀTANTRYA AND PRATYABHIJÑA**

To teach students *SVātantrya* and *Pratyabhijña* will engage students’ paths of self-knowing—it is by this engagement that they are free to learn what it is they truly desire. Though *SVātantrya* can be interpreted as “freedom” in a mundane sense (and seeing as the tantric intention is to make something applicable to and in the mundane), it is much greater than that and should be discussed so to grasp, if only slightly, the greater praxis involved. Because ‘*sva*’ means ‘self’ and ‘*tantram*’ means ‘dependence’, it can be literally understood as ‘free will.’ It is not free will in the ordinary sense. *SVātantrya* is a primordial energy that comes from the Supreme *Siva*. In other words, it is the quality of the movement that sustains consciousness (*Siva* being the sustainer of consciousness in Hindu lore). The first objective of tantric pedagogy, *tat tvam asi*, triggers a process towards *SVātantrya*, which is also understood as the true oneness prior to multiplicity—multiplicity being the illusion that leads to suffering. The quality of this movement is also the pedagogical process that moves a student towards the seed of the universe and the original creative force (much like a person would move toward *Ein Soef* in Kabbalah or toward the Oneness [confused as multiplicity] in Neo-Platonism). *SVātantrya* is the ultimate and absolute sustained freedom prior to an illusory multiplicity and understanding that “thou art that” is a prerequisite to reaching it. Multiplicity is, as the *Vijñānabhairava* states, “[A]s waves arise from water, flames from fire, rays from the sun, and even so the waves (variegated aspects) of the universe have arisen in differentiated forms from me i.e. the Highest Reality.”

The mundane goal implied by this type of freedom (*SVātantrya*) would be to reconnect with that higher absolute consciousness. In tantric pedagogy the reconnecting with a higher consciousness is the process of understanding *tat tvam asi*, as that understanding brings a student to *SVātantrya* because understanding one’s self means understanding the

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greater oneness of which one is inherently a part. Svātantrya can occur when a teacher (the acharya—commonly known as guru) gives a singular structure—a backbone curriculum—and the student is encouraged to express her true nature as she goes about learning. Students are given support, guidance, and an environment where there is no power imposed by teachers; students are never directly forced to believe in what they learn in a specified way. This process of learning can sometimes occur in today’s pedagogy, however, because of the emphasis on a standard performance (testing, for example) a student must learn in a certain way prescribed by the curriculum writers. When Svātantrya becomes a classroom objective, there is no demand to apply any external standard to any of the students, and students will be able to approach learning independently, creatively. For example, many learning stations can be organized in a room with the intention of independent learning; a creative outcome is reached independently not by way of curriculum but through a student’s personal choice. In this case, educators have an intention with the learning stations, however, it is not an expectation to learn something specifically built into the curriculum and later examined.

Alongside this idea of free will, comes the concept of self-recognition voiced in the later tantric text Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam. The Pratyabhijñāhṛdayam is a text that came about during the latter part of the two-hundred year period of Kashmir Shaivism and therefore received the benefit of having heard all points of view, which created a helpful summary of Tantra. According to the first verse, “Consciousness, in her freedom, brings about the attainment of the universe.”

This is the aspect of Tantra that emphasizes self-recognition as a way to illuminate the truth of the mysterious universe. By shedding light on one’s own awareness, one can illuminate one’s own mind; one can know one’s own consciousness. To know one’s own consciousness is to know oneself. The light of consciousness, or awareness of consciousness (self-recognition) is the greatest gift; it is the glorious guide to liberation. To be free is not to live out one’s life as one’s parents and school teachers prescribe, e.g., “be a doctor or lawyer.” Being free is not thinking one is a bad singer because one was told so in 4th grade. Being free is recognizing one’s self and following that self down a path of one’s own free will. Self-recognition, in regards to tantric pedagogy, becomes a primary goal.

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because if students can learn to know themselves, the students can express themselves honestly. Choosing to learn what benefits them naturally might give them a life that has freedom as the foundation.

When we talk about freedom and self-recognition, it can sound very esoteric and spiritual. However, a system is involved. How do we mean to structure these ideas in a classroom? As Huxley’s literary interpretation explains, Tantra primarily differs from other schools of Hinduism in that it is meant to be applied for the everyday moment, concentrating on freedom right now as opposed to a later reincarnation or soteriological purpose. Therefore, these concepts of freedom and self-recognition are meant to be applied in the mundane world. They are meant to reaffirm life and to teach one to live well day-to-day. This allows a tantric setting to be based in pedagogy, and have a non-esoteric structure, because pedagogy is very much a part of the mundane realm and therefore requires mundane structure. That structure serves as a vehicle, as the means to a higher, less mundane truth. In that sense, there are certain techniques (viddhi) for certain activities (samskaras, karanas). Hence, Tantra is not opposed to structure. As Ranga mentions in Island, Tantrics “don’t renounce the world or deny its value […they] accept the world […] make use of everything […] as so many means to your liberation from the prison of yourself.” In that way, it is a vehicle. It is a kind of teaching in which student and teacher are equal—both learners, both students. These exchanges built on free will and self-recognition fostered between the student and teacher create a situation where they are bonded together, developing an environment of trust and a platform for complete self-recognition and freedom.

In this sense, there is no one methodology to speak of because a tantric method is contingent on the dynamic between teacher and student. This meta-methodological science is dependent on the forging of two egos (that of the teacher and the student); it overcomes and puts under erasure the traditional construct of selfhood and in that sense works toward a deconstruction of the ego and a renewal of a collective ego. With that said, the structure is dependent on the dynamic—the needs and expressions of the student and teacher. This is how a teacher begins to transmit experience versus knowledge.

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54 Huxley, Island, 87-88.
Self-recognition is the key to this type of transmission. To transmit experience versus knowledge means to awaken in a student the knowledge that student already has inside her. The teacher facilitates the natural unfolding of a pupil’s intrinsic possibilities. To do so involves Pratyabhijña. The awakening of knowledge as an experience is much different than assuming, as a teacher, that the student is lacking something only the teacher can give. Teaching one to experience one’s own wisdom can be understood by the teacher as a way to facilitate a higher level of consciousness in the student. This parallels the idea of Recollection in Plato’s *Phaedrus*:

> [T]his is a recollection of those things which our soul once beheld, when it journeyed with God and, lifting its vision above the things which we now say exist, rose up into real being. And therefore it is just that the mind of the philosopher only has wings, for he is always, so far as he is able, in communion through memory with those things the communion with which causes God to be divine. Now a man who employs such memories rightly is always being initiated into perfect mysteries and he alone becomes truly perfect.\(^55\)

Plato’s sense of Recollection is a divine pedagogical experience meant for the individual; *Pratyabhijña* too brings one alone to true perfection. However, as tantric pedagogy explains, being alone in perfection still involves being with one’s teacher.

**THE GURU**

Tantric pedagogy emphasizes the importance of the *guru* and gives each student an intimate relationship that allows teachers to transmit experience as opposed to knowledge. As mentioned previously, to transmit experience versus knowledge means to awaken in a student the knowledge that student already has inside her. The awakening of knowledge as an experience is much different than assuming, as a teacher, that the student is lacking something only the teacher can give. Teaching one to experience her own wisdom can be understood by the teacher as a way to facilitate a higher level of consciousness. The (*guru*) assists in the natural unfolding of the student’s preexistent possibilities. “When something is being said to us, we are not learning it for the first time—we ‘recognize’ it as the knowledge which was already present in our own soul.”\(^56\) That recognition illuminates the importance of


\(^{56}\) Natalia Isayeva, *From Early Vedanta to Kashmir Shaivism: Gaudapada, Bhartrhari, and*
Pratyabhijña, as we have seen in the previous section, and also the importance of the student-guru relationship.

The tantric teacher is historically very important because Indian traditions always utilized oral, aural, or verbal rather than written transmissions. The guru-student dynamic plays a very important role in tantric pedagogy for other reasons as well. Traditionally, a tantric guru is worshipped like a god. The Kulārṇavatantra says, “The guru is the father, the guru is the mother, the guru is God, the supreme Lord. When Siva is angry, the guru saves us [from his wrath]. When the guru is angry, nobody [can help].” This assertion has been taken quite seriously throughout history; however, a contemporary adjustment must be made. Because the guru was the holder of the scriptures and knew the mudras and the rituals, he was irreplaceable. It was as if the guru escaped the human condition altogether and became godlike, if not simply a god. Nowadays, we can read the scriptures and even Google the mudras online. However, we still need the guru to give a nurturing platform from which a student can both overcome her ego and feel comfortable enough to express herself while recognizing her own consciousness. On a practical level, the teacher and student dynamic must not be transient, as we are accustomed to in an Amero-european setting. Rather, the teacher offers a stable dynamic meant to build a personal relationship that sprouts, buds, and blossoms as the student grows into himself throughout his schooling.

After the second sutra of the Pratyabhijñāḥṛdayam, its author Kshemaraja warns that “He […] who does not acquire complete knowledge, owing to a lack of guidance from a sadguru, remains deluded by his own powers, since the real nature of each [sakti] is concealed [from him].” In Tantra, it is crucial that the guru be the vehicle. In other words, the grace of the divine takes form as the guru for the sake of the student. Without the union of student and guru, the student dwells on his or her ego and cannot experience freedom.


