

Support and Transformation

When I read the question for the current issue of the Tantranetz blog, “*Does Tantra need rituals?*”, my spontaneous reaction was: of course! Tantra needs rituals, just as life in general needs rituals. What would be the point of a more rambling text? And yet it always seems worthwhile to bring to ones mind, to become more aware, of how words are used in sentences about the world.

To be able to decide more clearly, more undoubtedly, whether I want to ascribe truth to a certain statement or not. Whether this feeling of truthfulness is possibly even connected with the more precise usage of a word. As in the sentence: *Ripe cherries are red*. If someone shows me a bowl of ripe cherries, she might thereby want to convey to me what is meant by the colour *red*. Or I am given a colour palette with different shades of red, and I am supposed to decide which of the cherries are probably ripe. In that case, the term *ripe cherry* would be narrowed down more precisely. Even though, according to an English proverb, the proof of a pudding ultimately is in the eating.

So in the following I would like to take a closer look at the words used. In order to illuminate, to specify what I want to understand by the quoted sentence. Before I give my final answer. Don't conflicts often arise from a lack of exchange about the use of words, a lack of quality and attentiveness in communication? Beyond body language, highly developed verbal communication is a conspicuous feature of our humanity, a central component in creating loving connection, and should therefore be treated with special care. Experience cautious, careful handling.

Need seems to me to be the most accessible word in the above sentence, although even its use is open to eager debate. What does a human being need? One might quickly think of air to breathe, water, or food. Besides love. But humans would only really need air, water and food if it were explicated more precisely that they also want to survive. Without this addition, they could manage without breath, water and food for different periods of time. Only then, a certain time later, their being human would end. A better, more accurate sentence that uses the word *need* would be, for example: *For long-term survival, humans need air, water and food*.

If this supposedly simple, obvious example already leaves room for considerable sophistry, it is of course all the more complicated with our sentence “*Does Tantra need rituals?*”. So up to this point, in the light of what has been written so far, I would now say: of course not! Or at least, a *Tantra* without rituals would have a different meaning than a *Tantra* with rituals.

Which brings us to the concept of *ritual*. By this I would like to understand an action that always follows fixed, predetermined rules. In other words, it has a high recognition

value. It takes place in everyday life or at less ordinary moments. And can have a more profane nature, or a more solemn, festive, sacred character. A secular example would be the tennis player who always bounces the ball a certain number of times before serving, or performs some other internalised movement. A solemn one would be the fixed procedures of a Japanese tea ceremony. And a sacred one is the ritual washing in the course of Christian baptism. The examples listed also indicate the diverse functions that rituals can assume. For example, automated sequences of movements, such as in sport, can convey security. The ritual sequence can, as in the tea ceremony, reinforce the festive character and symbolic content of the action. And rituals in a spiritual or religious context can strengthen the sense of community or, as in baptism, serve initiation, the acceptance into a religious community. Reaffirm membership with a chosen group.

Before I conclude by exploring what function rituals can have in tantric encounters, I would like to briefly discuss my own view of Tantra. I have already presented this view in more detail in a previous post. For me, Tantra is a tool, a vehicle of individual growth that allows the connection of the human being to the world, to nature, to other people, to become stronger, more intense, and in this respect also increases love. Whereby the growth of love is for me the central, the most significant aspect. This growth is achieved through mindfulness, awareness, meditation, in dealing with the world, nature, and in particular, myself and the encounter with other people. The mindful, meditative approach makes it possible to let the voice of the mind become quieter and quieter, and that of intuition, of the heart, become more authoritative, stronger. So that unbiased, heartfelt, loving encounters with other people become completely natural. Independent of any previous history.

So how might rituals be helpful in this context? For one thing, rituals give a sense of security. I am familiar with the processes, thinking, or even instinctive, involuntary reactions, which easily gain the upper hand in unexpected events, can become quieter, step back, and the intuitive feeling, the voice of the heart, can take more space. Guide me. Then, of course, rituals enhance the festive character of a tantric encounter, and can thus contribute considerably to the well-being of all involved. Giving a sense of the irretrievability, uniqueness of each moment.

And last but not least, rituals in Tantra also have a sacred, spiritual, transcendental aspect. To transform the worldly being into an individual who leaves his individuality and history more and more behind, and becomes an indispensable part of the whole. The divine. Our universe. Seen in this way, rituals in tantric encounters fulfil all the functions discussed above. In short, they provide support and enable transformation. Growing beyond ourselves. Which brings me to my last answer: yes, Tantra requires rituals, and for me it would not be Tantra without rituals. And now the inclined reader is free to further ponder about the statement that *Tantra would not be Tantra*.