



Dynamics of Rudra Yaga

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Rudra is *prana shakti*, the vibrant life force. This intelligent energy pulls us out of inertia, makes us vibrant and energetic, and puts us on the path of inner fulfillment and freedom. It is represented by Rudra—the most energetic form of Shiva—emerging from the primordial fire. Intent on filling the universe with life force, Rudra performs his cosmic dance. In response, the goddess Durga, an embodiment of immaculate beauty, vigor, and bliss, emerges. The union of the two fills the universe. It is in this universe everyone and everything lives and thrives.

Rudra Yaga is one of the most ancient and pristine rituals for accessing Rudra Shakti, the life-sustaining force within and without. The masters in our tradition access this shakti in three different ways—*kaula*, *mishra*, and *samaya*. *Kaula* is a purely ritualistic path, whereas *samaya* is purely yogic. The yogis following the method of *mishra* combine rituals with meditative and pranayama techniques. Each of these paths has its own unique characteristics.

The ritualistic path of **kaula**, if followed while observing the precise rules of tantra, bears fruit almost instantly. The rituals are elaborate and require the recitation of thousands of mantras unknown to casual seekers and practitioners. The preparatory steps to the ritual-heavy Rudra Yaga are lengthy. They consist of invoking the benevolent forces of nature that govern, guide, and nourish the functions of earth, water, fire, air, clouds, lightning, and seasons. These same forces nourish and guide our body and mind. The preparatory rituals invoke and help us connect with the forces that preside over constellations,

zodiac signs, stars, planets, the four directions, time, the laws of cause and effect, and ultimately, the all-pervading force that holds the numberless aspects of nature together in harmony. Each step of these preparatory practices is accompanied by the recitation of mantras and intricate ritual offerings. The main course of Rudra Yaga begins only after these preparatory practices have been completed.

The **samaya** method of Rudra Yaga is totally opposite to the ritualistic method. Here a yogi is led to awaken *kundalini shakti* at the *muladhara* chakra, located at the perineum. With the help of pranayama and mantra japa, kundalini shakti is then brought to the *manipura* chakra, located at the navel center.

The *samaya* method of Rudra Yaga is the specialty of the Himalayan Tradition. We are taught to take extreme precautions not to get distracted during the upward journey of the vibrant energy from the *muladhara* to the *manipura*. Finally, we are taught the precise method of meditating at the *manipura* chakra. In the tantric tradition, the *manipura* chakra is described as the center of fire. The fire here is a miniature cosmic fire, the ultimate vortex of the life force. Rudra Yaga at the navel center opens the floodgates to experiencing the divinity that embodies the inexhaustible life force. Only after we have gained access to the navel center and become fully established there are we taught how to meditate on the crown center, which subsumes all other chakras. The system of Rudra Yaga in the *samaya* school of tantra uses the human body itself as an altar, and all rituals are completely internalized.

The **mishra** method of Rudra Yaga combines ritualistic kaula and yogic samaya. In this system, the purpose of rituals is to awaken the forces of nature and guide them to awaken the power that lies dormant in the various chakras. A specific segment of rituals and the power engendered by them awakens the inherent power of the first three chakras and brings it to the heart center. This process frees us from fear, doubt, insecurity, and grief. It infuses us with self-confidence, self-trust, courage, and determination. Other parts of the rituals awaken the forces inherent in the higher chakras, mainly the center between the eyebrows. This frees us from confusion and the cravings that create turmoil from inside. Finally, the main course of Rudra Yaga commences.

At the outset, most students in our tradition are led through the disciplines of mishra, which combine both the ritualistic approach of kaula and the yogic approach of samaya. The reason for this is that the anatomy both of the mind and of the pranic force, which pervades and permeates every nook and cranny of our body, is so subtle that it is an impenetrable mystery. Therefore, the practice of samaya is difficult for most seekers in the beginning. Ritualistic practices are somewhat easier. The majority of tantric texts are ritual manuals. Learned tantrics break lengthy rituals into smaller steps, and rearrange them in a manner conducive to accomplishing the intended goal.

Once the ritualistic portion of the mind, we can apply the same procedure to awaken and become fully connected to our inner core. Unlike the internal practice of Rudra Yaga, a group of adepts and aspirants can participate in the ritual-driven practice of Rudra Yaga. This group practice creates a collective consciousness that is transforming both at a micro and macro level. In the past, whenever society was suffering from upheaval and unable to supply the nourishment necessary for stable health, wealth, peace, and

happiness, adepts and aspirants undertook mega-sized group practices such as Rudra Yaga. In this way, enlightened souls restored peace to society, brought nature into balance, and created an environment where people can live without fear and sorrow.

As part of our daily practice, Rudra Yaga could be short. We can complete it in one to three hours' time. But when Rudra Yaga is performed to influence a collective consciousness, then the length, depth, size, and complexity of the practice expand proportionately. Depending on the size of our desired outcome, it may take a few days, weeks, months, or even a few years to complete the practice. During the Kumbha Mela, for example, the scope of the practice is such that it will be completed in 12 days. Such a large-scale practice of Rudra Yaga must be preceded by the practice of Sri Vidya, the motherly manifestation of the Divine Being. The practice of Sri Vidya builds a strong base for collecting and containing the vibrant and often overwhelming shakti of Rudra Yaga.