57 White, Tantra in Practice, 41.
58 Quoted by White, Tantra in Practice, 43.
59 A mudra is a hand movement associated with a particular mantra.
The guru plays a very important role in tantric pedagogy, not only because of his closeness to the divine or his knowledge of the material, but also because of his closeness to the student. As can be seen in the traditions of Vajrayāna Buddhism’s Kalachakra Tantra ritual, the Dalai Lama empowers a student (or nowadays thousands of students at a time) through a ritual initiation (diksa). 61 This ritual can bring down what Abhinavagupta describes as “goddesses of his own consciousness.”62 The Dalai Lama’s heart is open to his student, so the student and teacher forge a very strong bond. The student and guru are like one, and a strong awareness of a transcendental self occurs; a powerful recognition and awareness of the universe beyond the self follows as well. This ritual seems less about true divinity and more about one’s own self-comprehension as both a unique individual and one aspect of the divine; as Alexis Sanderson has said, it involves the conception of these “goddesses as the blissful, uncontracted awareness which is within and behind one’s individuality.”63 Therefore, the main importance of the guru and student dynamic is Pratyabhijña (the philosophy of self-recognition). For many authors of Kashmir Shaivism, including Abhinavagupta and Kshemaraja, Pratyabhijña is the perfect, non-dualistic union between two original aspects of higher consciousness—it is “a merging together of prakasa or quiet radiance of pure consciousness, and vimarsa or active self-awareness, which was considered to be a dynamic side of the higher Self.”64 Because the core teaching of tantric pedagogy is “you are already that,” a teacher’s job is to assist the student to recognize the potential that the student already has and her relation and identity with the entire universe. That “recognition” or Pratyabhijña relies on a non-dualistic ontology (with an illusory dualistic epistemology) because it is through the praxis of emanation that true freedom comes—emanation occurs only by way of multiplicity. Non-dualism emerges when the use of dualism (manifested by Shiva and Sakti) helps in the process of emanation (sakala) to overcome the illusory plight of multiplicity. For these reasons, the guru is irreplaceable in

61 In Tantra, there are at least four different kinds of diksa, but here we will only concentrate on the general meaning of diksa, the consecration and passing on of knowledge from guru to student.

62 Quoted by White, Tantra in Practice, 45.

63 Ibid.

64 Isayeva, From Early Vedanta to Kashmir Shaivism, 115.
tantric pedagogy because his or her relationship with the student serves as a overcoming of perceived egos and a unified oneness of connection.

The teachers of tantric pedagogy, the acharya, never assert their ego, nor are they defensive, as these characteristics are antagonistic to the entire objective of the guru-student relationship outlined in the Vijñānabhairava. This text displays a caricature of the union between egoless teacher and student in the ongoing dialogue between Bhairavi and Bhairava. Bhairavi is the word used for Supreme Reality; Bhairava is shown to be quite close (even their names are nearly the same), however, Bhairava plays the same role Siva’s consort Sakti might, she is the student asking questions.

Because there is no place for egoism or power in this pedagogy, a hierarchy is never formed, and therefore power struggles and competition are rarely experienced. Because tantric pedagogy does not envision hierarchy as its broader scheme, it does not advocate violence (himsa). Rivalry between teacher and student is rare as they share a higher goal—to attain liberation from the mundane. Students are encouraged to find their own ways to solve problems and are given the space and time to learn what their favorite and therefore most powerful expression might be, because learning for a traditional Tantric practitioner gives priority to Svātantrya or free will with the view of attaining Moksha—salvation or liberation. The structure given is meant to be altered, played with, explored, challenged, embraced, and neglected. For example, a student is encouraged to find his own way to solve problems. When the teacher asks open ended questions, she makes no assertions; a student is left on his own with certain puzzles that leave open the option for many results. In this way, students can be where they want, choose their own activities, and can progress at their own pace using self-correction and self-interpretation—the practice of which facilitate the kind of self-recognition that Pratyabhijñāḥṛdayam emphasizes.

Since the objective of the teacher of tantric pedagogy is to learn to transmit experience as opposed to transmitting knowledge, this brings us back to the concept of heart in Kashmir Shaivism. Everyone has a heart and experiences the expounding vibration of opening and closing. Just as this—the experience of the throbbing of one’s heart—is a personal experience, so is the experience of union of Śiva and Sakti (emanation) on a

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conscious level. Because the heart is a symbol of higher consciousness, and the guru is a vehicle for the student to look into her heart and experience that consciousness, we can see the heart as a symbol of the union of teacher and student. The student must learn to experience her own heart and build on that experiential knowledge to uncover her own purpose and fulfillment with which she can happily walk through life.

**INITIATION**

As revealed in the section concerning the Kashmir Saiva paradigm, initiation is at the center of religious life because Tantra is a practice into which one has to be initiated. As we learned earlier, there are traditionally four stages to the initiation process: samaya, sadhaka, putraka, and acharya. However, the application of tantric initiation in contemporary pedagogy does not require these specific levels to be followed with precision. The levels through which an aspirant grows are by no means restricted to the exact cultural tradition we find in medieval Kashmir. These levels are to be determined by the cultural, social, and personal requirements within the particular education dynamic at play. Of course the four steps are important for Tantrics. However, the two more general—and arguably more important—concepts of particular focus for this thesis’s discovery of tantric pedagogy are:

1. The importance of individual based movement through the pedagogical initiation process. Each step of tantric initiation is accessed depending on the individual student, as opposed to relying on the expectations of a greater system. This means that the student will move to the next level when it is suitable for that particular student.

2. The emphasis on making each level equal by delivering the same height of truth consistently from the beginning until the end. In other words, each step is as important, informative, and relative to success as the next step.

The first aspect of Tantra’s initiation (the first focus listed above) insures that a student moves through the education system based on the student’s individual growth. The student does not go onto the intended next level until he is ready to do so. This movement is to be determined by the student and his guru. This means that the level a student is at is perfect for that student and remains always perfect wherever the student may be. There is no pressure to be like anyone else, and the student is encouraged only to be exactly where he is

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at that time. When it is time to move on to the next level, it will be because it serves the student, as opposed to serving the overall organization of the systemic whole.

It is good and necessary to address this focus in tantric initiation, as it is completely different from contemporary modes of educational initiation. Movement through contemporary education is measured in a “school year.” A student is finished with one grade after the completion of three seasons of study. This method standardizes learning because a pupil must learn at the exact same pace as all other students, otherwise the pupil stays back in the same class level for another year until that pupil learns to do as everyone else has done. However, in order to give a student the chance of self-recognition and free will, so as to fully embody *tat tvam asi*, the student must be a part of a system that works for him, that nourishes him as the individual. Removing standardized expectations reduces performance anxiety and encourages a student to move at her own pace. Because students of tantric pedagogy are not forced to learn as fast or as slow as the other students, they can explore the material with a depth that only personal desire can bring. As many teachers will attest, when students want to learn something, they have a greater chance of being deeply engaged with the subject and therefore are more inclined to remember it longer and use it creatively.

The second aspect of Tantra’s initiation (the second focus listed above) that is important for the contemporary application of tantric pedagogy is the equality of levels. No higher level is truly “higher” in the sense that it is better or harder and more complex. All levels are challenging and reveal the highest truth, *tat tvam asi*. This means that a hierarchy is difficult to see, competition is minimized, students are better equipped to not look towards the future as a distraction from the present educational goals, and can work at their own pace with their own teacher to uncover the deepest, most steadfast trust, knowledge, and wisdom.

The contemporary method of initiation reveals knowledge unevenly; the seemingly lesser grades involve truths somewhat subordinate to those revealed in the higher grades. However, for tantric pedagogy, the truth revealed for the beginning aspirant is just as much of a high truth or important wisdom as the aspirant encounters in the later years. This is carried out in tantric pedagogy in order to remove hierarchy. A student is only performing the way a student can perform. Allowing each stage to be just as important as the next stage means centralizing and focusing on the importance of each stage, instead of working for the
next stage—so a sense of competition, insecurity and performance anxiety can be more easily avoided.

As a result of applying these two focuses of tantric initiation the aspirant’s movement through the levels of pedagogy becomes a quiet movement, oftentimes unknown to the student. Because each level is no higher an accomplishment and because there is little ego involved in the movement, knowing one’s level is useless. This demonstrates the crucial importance of the guru and student. A student learns to trust the guru who oftentimes introduces a student to the next phase without anyone else’s knowing. Though it is a science, the levels are subjective, not concrete. Even though the levels seem blurred, this does not necessarily mean they are useless. They mark great movements, and depending on what one is learning (be it art, math, cooking, etc.), the levels can be altered. The particular levels, again, can be adopted for the particular cultural and educational dynamic.

**EARLY INDIVIDUATION**

Another outcome of the four main objectives of tantric pedagogy is what Carl Jung calls “Individuation.”67 Individuation is beneficial because it allows a person to understand her own nature and gives her the confidence to follow her dreams (so to speak). Tantric pedagogy allows Individuation to occur at a much younger age, which (in western clinical terms) avoids personal and societal neurosis. Jung considered Individuation to be a process. Much like the process of deconstruction, this process is non-linear by nature; it goes beyond language. It involves a desedimentation of our psyche, desedimentation is an innate occurrence in human nature. Individuation is “a natural process immanent in every living organism.”68 It is the process of breaking down the psyche into the atomized aspects of one’s self and coming truly to know oneself wholly, and thus to comprehend one’s individuality so to grasp the greater whole. Or as the scriptures say, “to realize the nature of Bhairava [the Highest Reality], which is non-different from their essential Self.”69 In Jungian terms, Individuation is the transformational process of integrating the conscious with the personal

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and collective unconscious.⁷⁰ That means the individual as an empirical self (*Jīva*) is broken down to see its parts and thus better integrate the consciousness (*Ātman*) with the collective unconsciousness (*Brahman*). According to Jung’s experience with psychotherapy, this involves realizing and harmonizing the archetypes (one of the categories of the psyche). As far as tantric pedagogy is concerned, Individuation is finding one’s path and purpose after struggling through not knowing oneself or one’s path, feeling confused and neurotic. An early Individuation is an outcome of implementing *tat tvam asi*, *Śvātantrya* and *Pratyabhijña*, by emphasizing the guru-student relationship in a classroom. Early Individuation is an overall outcome to the objectives of tantric pedagogy.

The process of Individuation and the pre-tantric view of knowledge involves a deconstruction—the questioning and desedimentation of mundane knowledge.⁷¹ Students are allowed to experience enrichment through a deconstruction of the mundane. This is why enriched experience enables students to alter their karmic seeds (*vikalpas*) in lieu of attaining ultimate freedom or *Moksha*.⁷² If these karmic seeds go untended, they cannot flourish and problems will follow. Buddhist phenomenologist Dan Lusthaus explains this process quite well:

> Just as a plant develops from its roots unseen underground, so do precious karmic experiences fester unseen in the mind; just as a plant sprouts from the ground when nourished by proper conditions, so do karmic habits, under the right causes and conditions, reassert themselves as new experiences; just as plants reach fruition by producing new seeds that re-enter the ground to take root and begin re-growing a similar plant of the same kind, so do karmic actions produce wholesome or unwholesome karmic acts produce effects after their own kind.⁷³

The process Lusthaus describes is analogous to the cognitive conditionings that contribute to the cycle of birth and death (*Samsara*) from which one seeks liberation. In the *Vijñānabhairava*, Tantrics talk about *vikalpas*, not karmic seeds. *Vikalpa* is a thought-

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⁷¹ Here I am not willing to say that Tantrics utilize this same process of deconstruction because they find meaning by reaffirming as opposed to negating.


construct that always has a subject-object relation. When one is free from thought-constructs, one understands Bhairava or Shiva and loses one’s idea of self. “Finally this vikalpa also disappears and one is landed in a nirvikalpa or thought-free state which denotes the awareness of Reality.”\textsuperscript{74} Accessing Reality is accessing one’s higher self. If reality is non-relational, beyond dualities, there is no object outside reality and in this sense vikalpas cannot grasp reality.\textsuperscript{75} It should be mentioned that vikalpas are spoken of here as a means to some soteriological end, however, tantric pedagogy can understand the process and use it in a mundane sense. We do not build thought-constructs in a student then dismantle them, but let a student’s concern be about his or her self:

In the absence of thought-constructs, he will be (completely) rid of all thought-constructs (vikalpas) and will abide as pure consciousness (suddhacaitanya) which is his essential Self.\textsuperscript{76}

In tantric pedagogy, there is a deconstruction of the self because the system of tantric pedagogy is meant to deconstruct the social norms, the normative methods of pedagogy, and finally—with a deconstructed society—deconstruct itself. The intention is to overcome logocentricism; similar to Derrida’s deconstruction, it is not demolition but desedimentation. It is also exemplified in the pre-tantric text, the \textit{Bhagavad Gita}, when Sri Krsna teaches Arjuna, “the man who is indifferent to the pairs of opposites, Mighty-armed Prince, is easily released from bondage.”\textsuperscript{77} In other words, one who neither disdains nor desires is a person free from all dualities and is liberated, hence free to behold pure experience.

Such pure-awareness is described by psycho-analyst John Welwood as follows:

If the contents of mind are like pails and buckets floating in a stream, and the mind stream is like the dynamic flowing of the water, pure awareness is like the water itself in its essential wetness. Sometimes the water is still, sometimes it is turbulent; yet it always remains as it is—wet, fluid, watery. In the same way, pure awareness is never confined [n]or disrupted by any mind-state. Therefore, it is the source of liberation and true equanimity.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{74} Singh, \textit{The Yoga of Delight}, xxxix.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., xxxvii.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 86, verse 94.
\textsuperscript{77} Lars Martin Fosse, \textit{Bhagavad Gita: The Original Sanskrit and English Translation} (Woodstock: Yogavidya, 2007), 50-51.
\textsuperscript{78} John Welwood, \textit{Toward a Psychology of Awakening: Buddhism, Psychotherapy, and the Path of
In a state of pure-awareness, knowing and expressing one’s self becomes natural, unconscious, and free of worry because one is uninvolved in the conscious banter of the brain. To be liberated in the way that “true equanimity” and “pure-awareness” can liberate one can help a student obtain more information and can be functionally more efficient, as there is no struggle to compete with others in a hierarchical learning atmosphere. Students are uniquely learning and need not struggle because they have the option to learn what they want and the tools to know what it is they want.

Kitaro Nishida, Japanese philosopher and founder of the Kyoto School of Philosophy, also talked about “pure experience,” which he considers the essential experience that either momentarily or permanently changes the ego-self into the true-self. That metamorphosis from ego-self to true-self of great importance is tantric pedagogy too. Though it is uncertain what Indian influences Nishida encountered throughout his life, his phenomenology reflects parallels to the importance of Individuation. According to Nishida, “pure-experience” occurs when an individual experiences the reality of the phenomenal world. Applied to his ethics, it is the place where human individuals find themselves and follow their own path. Nishida uses the term ‘Kegon-shu’ to describe the experience of self-awareness of the world in which phenomena influence one another without obstruction. The world in which phenomena are identified with noumena is ‘riji-muge-hokkai,’ a possible world to live in if a society is fashioned with schools that encourage kegon-shu (or following one’s own path). Nishida discusses the ethical problem of expression, implying that a moment of pure experience must occur for pure expression (which, according to Nishida, is living out the best, most ethical life) of action to take place. Furthermore, the practical application of Nishida’s philosophy of phenomena as noumena (comparable with Kant’s Ding an sich) utilizes this “pure experience” in pedagogy.

Although Nishida is postulating the fact that without pure experience it is impossible for one to manifest pure expression, his ideas are limited to just the subject/object relation. Though Nishida is on the right track, he falls short from the perspective of Tantra. However,

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he does provide a great example of what is left undone; he clearly indicates what is left to fix. Here we can see how the application of tantric concepts in pedagogy allows for complete deconstruction, by showing the nature of “pure experience” to go beyond the subject/object relation. This means a truly pure experience is one that literally dismantles the binary system and shows the entire relation to be naturally fluid and whole, which is the result of all objectives in tantric pedagogy.

Tantrics maintain that for pure expression to occur, one must not be limited by the clutter of thoughts that involves and binds us to merely subject/object relations. This further limits our freedom of expression as it is important for us to have the freedom of the unconscious for the attainment of Svātantrya. If the clutter prevails or dominates through the conscious mind our habit of serial processing, we are limited to the phenomenal. It does not allow us the freedom to express our truth as human persons. How, then, would it be possible for us to express our true potential as thinking beings?

Jung’s work on Individuation gives us an insight into Dharma or uncovering one’s true self so to follow one’s greatest path. Tantric pedagogy encodes a classroom with the DNA of self-knowing and, just like Jung’s Individuation, allows one to follow one’s own Dharma. It allows a student to build scholastic endeavors on personal expression—making every aspect of learning an expression of a unique self. This way of teaching bestows trust, avoids power structures, and—by allowing full expression to the individual pupil—circumvents neuroses such as insecurity, fear, or guilt.

The word Dharma has several meanings. Etymologically, it is derived from the verbal root ‘dhr’, which means to hold, bear, carry, preserve, or maintain. Dharma has three primary definitions—(1) naturally occurring phenomena, (2) the teachings of a spiritual master, and (3) a natural process of self-comprehension, which is a prelude to acceptance and expression. The latter allows one to follow one’s own teaching or doctrine, and hence uncover the truth beyond individuality, to emanate successfully and to understand the Brahman nature beyond the illusory multiplicity. It is clear that in all definitions ‘Dharma’ has a peculiar spectrum of uses to describe what is not readily discerned by the senses. We ought to keep in mind that Dharma is something beyond the empirical realm, hence so as we begin to understand Dharma, we understand the importance and the difficulty of following one’s Dharma.
One’s Dharma is not readily knowable and is not a sensory experience. It is both intellectual and beyond intellect. In its ineffability, it is not a structure; it is beyond linear, logocentric ideals. *Dharma* is difficult to cultivate, but when well-practiced, as when individuals are encouraged in school to be themselves and know themselves at a young age, there is no thinking required in fulfilling one’s *Dharma*. In fact, *Dharma* is learned through self-awareness or perception.

*Dharma* is only intellectual insofar as being oneself is what all other thinking processes are based upon. When one is confused about what one’s “lot in life” entails or what one thinks one knows but really does not, one is passionless, confused, and oftentimes disgruntled. However, if people begin to learn about their true nature and study their real self from a young age, cognizing the self and understanding divinity, it is easier to cultivate self-wisdom and practice one’s *Dharma*, thereby experiencing life in a pure way.

Jung believes this process of Individuation is an innate occurrence. The difference between a regular person outside the tantric tradition and a Tantric is that the Individuation process for a Tantric happens much earlier in life and is thought to involve a greater transcendence than cognizing the collective unconscious. Individuation deconstructs the neuroses of the already corroded unconscious, a process that hopefully ends in “finding oneself” or finding one’s *Dharma*. This commonly occurs between the ages of twenty and thirty and is, as most people should know, a relatively challenging enterprise. It involves looking at oneself and contemplating the following types of questions: Who am I? What do I want as a human being? What am I going to give to the world? How am I my parents? How am I not my parents? How am I an individual? The conundrum involved is seemingly clear. If you do not know who you are, you do not know what you want and you do not know how to give to the world, to your friends, lovers, family, etc.

It is through expressing our *Dharma* that we have the means to attain *Samadhi* (the highest level of concentration or *dhyāna*), which then has the chance of becoming total liberation or *Moksha*. The free (tantric) person, as a product of tantric pedagogy, is a person who has the ability to know himself and act accordingly. If *Dharma* is applied in a classroom, the neurotic person and the process of Individuation need not happen so late in life. The process of Individuation will be dealt with early on and will not be put off until college or post high school. One will have a far greater chance of avoiding the neurosis that
accompanies any seasoned adult. A person without the experience of tantric pedagogy will only have time to explore her inner self—uncovering her truest desires and expressions—when she reaches her twenties (when Jung says the process of Individuation might commence). As products of a dysfunctional education system, her schooling was centralized around a generalized curriculum rather than her own creative, intelligent, spiritual expression and understanding.

In an average public school classroom in the U.S., the student is guided entirely by the teacher’s actions, which are oftentimes invasive and administratively scripted; making a pupil’s learning process hierarchically deterministic—not determined by the pupil. There is a blatant trickle-down effect at play in the public school schema. For instance, the social tenets endowed institutionally are encrypted by law—first by the Senate’s national education decree, next by state legislators, state administrators, local school administrators, and teachers. Causally, the outcome is regurgitated in a classroom filled with students. For example, one might argue that the United States needs better foreign rapport with China; therefore we have urged that many kindergarten curricula around the United States entail learning Chinese. Studying Chinese at a young age would seem like a good thing, a knowledge that could bring about an element of freedom to a student’s life. However, the true role of a teacher is not to mold, cast, or create a Chinese speaking automaton; it is to nurture a foundation of self-knowing so that a person is first and foremost free. Being a component of foreign policy at five years old is not being free. A teaching method ought to be primarily grounded in the application of tantric freedom and secondarily in structured learning.