Sri Vidya is the embodiment of the tantric experience—all forms of tantric practices are subsumed in it. Sri Chakra is the visual expression of Sri Vidya. Sri Chakra allows us to identify the supreme power of intelligence, tracing it from its most subtle form to its most visible, manifest form.

Sri Chakra is made of nine circuits, with a dot in the center representing transcendental love, beauty, and joy. Each circuit of the Sri Chakra is composed of a cluster of divinities. These divinities correspond to different forces in the universe and in our own body and mind. For example, there are 28 divinities in the outermost circuit of Sri Chakra. These divinities govern the forces that control and nourish our physical world, and each has its corresponding mantras. Although independent in their own right, collectively these divinities work

toward a common goal—our ultimate freedom and fulfillment. As we go deeper into the circuits of Sri Chakra, our quest becomes increasingly refined and fulfilling.

Just as with Rudra Yaga, the worship of Sri Chakra can be relatively simple, moderately elaborate, or extremely elaborate. During auspicious occasions, we worship Sri Chakra moderately in honor of the forces that are constantly providing us with guidance and nourishment. Moderately elaborate practice is often goal-driven and done by a group of practitioners. In other words, it is a group practice. Yogis in our tradition arrange a group practice of Sri Chakra for the welfare of society or to restore nature's equilibrium.

Extremely elaborate practice is done at highly significant times, such as during the *sandhi* of two *yugas*. *Sandhi* means “joint” or “transition.” There are times when the forces of light and darkness clash—both forces are at their peak, both are unyielding, and a collision could wipe out thousands of years of human achievement. At such times, we undertake the extremely elaborate

practice of Sri Chakra. In order to include high-minded seekers and friends in the practice and help create a collective consciousness, we resolve to do Sri Chakra worship with rituals.

Both the moderately elaborate and the extremely elaborate practice of Sri Chakra automatically include practices pertaining to the divinities that constitute Guru pitham, Vishvedeva pitham, and Yogini pitham. These three pithams (altars) have their designated spaces, and at these altars we invoke the guiding forces of the lineage (Rishis), the benevolent forces of creation (Vishvedeva), and the 64 Yoginis that preside over the infinitely vast range of our *samskaras*, subtle traces of our *karmas*, thought processes, and temperaments.

After completing the moderately elaborate practice of Sri Chakra, we can begin the practice of Rudra Yaga. Just as Divine Mother Sri Vidya is worshipped in Sri Chakra, the Rudra Yaga is performed in the Rudra Yantra that is installed on the Rudra pitham, the altar designated for the practice of Rudra Yaga.

Rudra Yantra at the Rudra Pitham



This altar is the seat of Rudra. Rudra is *prana shakti*, the vibrant life force. Rudra presides over our health and longevity. It is the primordial pool of healing force. The yantra of Rudra consists of eight avarna, circuits of shaktis. The innermost circuit is composed of a circle, and is the locus for the power of Maha Mrityunjaya mantra. Surrounding this circle, there are seven circuits, each consisting of eight petals. These petals serve as a locus for fifty-six shaktis that ensure we live a healthy, happy, peaceful, and fulfilling life. They grant the protection and guidance we need in our worldly and spiritual quests. The last circuit is a square with four gates. Since four prominent divinities guard these gates, those divinities are viewed as our guardians. They are Durga, the force that pulls us out from helpless,

insurmountable situations; Ganesha, the one who removes the obstacles from our path; Nandi, the one who infuses our mind and heart with courage, enthusiasm, and joy; and, Batuka Bhairava, the one who infuses our mind and heart with intuitive wisdom and indomitable will.

We'll conduct Rudra Yaga while keeping the Rudra Yantra at the center of our sadhana. The invocation and propitiation of the cluster of divinities will follow the method of right-hand tantra as taught in the Sri Vidya tradition. We'll enter from the northern gate of Rudra Yantra, with the blessings and guidance of Divine Mother Durga, and continue moving from outside in, clockwise, to finally reach the center. More clearly, the steps of the practice are as follows:

1. **Invocation and puja of the first circuit**, consisting of the four gates, that begins with the invocation of Divine Mother Durga and the other three divinities
2. **Invocation and puja of eight loka-palas**, the protectors of the directions, or the divinities who provide directions in life
3. **Invocation and puja of Dhara, Uma, etc.**—eight shaktis that bring stability in life
4. **Invocation and puja of Arya, Prajna, etc.**—eight shaktis that infuse us with clarity, intuitive wisdom, and power of discrimination
5. **Invocation and puja of Vishva, Vidya, etc.**—eight shaktis that manifest in us in the form of creativity and ingenuity
6. **Invocation and puja of Rama, Raka, etc.**—eight shaktis that manifest as beauty, tranquility, and sustainability
7. **Invocation and puja of Sharva, Bhava, etc.**—eight shaktis that serve as a locus for everything that exists, and hold the entire web of life together in a mutually supportive manner
8. **Invocation and puja of the innermost divinity**, Rudra, the primordial pool of life

After this lengthy invocation, the fire offering begins. The fire offering is done exactly in the same order as the invocation, and is concluded with a cluster of 123 mantras, collectively known as Shata Rudriya. Inclusive to this practice is the structured study of scriptures enabling us to understand and assimilate the energy Rudra Yaga emits. It is important to remember that Rudra Yaga is one of the rarest and most sacred of spiritual practices for awakening the force of change, and should be undertaken with reverence and enthusiasm.