However, most of us were not raised worshipping wisdom like a goddess or told to find our own relationship with gnos 

osis to be happy and free. On the contrary, most of us were raised to learn within someone else’s paradigm. As we take in the information outlined by others, we become a small part of the functioning whole. We learned what others thought would be best for us to learn, and we learned it in a particular way the others felt better suited us as children. Due to the school system’s having been structured this way, we have very little understanding of how we as individuals take in and experience empirical knowledge (following Jung’s Individuation). To step outside of this culture of infantile unknowing, we must first refrain from infantile ignorance and educate ourselves about our self. The tantric
pursuit of knowledge helps elucidate our human nature, which is not to be ignorant and violent creatures with good reasoning skills. Would this not all be easier if we started when we entered kindergarten? Instead, we spend our twenties wading through the murky waters of Individuation, hoping for a moment of clarity.
ARISTOTLE V. STEINER

Aristotle’s ancient Greek rendition of pedagogy is similar to the schooling found in public schools today in that the underlying intentions of the two are the same. Aristotle and contemporary public schools both produce students molded to function in society. Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925)—20th century Austrian philosopher and founder of the Waldorf School—provides a philosophy of education that is dissimilar from the pedagogy of Aristotle, hence dissimilar from modern public schools. His is a response and solution to public schooling today, meant to heal the pedagogical tradition of putting the greater good before the individual. He does this by doing the inverse, putting the individual before the greater good. Steiner calls for the ultimate free will (much like Tantric pedagogy’s Svātantrya) to be nurtured in the individual first and the flourishing of society second. Steiner’s philosophy has been widely accepted into mainstream society as an alternative but effective pedagogy. One can find a number of Waldorf schools in every state of the U.S., every country in Europe, and many other countries around the world. Because the Waldorf schools have shown to produce good students with a love for knowledge and high test scores, the style of pedagogy seems to be well received as it is growing immensely.

Although Steiner is not a Tantric from India, he is a great example of someone who has implemented a concept of true individual freedom into an actual pedagogy. Steiner is relevant to this comparative study because of the important similarity between Steiner’s work and what this thesis has been calling tantric pedagogy. Steiner emphasizes the individual, and as a byproduct, a greater society is realized and flourishes; society can flourish due to a concentration on developing the individual student. If society is filled with flourishing people, society thereby flourishes. This is very similar to Tantra’s concentration on the development of the individual so that that individual can realize the non-dual structure of the universe and obtain Moksha (liberation). By concentrating on individual growth and understanding first, inherent understanding of the whole can follow. The schools that Steiner
established in the 1920s, which continue to be built and thrive to this day, are founded on a deep understanding of the tantric traditions of India (Steiner’s understanding) combined with 20th century theories of child development.

The opposition, Aristotle, is most commonly known as a logician, metaphysician, biologist, and ethicist. However, he should also be remembered as a pedagogue, as he spent a large portion of his life teaching, developing theories of education, and building the Lyceum—the academy at which he taught. Education has an important role in the philosophy of Aristotle because he believes that through the process of education, an individual can learn to reason and arrive at virtue. Through reason, a society can arrive at political harmony. Aristotle states, “No one will doubt that the legislator should direct his attention above all to the education of youth; for the neglect of education does harm to the constitution.”

This section calls upon the philosophy of Steiner as the closest application of Tantra in a classroom thus far implemented in Amero-european society. A look at the difference between the two pedagogical traditions—Aristotle’s and Steiner’s—will serve to elucidate what tantric pedagogy, not unlike Steiner’s pedagogy, is a response to. That is not to argue that what Steiner has done with his schools is purely tantric, but only that his form of education is based on the freedom of a child over all other elements—the most important component of tantric pedagogy that this thesis has concentrated on. Steiner’s theory of pedagogy is a response to the preceding and foundational pedagogical system implemented early on by Greek society.

**THE PEDAGOGICAL INTENTION: POLIS OR INDIVIDUAL?**

All educators are similar in their original goal—ending ignorance. However, their methods can be diverse. Methodology begins with intention. It is within a teacher’s foundational intention that the profound and revealing distinctions lie. In the pedagogy of Aristotle and modern public schooling, a hierarchy is established because the foundation on which the pedagogical intention is based requires a power role—a teacher has power over the

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student. A teacher, or administrative authority, decides what students ought to learn, how they ought to learn it, and the rate at which they ought to learn. In tantric pedagogy and Steiner’s pedagogy, hierarchy is avoided. Aristotle and Steiner differ insofar as Steiner is primarily concerned with the individual for the individual’s sake, whereas Aristotle’s concern for the individual is a means to the betterment of the state. The intention that leads to a freer society is the intention that both tantric pedagogy and Steiner’s pedagogy share—to encourage the individual to be free for the individual’s sake rather than for society to be free for society’s sake.

Aristotle’s theory of education is found within his political work, *Politics*. Aristotle has the *polis* in mind when he sets out to teach the individual. Steiner, on the other hand, has only the student in mind; his intention is to teach the student as an individual distinct from the social whole. A Steiner student is taught to know the self—in a truly tantric sense of self as outside social expectations. He believes that knowing one’s self helps one uncover one’s truest desires and enables one to hone individual talents, the practice of which involves higher levels of contemplation. However, the intention behind why Aristotle would endeavor to teach a student to contemplate is not so that the individual may flourish but so that, in the end, the *polis* can flourish. The *polis* is Aristotle’s primary concern. This is not to say that Aristotle has no concern for the individual; certainly he does. Distinct to Aristotle’s pedagogy is his emphasis on the flourishing of society over the individual’s flourishing. This is also the greatest difference between Aristotelian pedagogy and tantric pedagogy.

Steiner’s intention, on the other hand, is for the individual to find him- or herself by relating lessons to the student as a unique and creative individual. “When children relate what they learn to their own experience, they are interested and alive, and what they learn becomes their own.” Steiner believed this encouraged knowledge of oneself. In a tantric classroom, to know oneself and to encourage self-knowledge is the best way to teach.

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82 *Polis* is Greek for ‘city-state, also used to refer to a society. What constitutes a *polis* is a hotly debated topic; however, the interpretation that I am using views the *polis* as a single body rather than a set of individuals due to Aristotle’s comment in the *Politics* that the *polis* is a being.

Individuals flourish in proportion to their experience of greater levels of contemplation. A self-aware individual is a more contemplative individual. If contemplation is self-chosen, not only is the will involved but passion is as well. Finding a passion—a thing that arouses enthusiasm—in what one is learning allows for depth of contemplation because one will put more effort into it if one is passionate about it. If a student has mental hurdles or a resistance to the subject, it does not allow the student to engage in it as he or she otherwise might. If we agree with Steiner’s emphasis on self-reflection and learning where one finds passion, we might also agree that if antipathy is involved in learning, then the student becomes closed off to learning because a mental block is formed in the mind. If one is free to feel passionate about one’s subject, then greater depths of contemplation can be reached because one is not already in opposition but ready and open, excited to learn and to engage. This, one could argue further, contributes to the society in the most effective manner possible because both the individual and the polis profit from a student’s passionately pursuing knowledge by studying his or her subject to greater depths.

Aristotle’s pedagogical aim is the production of a good polis by producing a reasonable and good human citizen. By nature, the human being is good, but he must learn to control his illogical tendencies; as human beings, we are still animals, and without reason we are no better than all the other non-human animals. In order to maintain power over our illogical tendencies, we must take on challenges and activities that inspire our natural rational ability. Only when human beings utilize the ability to reason are they capable of happiness because happiness is a byproduct of contemplation, while contemplation is a byproduct of reason. According to Aristotle, education must seek the development of the individual’s intellectual capacities to their fullest extent, thus developing the human being’s complete potential as a logical and reasonable component of a flourishing polis.

Because reason plays an irrevocable role in the learning process, Aristotle believes that a teacher ought to organize his lessons according to the laws of reason. Repetition can be

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84 Aristotle, The Ethics of Aristotle: The Nichomachean Ethics, trans. H. Tredennick (New York: Penguin Books, 1953). Aristotle refers to contemplation as “the highest form of activity [...] since the intellect is the highest thing in us, and the objects that it apprehends are the highest things that can be known” (328). Aristotle considers the intellect the highest virtue and contemplation the highest form of human activity. For this thesis, because Aristotle takes contemplation so seriously, the Aristotelian definition will be used.

85 Ibid., 1178b8-32.
used to reinforce what has been understood by reason.\textsuperscript{86} Although his curriculum seems strong and his emphasis on reason and logic practical, there is an important component lacking in Aristotle’s theory of education—a foundational concern for the individuality of the student. His intention is sound, insofar as he is concerned for the individual, but his intention becomes flawed when we realize why he is concerned for the individual. Again, the intention of the educator is amiss. He is concerned with the individual for political reasons as opposed to pedagogical reasons. Aristotle makes no distinction between the two.

At the Aristotelian academy, the fulfillment of human nature is pursued so that human society may be virtuous; Aristotle encourages the individuality of the student as a means for the flourishing of the political system and not for the isolated incident that is the flourishing individual. The Aristotelian argument for why an individual’s growth is secondary to the growth of the political system might look something like this:

1. A whole precedes its parts.
2. A part does not fulfill its purpose unless it adheres to the whole.
3. A man is a part of the whole, which is the State.
4. Man does not fulfill his purpose unless he adheres to the whole.\textsuperscript{87}

Steiner’s Waldorf School, like the tantric pedagogy discussed in this thesis, knew and accepted that every individual student is unique. In fact, their curriculum is organized to accommodate individuality and inspire expression natural to the individual student. Aristotle, on the other hand, agrees with most modern American public schools. It is not that Aristotle, or public schools, believe that everyone is the same exact individual. They understand and accept diversity; however, they rarely accommodate it. Even though students are acknowledged to be unique (contemporary experimental pedagogues have shown that every student has his or her own way of taking in material and turning it into knowledge\textsuperscript{88}), they

\textsuperscript{86} Aristotle, \textit{The Ethics of Aristotle}, 1178b8-32.


\textsuperscript{88} I am referring to the most common and widely-used VARK model from Neil Fleming that tests students and then categorizes them into visual learners, auditory learners, reading/writing preference learners, kinesthetic learners, or a combination of the above. N. Fleming, and D. Baume, “Learning Styles Again: VARKing Up the Right Tree!” \textit{Educational Developments} 7.4 (2006): 4-7.
receive the same regimented schooling as their classmates. Since a classroom is a group of individuals with different learning abilities there are also different needs.

Aristotle might agree that every student learns in a particular way and digests information idiosyncratically, not unlike modern public school education. However, he disagrees that anything should be done about it, proclaiming “it is manifest that education should be one and the same for all.” Aristotle claims, “Neither must we suppose that anyone of the citizens belongs to himself, for they all belong to the state, and are each of them a part of the state, and the care of each part is inseparable from the care of the whole.” It is clear Aristotle desires the perfect polis and will get it at the expense of the people who make up the polis. Is it fair to see the Aristotelian approach to education as a stifling, political burden placed on the individual? Yes. Is the same true for modern public pedagogy? Some might think so. Individuality is not possible in a pedagogic movement if the very paradigm on which education rests is embedded in the sphere of politics, a sphere concerned with the functions of a group as opposed to the betterment of the individual. The only way Aristotle and modern public schools differ on this topic is that modern educators say they are accommodating uniqueness. Nonetheless, very little is actually done because public schools are meant to produce members of society as opposed to free thinking individuals. At least Aristotle can be honest about his true intentions.

**THE WALDORF RESPONSE TO AN ARISTOTELIAN PARADIGM**

We will now look at the schooling developed by Rudolf Steiner, an approach more concerned with individual freedom and flourishing than the Aristotelian approach. This approach tends to the individual student before it tends to the whole political system. Steiner’s Waldorf School was established around the same time he published the Waldorf

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90 Ibid., 1337a27-30.
Manifesto in 1919, titled “An Introduction to Waldorf Education,” in which he responds to the pedagogical theories that preceded him and describes a new educational order.

As mentioned before, the difference between the Aristotelian ‘individual’ and Steiner’s ‘individual’ is the intention behind the teacher as he or she initially perceives an individual student. A Waldorf teacher goes about educating a young person with the goal of setting that individual free—to teach him or her to listen to his or her inner self and inner desires. This helps an individual uncover the learning style best suited for his or her individual needs and enables a student to be free to contemplate deeply. For Steiner being “free” means remaining autonomous, not confined to a political education that tells one what one ought to be. As opposed to the curriculum of Aristotle’s Lyceum or public schools, a Waldorf curriculum is never focused on societal needs. For example, as previously noted, if the government needs more fluent Chinese speakers to bolster foreign policy, then many elementary schools will become Chinese language schools. However, a student in a Waldorf School would not study Chinese unless he or she wanted to. One might ask how a child knows what he or she wants. That is the very goal of Steiner’s pedagogy: to teach children how to look inward and to know oneself at an early age and therefore know what one wants.

Teaching students to know what they want is very important. Henry Barnes, a Waldorf teacher and former Chair of AWSNA (Associated Waldorf Schools of North America), describes the Waldorf approach as follows: “When children relate what they learn to their own experience, they are interested and alive, and what they learn becomes their own. Waldorf schools are designed to foster this kind of learning.”91 Such a learning process is dependent on inner knowledge. An Aristotelian, on the other hand, would interpret knowledge only by what is externally perceived. Hegel once said that Aristotle “rejects the Idea, and clings to what is actual; for that reason he should be considered the founder and leader of empiricism.”92 This clarifies a very relevant distinction between Steiner and Aristotle, not to mention tantric pedagogy and contemporary public schools. With Aristotle,

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one learns from one’s empirical experience; for Steiner, one must search within for the truest form of knowledge—a place where empiricism has little weight.

Steiner believes that in order to establish a child’s own level of academic excellence and to help him find meaning in his life, teachers must evoke enthusiasm for learning and work. This brings about a healthy self-awareness, a deeper level of contemplation, and a concern for fellow human beings. Waldorf encourages self-respect because when one respects oneself, Steiner believes a respect for the world follows. Steiner once wrote, “Destiny is the result of two factors, which grow together in the life of a human being. One streams outwards from the inner depths of the soul; the other comes to meet man from the world around him.”93 This is not to say that Aristotle does not value self-respect. It is only that he places importance on self-respect so that the nation can be filled with self-respecting persons. Again, the difference is one of intention. Steiner intends to fill a student with self-respect for the growth of that individual student, not for the greater good.

Steiner differed from Aristotle in his view of reason. For Steiner, the soul (of which the body is the expression) is “warm,” near, and pleasing, whereas the intellect and the logical faculties are “cold,” distant, and unpleasant.94 Logic is not cold for Aristotle because the basis of his curriculum is to enhance the student’s ability to be logical. Contrary to Aristotle, Steiner believes the logical faculty is part of the soul, but the part in which man’s inner being participates least. Hence it is not the greatest emphasis in the Waldorf curriculum, since the inner being is what is most important to Steiner. Morality and imagination are emphasized over logical structures or reasoning. However, there is still a need for reason. This is why Steiner tells teachers to awaken in students the logical faculties they need later on in life to allow them to work in their desired field and to obtain for themselves a sufficient living in a practical and logical society.

Practice in being logical is not at the forefront of Steiner’s teaching methods. To know what one wishes to do in life, one must practice going inward as opposed to being outwardly logical. Looking at one’s self and being honest about one’s place in reality is a

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practice of the Waldorf School. Nevertheless, reason still plays a huge role in being human. This is why the Waldorf School curriculum is concerned with what is best for the whole human being, inclusive of the ability to reason, as Steiner reminds:

Insightful people are today calling for some form of education and instruction directed not merely to the cultivation of one-sided knowledge, but also to abilities; education directed not merely to the cultivation of intellectual faculties, but also to the strengthening of the will. The soundness of this idea is unquestionable; but it is impossible to develop the will (and that healthiness of feeling on which it rests) unless one develops the insights that awaken the energetic impulses of will and feeling. A mistake often made presently in this respect is not that people instill too many concepts into young minds, but that the kind of concepts they cultivate are devoid of all driving life force. Anyone who believes one can cultivate the will without cultivating the concepts that give it life is suffering from a delusion. It is the business of contemporary educators to see this point clearly; but this clear vision can only proceed from a living understanding of the whole human being.95

Indeed, teachers in Waldorf schools have a healthy skepticism towards strictly intellectual endeavors (not unlike Tantrics). However, because Steiner was concerned about the whole human being, Waldorf students learn to satisfy the standards imposed by the current socio-political views (those impositions largely centered on intellect). The Waldorf curriculum is founded on the concern for a particular student’s self-knowledge and the way that particular student may go out into society with said knowledge. Due to the advancement of each individual, a society advances (although the advancement of society is not a direct goal for Steiner, it is more of a happy byproduct). Being in a society that helps the individual flourish independently of society is a prerequisite for teaching a student to be whole.

A very important strength of the Waldorf School is the Waldorf teacher. Waldorf teachers are incredibly dedicated because they recognize the importance of individual growth, giving their attention to each individual student. Steiner makes it very clear that a class should be taught by a teacher who puts every part of his or her being into a lesson, “classes led by teachers who proceed from standard educational theories […] have no chance to put [their] life into their work. If the teacher engages his or her whole being in teaching, then he or she may safely bring the child things for which the full understanding will come

95 Rudolf Steiner, An Introduction to Waldorf Education and Other Essays (Radford: Wilder Publications, 2008), 7.
when joyfully remembered in later life.” If there is an emphasis on learning the inner substance of a pedagogical individual, the teacher can avoid having any “visual aids degenerating into banality.” Steiner finds that when a lesson is repeated over and over again so that a child may eventually memorize it—much as Aristotle uses repetition—that child will grow bored, thereby stifling any opportunity for inward knowledge. “The flame enkindled in the child from the living fire of the teacher in matters that still lie, in a way, beyond his ‘understanding,’ remains an active, awakening force throughout the child’s life.” Therefore, a successful Waldorf teacher must be creative, enthusiastic, and, most importantly, avoid repetition.

To an Aristotelian, it would seem absurd to concentrate on the individual for the individual’s sake only—after all, the student would not be a student if it were not for the social demand that a child be educated. This to Steiner is also very obvious. He has taken that fact and looked beyond it. If a teacher concentrates on teaching the student to know and express his or her individuality, that teacher is contributing indirectly to a flourishing society. In this sense, Steiner does not deny that the polis is important; he just does not put the polis before the individual or the whole before the parts. To Steiner, the possibilities of the individual go far beyond the constrictions of society. If we always restricted our growth to the slow and limited growth of society, we could never truly learn who we are as individuals; our individuality would be a mere representation of the greater whole. Steiner believes that we cannot learn about the independent nature of a part if we only looked at the whole.

However, Steiner acknowledges the association of student and polis as follows:

[H]uman life itself is shaped by […] inner development; and one can enter upon life in no better way than when, through the development of our own inner capacities, we can join with what others before us, from similar inner human capacities, have embodied in the evolution of the civilized world. It is true that to bring the two into harmony—the development of the pupil and the development of the civilized world—will require a body of teachers who do not shut themselves up in an educational routine with strictly professional interests, but rather take an active interest in the whole range of life. Such a body of teachers will discover how to awaken in the upcoming generation a sense of the inner,

96 Steiner, An Introduction to Waldorf Education, 7.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
spiritual substance of life and also an understanding of life’s practicalities. If instruction is carried on this way, the young human being at the age of fourteen or fifteen will not lack comprehension of important things in agriculture and industry, commerce and travel, which help to make up the collective life of mankind. He will have acquired a knowledge of things and a practical skill that will enable him to feel at home in the life which receives him into its stream.99

As an advocate for individual growth and realization, Steiner recognizes that each student will have a different way of learning. Giving individuals the chance to learn what style of learning to use liberates the individuals from mundane blanket curricula, like the one found in Aristotle. As an indirect outcome, the individual will become a stronger spoke on the societal wheel. It is clear that the polis still flourishes under this approach.

Another way a student of Waldorf learns to be an individual, while indirectly becoming a greater social component, is the idea of fun classrooms. To learn to enjoy education, Steiner believes, is one of the greatest gifts to give a growing pupil. Aristotle, on the other hand, claims “obviously youths are not to be instructed with a view to their amusement, for learning is no amusement, but is accompanied with pain.”100 If students love school, those students will most likely choose to pass on the gift of education to their children, not because anyone forced them to but because they contemplated it independently. This commences a process that will directly contribute to the greater flourishing of human society. This process occurs because the individual willed it so, not because the power of the socio-political paradigm willed it so.

Steiner’s method of education is helpful for a student because it teaches her to reflect on and understand what she truly desires, which allows her to engage in higher levels of contemplation earlier in life. To contemplate inwardly can be one of the most challenging thought processes. It is much different than simply looking at a plant and knowing what color it is because someone else told you about the color green or looking at an algebra problem and knowing how to solve for X because someone told you what Y is. No one can tell someone what to do with what someone observes; it is something one must figure out on one’s own.

99 Steiner, An Introduction to Waldorf Education, 7.
Contemplation, to Aristotle, is the greatest thing a human can do because it is the human activity closest to the activities of the gods.101 It is also indispensable to happiness, according to the *Nichomachean Ethics*: “those to whom contemplation more fully belongs are more truly happy, not accidentally, but in virtue of contemplation.”102 Contemplation leads to happiness, so it seems that the most contemplative person is the most virtuous person. Contemplation is an independent activity—and any activity that teaches one to be more of an individual is an activity conducive to higher levels of contemplation. Aristotle’s method of education encourages the student to contemplate so that the polis may overflow with contemplative people. Steiner’s method of education encourages the student to contemplate so that the student may become a more complete individual. Aristotle would find this beneficial, as he finds a person lacking virtue to be a flawed person. Yet, that is only because the intention behind Aristotle’s goal for a contemplative individual is a goal for the polis, not the individual alone.

Aristotle and Steiner both agree that the flourishing of an individual is very important, but differ on why it is important. For example, they would both agree with the following analogy. When a flight attendant explains what to do in case of an emergency, it is essential that he or she explain how and when to use the oxygen masks. The attendant will explain that if the oxygen levels were to drop, a mask will fall out of the ceiling; there will be a mask for every individual on the plane. The key notion is that if you are travelling with a child or someone who cannot put the mask on himself, it is of utmost importance that you put your own mask on prior to helping another passenger put his mask on. This is because being able to breathe will enable you to take care of more people in a more efficient manner. This scenario is analogous to education in a society—an example both Aristotle and Steiner would understand. For both Aristotle and Steiner, an individual must be educated and flourish before a society can flourish. Students must be encouraged to take care of their own education before they can concern themselves with becoming a viable and useful component of society. The primary difference is that the student of Aristotle is told to put on his mask so that he can be alive to put on the mask of the neighboring passenger. Steiner, on the other

102 Ibid., 1178b30-33.
hand, would tell his student to put on the mask to survive—then confidently hope that his student figures out on his own that because he survived, he can now help his neighbors. To have that choice made by the individual versus by an instructor makes all the difference in the flourishing confidence, compassion, growth, and self-awareness of the individual. Because the movement towards helping the fellow passenger was self-activated, the ethical and spiritual growth of the individual arrives experientially through contemplation as opposed to imperatively by way of coercion, guilt, etc. Because it was not an imperative but a movement in following one’s own belief, it demanded deeper levels of contemplation—it seems that in this case someone can either tell you how to be ethical or you can contemplate and listen to your own passions.

Aristotle believes, “The citizen should be molded to suit the form of government under which he lives.”\textsuperscript{103} This statement signifies the moment in Aristotle’s theory of education when the individual disappears; it is where the paradigm of Greco-pedagogy becomes a slave to politics and violates an individual’s freedom. It rejects the need for the student of the Lyceum to demonstrate attributes of independence. Even if that student thinks he is pursuing his individual desires (for example, poetry over biology), he is actually doing so as a result of having been molded. In the proper context, perhaps the context of ancient Greece, this played out quite well. However that does not constitute an argument for diminishing an individual’s growth today. A student, despite the paradigmatic setting in which he resides, should be encouraged to know himself independently of what society tells him he should or should not be. This type of self-knowledge requires a deeper level of contemplation than Aristotle assumes, which permits one to pursue what better suits one.

To summarize, Steiner would say that seeing the individual of the Lyceum as a potential constituent of a whole society as opposed to a constituent of a whole being is damaging to the human being. Contrary to Aristotelian pedagogy, Steiner saw the pedagogic individual with reverence over the general \textit{polis}. To centralize one’s self—as a teacher—around a concern for the individual student (as opposed to a concern for the \textit{polis}) allows the student to acquire both greater self-knowledge and higher levels of contemplation. Aristotle

\textsuperscript{103} Aristotle, “Politics,” 1337a12.
is right to claim that contemplation allows for a more virtuous individual.\textsuperscript{104} However, a primary concern for the individual over the \textit{polis} is the best way to approach a student because it allows the student to experience deeper levels of contemplation. By placing an emphasis on the flourishing of the individual student, a more virtuous \textit{polis} will indirectly flourish.

\textsuperscript{104} Aristotle, \textit{The Ethics of Aristotle}, 1178b8-32.
POINT/COUNTERPOINT

Freud once wrote, “If it is the purpose of educators to stifle the child’s power of independent thought as early as possible, in order to produce that ‘good behavior’ which is so highly prized, they cannot do better than deceive children in sexual matters and intimidate them by religious means.”¹⁰⁵ This statement relates a truth so undeniably accurate that its utterance is almost frustratingly simple. Freud is talking about the tradition of fear imbedded in culture, the tradition to which tantric pedagogy has found a solution.

A CULTURE OF FEAR

What is fear? Fear is defined in this thesis as a feeling of agitation, worry, terror, or panic in anticipation of the future. In this section, it will become apparent how the two main arguments against tantric pedagogy are based on fear and not empirical, comprehensive data. This section will first present the arguments of the opposition and then formulate rebuttals.

One argument might appear as follows: If we encourage our children to express themselves through their learning and learn the way they want, they will be free to run amuck as non-conformists. This argument’s façade is practicality; it is fallacious in that its very expression is founded on fear of consequences. Let us analyze the underlying claims in this argument against tantric pedagogy. In its simple syllogistic deductive form, it assumes:

1. Misbehaving children are undesirable components of a classroom.
2. Students who are not controlled become misbehaving children.
3. Therefore, students who are not controlled are undesirable components in a classroom.

The truth value of premise (1) certainly depends on the teacher. However, it is highly unlikely that somewhere there is a teacher who finds a misbehaving child enjoyable. The weaknesses of this argument lie in premise (2) and conclusion (3). Premise (2) is a pathological blunder. Such a statement is based on fear and misinterprets past experience. More importantly, it relies on the presumption that a child’s misbehavior is a result of lack of

control. Another way of stating premise (2) is “Because they are free to do what they want, they will not conform to what I want them to conform to.” What do educators really mean by “misbehavior”? Misbehavior seems to be just another word for “non-conformity.” To show behavior that is amiss is to act in a different way. It is to not conform to what authority has commanded.

It is hard to prove that a child will misbehave (or not conform) if given freedom. That would have the same effect as a law against something that has yet to happen or is yet to cause a problem. Under the tantric reading, one might deduce that a child who is encouraged in a classroom to be free does not think about freedom as does a child who is restricted in a classroom. Tantra assumes the free child does not think about being free: he simply is free. The child does not worry or fear not having freedom because he or she is so free that he or she is not insecure about not being free. Inversely, a native citizen of a hierarchical power structure, a student who is being told what to learn, how to learn, and when to learn, is not free and will misbehave when given the chance. The sliver of freedom given during recess is enough time for a suppressed student to misbehave with paroxysmal energy. It is a special, isolated moment when a student is given the chance to do what he wants, and because it is so rare, when it happens, a student will notoriously “run with it.”

Think of an average third grade classroom. At every moment there is a format, a plan, a schedule to live by. When the children respect the teacher, the students will be reasonably well behaved during classroom time. However, when a child is released during what is ironically termed “free time,” teachers have to deal with misbehavior. It is only natural for a child to let out all her previously imprisoned energy during “free time,” when most children fight, cry, or get sick. Hence some teachers make a connection between a free child and misbehavior. It need not be so. If a teacher gives a student freedom from the beginning, the student will not feel anxious—anticipating the moment of release that “free time” offers—and will not have any structure to rebel against. The child has a greater chance to be more productive as a learner and listener with his own personal structure guiding his pursuit of knowledge.

106 These last few opinions I have gained experientially from nine years of teaching young children.
Of course, this is not ground breaking news to most educators. More often than not, teachers will use “freedom” as an award for “good behavior.” However, this is not the answer either but a power play—an expression of hierarchy and structured manipulation. This does not teach children to be themselves or to be truly free. More often than not, this type of methodology teaches children to manipulate adults to get what they want, which can be indicative of a number of slow developing sociopathic neuroses. For these reasons, premise (ii) is an untrue statement. The conclusion (iii) is the result of the belief in premise (ii). Having dismantled premise (ii), it is clear that although the conclusion (iii) might logically follow (is valid), the argument is still unsound.

**IS TANTRIC PEDAGOGY SOCIALLY FUNCTIONAL?**

Another argument against tantric pedagogy, which appears slightly more plausible, runs as follows: What if the student realizes who she is and that person wishes only to paint butterflies and never to study math or spelling? How will a student function without the practicality of structured, prescribed learning? Jean Piaget, an expert in child psychology, has this to say about such a concern:

> [T]here are certain branches of instruction, quite obviously devoid of any formative value, that we continue to lay down as essential without knowing whether in fact they do or do not attain the utilitarian end that has been traditionally allotted to them. Everyone accepts, for example, the fact that in order to live in a social existence it is necessary to know how to spell (leaving aside any discussion of the rational or purely traditionalist significance of such a necessity). But we continue to lack all decisive knowledge of whether specialized instruction in orthography increases our learning ability in this field, is wholly neutral in its effects, or can sometimes become an outright hindrance.\(^{107}\)

The inspiration for Amero-european education follows tradition of the Aristotelian nature and “common sense” assumptions. Experimental pedagogy, although it does exist and has accomplished many things, it does not support many of these classroom assumptions. Due to an increase in standardized testing and a neglect of local individualized evaluations or experimentation, certain pedagogical assumptions reign. For example, the belief that a student who is more interested in the portraits of butterflies or waves or elephant will be

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hindered in life compared to a student obsessed with algebra. Piaget speaks of one experiment of particular relevance:

[I]n two groups of students, of which one has been given spelling instruction and one has not, there was no difference between the two sets of marks […] it is scarcely believable that in a field so accessible to experiment, and one in which the divergent interests or traditional grammar and contemporary linguistic theory are in such direct conflict, that the pedagogue has not organized sustained and methodical experiments, but has remained content to divided upon such questions on the basis of opinions whose “common sense” in fact conceals more effectively than effective reasoning. ¹⁰⁸

Piaget is concerned that pedagogy does not receive enough dialogue based on experimentation, as other fields might. This is why educators are left to make decisions based only on common sense, not effective reasoning. The common sense response to the common sense opinion—that a student ought to be prescribed what administrators consider a balanced diet of math, science, and language—is dictated by the standardized examination system. Examiners and administrators ask, “Are students learning what they should have learned at this point? More importantly, are teachers doing what we told them to do?” Piaget argues for an increase in experimentation over examination, making pedagogy more of a science. Medical doctors do experiments to recognize better ways to heal the sick. Why should pedagogues not do more experiments to find the greatest way to educate children? Hence, one should also argue for experimentation over cultural “common sense” assumption.

**STANDARDIZED EXAMINATION**

We use tests as the principal means for evaluating the efficacy of our pedagogic techniques. This is a fairly recent phenomenon, which has been both defended and criticized. Regardless, this type of testing is competitive; the use of the data compiled from this test-based pedagogy entails both the fallacy of begging the question and a vicious cycle. To use testing as an overall evaluation to prove that prescribed learning is superior to individually chosen learning (such as tantric pedagogy) presupposes that success on an examination confirms that, over time, the knowledge obtained is pervasive. However, real success in education, whether the student’s success or the teacher’s success, consists precisely in

attempting to establish what remains after a lapse of several years, including the exact contents of whatever still exists independently of the detailed knowledge forgotten. It is not hard to agree that after years of formal education “education” is what is left after one has forgotten everything else one learned. To say the student is worse off because he paints butterflies is begging the question because by requiring examinations, the bar has already been raised to a particular platform, the conclusion has already been made, and therefore the student has no chance of showing how spending a day painting a butterfly is better in all applications for him than a day spent learning math. A capitalist might bring the original argument further by saying that in a capitalistic society, such as ours, the result of painting butterflies will not provide a reasonable living for the child as an adult, unless there is a demand for butterfly paintings. If the main concern in pedagogy is material gain, the foundation on which most speculation is based today, then again the conclusion has come before the premise. We have already decided what our children should be, and so we can no longer see the significance of doing it in another way for fear it might turn out differently.

If the goal of schooling is to grow a free individual, we could only rely on an honest assessment of the students’ education based on an objective evaluation of said education. An objective evaluation would remove competition and fear based learning and teaching. The prelude to any pedagogical study of scholastic productivity should compare the results of schools without examinations; in fact, it would not compare them at all but contemplate a student’s worth by the work done throughout the year. In other words, results should not be based on exam scores or compared to others but assessed individually. Public schools today, which have the expectation of final examinations, may not only falsify the work of the students but that of the teachers as well. Many students cannot work under stress, have test anxiety, or practice a unique learning pattern and cannot be fully assessed by exams alone. Teachers of those students cannot be assessed efficiently either through exams, because those students who do not express themselves well through exams will not show clearly the effective or ineffective pedagogy to which the student was exposed. The “common sense” assumption depends on the paradigm that a child who chooses to paint butterflies over arithmetic is losing some sort of scholastic worth. To teach students to paint if they want, or to do math if they want, does not loosen any necessary pedagogical foundation but provides a great lesson. It encourages individual definition and growth because they are allowed the
freedom to commit to what they want and finish what they want and are successful at what they chose. It seems as though a feeling of success and confidence might likely follow. It also seems that “successful” students will have an activated trust in the pedagogical process, a trust that enables these students to move deeper into what they choose to learn. Without the fear of the outcome of examination, a student has no limits to the depth of learning (and will more than likely suffer from less dental problems109). Without fear of examination, a student can transcend the pedagogical glass ceiling—a ceiling established by educators as the highest form of learning. In the opinion of many public school teachers, examinations are stifling. Without them a student is granted not only upward mobility but sideway mobility, downward mobility, creative mobility, and mobility in general. Movement is encouraged, and hence growth is inevitable. At this point in pedagogy, we can only speculate the distance and the velocity at which a free pupil might progress.

**AMERO-EUROCENTRIC CONTEMPLATIONS**

The Amero-eurocentric tradition of philosophy, as well as Tantra, involves a deep love affair with knowledge. Education is an institution of society. If the intent of education is to learn or to acquire knowledge, then the purpose of the definitive education involves knowledge and a reverence for knowledge (the philosophical position). Hence, the importance behind any lesson—whether in second grade arithmetic or post-graduate research—lies in the pursuit of truth and the reverence for knowledge. If one did not respect learning—which inherently involves the pursuit of knowledge—then one would not choose education unless one was forced to do so (leaving aside those who are enslaved and forced to learn). The power of knowledge must be recognized, even if unconsciously, in order for one to set off on a propitious path of learning. Tantric pedagogy employs tools that pave the path to knowledge in order to grasp wisdom. The tantric inspiration is heavy with the spirit of

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109 According to the British Dental Association, exams are bad for your teeth. “The BDA is warning that stressed pupils who grind their teeth, bite their fingernails and chew pencils could damage their jaws […]. In particular, students tend to suffer from this problem around exam time.” BBC News, “Exams Are Bad for Your Teeth,” last modified June 16, 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/793396.stm.
philosophy, considering the etymology of the word.\textsuperscript{110} This is not unlike the Amero-
eurocentric tradition, since both have a reverence for wisdom with knowledge as a vehicle.

The typical student of the Amero-eurocentric philosophical tradition associated with Plato, Kant, Hegel, Wittgenstein, etc. is first grounded in the original inspiration of philosophy, the love of wisdom, and then endeavors to learn. However, soon thereafter a hierarchy is established due to the intention, and thereby method, behind the way in which wisdom is passed from teacher to student—positions of learner and learned are established. A dualistic system is adhered to and supported. Since a binary system must be intact in order for a struggle between two components of that system to function, this dualistic pedagogy gives rise to the possibility of a power struggle between the learned (possessing a knowledge that the learner does not) as distinct from the learner. For example, a discussion between a freshman undergraduate and a college professor can have a tendency toward power struggles. It might seem realistic and functional at first glance to have an established learner and learned intention in a discussion between a freshman and college professor since it is probably false to say a freshman knows as much as a college professor. That is nearly impossible even to imagine. It is likely that a college professor will have learned more in life about certain things than a freshman. However, if the college professor wants to pass wisdom on to the freshman, the fact that the college professor is more intelligent and more knowledgeable than the freshman and is a physically separate individual is a trivial fact. If one makes this the primary focus, it could be detrimental to pedagogical results because it departs from an altruistic pursuit and love of knowledge to attain wisdom. According to a tantric position, a practice of reinforcing an ego quickly disconnects one from higher levels of consciousness (wisdom). Again, the intention of a teacher plays a very important role in any pedagogical moment. The teacher is the individual with the foundational intention. If the teacher puts the system before the pupil, this would be following a more Amero-eurocentric approach to pedagogy, whereas putting the student before the system represents a tantric intention.

\textsuperscript{110} According to my Philosophy 101 teacher, the word \textit{philosophy} derives from Greek ‘\textit{philosophia},’ “love of wisdom,” from \textit{philo-} “loving” + \textit{sophia} “wisdom,” from \textit{sophas} “wise, learned.” Sophia is also a goddess—the association of a goddess with abstract concepts seems to reflect a common Indo-european heritage shared by Greek and Sanskrit languages.
Due to a *modus operandi* in which the teacher operates with a specific intention, a dualistic hierarchy emerges—the way in which the college professor extends knowledge to the freshman undergraduate causes a possible power problem. To teach the student what one has learned, one should have the intention to be as absent from the pedagogical moment as possible. In other words, the self-identifying ego of the professor ought not to be present. The absence of the teacher’s ego, as an intention, is important so that the student may feel connected and encouraged rather than stifled and threatened. To be absent, in this case, means that the teacher concentrates completely on the student and is not trying to prove herself, show how much she knows, or explicate her control with a blatant show of knowledge beyond that of the student. The power, the hierarchical position, need not play a role in the students’ learning experience; in fact, it should not. Yet, in most moments of traditional pedagogy, it does, as in Aristotle. The *guru*-student relationship of tantric pedagogy resolves this problem of ego.

More often than not, a student of the contemporary pedagogical tradition, for example in public schools in California, feels he has no power over those who possess knowledge. This is because a contemporary student sees knowledge as an object to be attained or as intellectual ability, which is understood to be a quality possessed by few. Contemporary students know well that knowledge is used in measuring one’s ability or skill, and this often intimidates them. Fear arises: fear of examinations, parental judgment, scholastic failure, for example. In contrast, students trained with the methods and intentions used in tantric pedagogy learn to see knowledge as natural and innate to the divinity Sarasvatī. In understanding knowledge as a sacred aspect of Sarasvatī, they adopt a reverential approach. This takes away the competitive aspect in acquiring or even approaching knowledge because it is a personal relationship one has first with one’s deity (during one’s initiation *puja*) and then with one’s personal relationship with the *guru*. The competitive aspect of the Amero-european tradition has a tendency to produce anxiety, performance complexes, and fear of being labeled as ignorant, all of which might hinder a student from exploring and learning.

In contrast, the approach towards Sarasvatī takes away the fear of being judged, so that the tantric students are able to approach knowledge with eagerness and explore more readily. A student of Tantra holds knowledge to be divine, knowledge is everything. “Infinite consciousness means Infinite Awareness, thus Knowledge. Infinite Knowledge is Infinite
Bliss.” It is therefore unattainable as a possession, especially a possession used to wield power over someone without that knowledge. The tantric student is mobilized to transcend power structures; she arrives at knowledge by herself, in her own unique way, avoiding hierarchies because her teacher’s self-identifying ego was absent from the pedagogical process. Her teacher’s *modus operandi* concentrated on a singular notion of oneness and did everything it could not to create a binary system of teacher and student.

Dualistic pedagogy limits learning to the merely subjective understanding of personhood that leads to a reductionist perspective (that some in the scientific community have tried to revise). The tantric student learns outside of dualistic structures. Her learning process has nothing to do with the “fact” that she is a student and her teacher is the teacher. The urgency never arises to assert the ego aspect of a subjective personality. The life of a Tantric has no need to assert itself because assertion is aggressive. Violence of any kind is seen as an inferior way of dealing with things and is avoided (*ahimsa* or non-violence—remarkably exemplified by Gandhi and the India of his time). There is never a moment of lapse where one falls into asserting, confronting, conflicting, etc. This avoids power struggles because no one has power over the other. They are simply experiencing together what to a tantric practitioner is divine knowledge or true wisdom. In fact, they would go further to say that knowledge as the revealer of the student’s true self is one in the same as the student—*jñāna* or knowledge reveals the Self and is the source of all revelation. Since there is no difference between the Self and *jñāna* (knowledge), the *Jñāni* (knower or Self) is revealed in the *jñāna* (knowledge).”

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people of a certain system. There is not one way to learn multiplication if a teacher relies on the student to come up with the best way to learn how to multiply.

Because most modern day public education in general is based on a curriculum established by standardized test results, the majority of educational institutions currently in operation are not conducive to cultivating the level of individualized freedom a tantric education would provide. Examinations rely on a general standard rather than an emphasis on individualized growth. Perhaps this is why the term “K-12” and what it signifies to most people does not exist in tantric pedagogy. A public school that educates children from kindergarten to high school under the measurement of one standard would not exist in a tantric society. The K-12 institution serves no function in a tantric society because it does not teach a child to learn by learning about him- or herself; rather it teaches a student to learn in a way prescribed by the standard curriculum formulated continuously by standard exams. In this sense, it prevents a child from truly being free to learn about his or her own way of learning and thereby free to learn about being free. Within a tantric-oriented society, the attainment of freedom is both the ultimate end and necessary means by which life is understood. It can be both an end and a means because, unlike our contemporary society, a free society does not spend time trying to be free, it simply is free. Knowledge and wisdom are the two truths, and there is a mundane process resulting in a fruitful ultimate end. One must learn and obtain knowledge, for this process serves as a vehicle to the absolute, just as the river (Sarasvatī) leads to the ocean (Ultimate Consciousness).

A contemporary educational institution is predicated on social paradigms. In a normal public system, a school is built and hence classrooms are built so that people have somewhere to go to acquire facts. They acquire these facts in these classrooms and then are sent out into society, molded in the way society had intended them to be. They understand something about math, language, science, and more than likely have acquired one or two special skills. This is usually how it goes. This is the type of knowledge that is centered on and encouraged to satisfy the needs of society. People who have only this type of knowledge will, if constantly encouraged by guardians to follow their own desires and creative inspirations, become people who not only know math but know much about themselves and experience a more transcendental form of knowledge, wisdom. Educational knowledge is learning your multiplication tables, knowing and following syntax, etc. However, tantric
knowledge can set one free because it gives one the wisdom of oneself—self wisdom. This wisdom is not emphasized in the standard, logocentric public education of contemporary Amero-eurocentric society but is incredibly important for tantric pedagogy.

According to the Tantrics of Shri Kali Ashram in contemporary India, to attain Individuation, one needs freedom and independence. Without it, one never matures to experience independent reasoning. This lack of independence is seen as a limitation and hindrance to experiencing life. The Tantrics, as well as 20th century psychologists such as Carl Jung, believe self-knowledge is not something that usually is realized until the mid-twenties, when we are finally free from the education system and can take the time to look deeply into our own nature. However, self-knowledge does not have to come so late. It is rare, if not impossible, to find a contemporary education that does not delay the process of Individuation until formal schooling ends; tantric schooling supplies that need.

It is important to note the struggle education endures at this moment to illuminate the need for such great changes in education. Many elite, east coast schools, are seeking desperately to find a new approach to fix a system of education whose mode of growth is based on standardized testing. Educators are starting to think that a “kid’s success—and happiness—may depend less on perfect performance than on learning how to deal with failure.” Learning to deal with failure has more to do with a student’s character than test scores. Educators like Dominic Randolph, headmaster at one of New York’s top tier private schools, have been working to prove to parents and educators that “character is at least as important as intellect.” Similar to the pedagogy discussed in this thesis, many of its aspects are pulled from Hindu texts such as the Upanishads. In fact, to develop the perfect combination of character needed to make a successful student the developers of this pedagogy pulled from not only the Upanishads but Aristotle, Confucius, the Torah, and even the Boy Scouts manual. Character traits such as bravery, citizenship, fairness, wisdom, integrity, love, humor, zest, and appreciation of beauty are strived for in this elite’s school’s


116 Ibid., 42.
classrooms. As a result, students not only receive report cards with grades that represent a student’s class work, test scores, and participation but grades evaluating their character.

Many involved in the science of education recognize that a system established to teach their children to learn to be members of the establishment, where test scores pave their path, is not always conducive to a happy life, or what developers of the Character Test model call (referencing Plato) the “good life.” Nor is it guaranteed to teach their kids to be great members of the establishment. This desperate, nevertheless progressive, step towards a new method of education is an example of how contemporary educators must find a new solution to a system they see as flawed. Most contemporary educators recognize the flaws and are trying everything to build anew. However, giving a teacher the power to quantify another person’s character is only boxing students into another standard not much different than standardized testing does. In other words, it does not solve the problem of standardized education. Only by giving a child the freedom to act by the values of his own character can teach a student about himself and lead that student on a path that leads to himself and not a place marked out by the establishment—unless he so chooses.

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117 Tough, “The Character Test,” 40.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis, we have considered the application of tantric pedagogy in a contemporary Amero-european society. We have learned that the following objectives outline what tantric pedagogy means:

1. Cultivate *tat tvam asi* as a dynamic in the classroom.
2. Teach students *Śvātantrya* and *Pratyabhijñā* as borrowed from Kashmir Shaivism.
3. Emphasize the importance of the *guru* while giving each student an intimate, long-term relationship that allows for a teacher-student dynamic that is comfortable and stable so that teachers can transmit experience as opposed to only knowledge.
4. Organize an *initiation* system based on (1) a student’s individual progress and (2) equality between the levels of the system.

The outcomes of each objective are as follows:

1. Cultivating *tat tvam asi* as a classroom dynamic teaches students about the importance of their own path, their relation to the greater good, which can give students the confidence and urgency to pursue their deep and most honest desires.
2. To teach students *Śvātantrya* and *Pratyabhijñā* will engage students’ paths of self-recognition and activate free will. Activating free will will will engage students on the path of self-recognition.
3. By emphasizing the long-term relationship between *guru* and student, a student has the nurturing and comfortable environment needed to cultivate Objectives 1 and 2.
4. Allowing students to grow and evolve based on the individual students’ *initiations* removes standardized expectations, reduces performance anxiety, and encourages students to move at their own pace. The result of creating each level of *initiation* equally diminishes competition between levels, builds trust between guru and students, and allows students to concentrate on their present so not to look towards the future as a distraction from the present educational goals.
5. As a result of Objectives 1, 2, 3, and 4, the process that Jung calls *Individuation* is overcome at an earlier age, neurosis may be overturned, and higher levels of consciousness can be accessed.

This type of pedagogy involves cultivating an overall dynamic that is student-first oriented. It puts the individual before the demands of society and gives a student the foundation to feel free while learning. Education breathes and expands like an organism. It must be nurtured and understood if ever it can grow. With that said, there are new ideas all the time resulting in many different theories of how to teach and structure a lesson for the
betterment of the education system. In the case of tantric pedagogy, it is more poignant than that. The concern is focused on the student. It can afford such a privileged concern because the relationship of the teacher and student is long term and unique. It is subject to a dynamic relationship between learners. It is a life form in itself; it has a spirit to it. It can change, and grow, and become deeper, more creative, and more intimate—its expression depends on the dynamic between student and teacher. The two components make a seeming dualistic pair; however, it is the inspiration of uncovering divine knowledge that brings these two to an egoless state of learning that is a whole. This respect for knowledge, expansive within the life of a tantric student, becomes great wisdom or liberation.

Most people, as products of public schooling, have to wait until liberation from the public system to have a chance to understand their own selves and make a distinction between selfishness and self-hood. When a person enters a school system fashioned from fear, the result is a selfish, neurotic pupil, a pupil who competes with other students because he is afraid of failure, fearful of his teachers, fearful of his parents, fearful of test scores. He obeys his teachers because he is fearful of their power or his parents’ power to punish him when he fails. However, when one comes from a background of self-knowing and has made a distinction between self-hood and selfishness, one can follow one’s Dharma and can act out of wisdom and not from fear. In this way, hierarchy is dismantled, and the conditioned structure becomes dismantled. A deconstruction has altered the consciousness and resulted in Svātantrya.

To understand what it means to be free in a tantric sense, and apply that sense of freedom to a philosophy of pedagogy, would without a doubt contribute to progressive societal advancement. A philosophy of education based on the idea of self-knowledge and liberation allows for a way of teaching that changes a school’s curriculum for the better, by providing a more creative structure and allowing for a total desedimentation of generalized testing. But it also challenges the intentions behind the methods of teaching—an intention whose long term implementation will result in a truly free society, a liberated society. A society that allows for widespread growth of tantric pedagogy will be a society that, unlike Aristotle’s polis, puts the individuals before the greater societal whole.

In the third section, using two influential pedagogues—namely Aristotle and Steiner—we elucidated both the traditional Amero-eurocentric pedagogy commonly used
today in public schools by placing it next to a non-traditional pedagogy, which applies an interpretation of tantric freedom. As we have seen, Steiner—not unlike tantric pedagogues—places the individual freedom of the pupil before the needs of the state.

Freedom is a piece of canonic greatness—contributed to throughout the course of human expression and thought. As humans, we must pick and choose what definition of “freedom” we want and where to apply it. This thesis has not escaped the intricacies involved in defining what “freedom” is, but it has narrowed down the possibilities enough to understand where a particular concept of freedom ought to be applied. A tantric freedom is a freedom that involves human liberation—both mundane and absolute. It is mundane because it involves an everyday practice and absolute because the everyday practice serves as a vehicle, a means, to a transcendental liberation.

Tantric freedom requires a strategy. It is a system, a science, a non-linear manual that gives one an ordinary, but dynamic, methodology to use for obtaining absolute wisdom. Tantric freedom has been defined within many of the classic works of India including the Vedas and the Upanishads, not to mention strictly tantric texts from Kashmir Shaivism or Tibetan Buddhism. Tantra has lived within the corners and crevices of India’s memory for thousands of years. Today it is manifested throughout the world either in high academia, psycho-therapy, or a physical/spiritual practice called yoga. In this thesis, the idea of tantric freedom is transmitted differently: it is to become a contemporary pedagogy. If the idea of tantric freedom can inspire the way a school’s curriculum is written, then a mundane application of an absolute wisdom can be brought to life.
REFERENCES


