

Tantric Methods in Attaining Buddhist Goals	
<i>Tantric Methods</i>	<i>Buddhist Goals</i>
<p><i>Tantric texts</i> Tantras are texts setting out esoteric meditation practices, presented as secret teachings deriving directly from the Buddha himself. These practices require absolute commitment and dedication.</p>	<p>To achieve the complete awakening of a Buddha.</p>
<p><i>Four classes of texts</i></p> <p>(1) Action (<i>kriyā</i>): Are least esoteric.</p> <p>(2) Practice (<i>caryā</i>): Describe conduct of more advanced tantric practitioners in ‘outer ritual’ and ‘inner yoga’.</p> <p>(3) Union (<i>yoga</i>): Describe esoteric and magical practices from ‘inner yoga’ – related to yogic trances and meditation.</p> <p>(4) Great Union or Higher Yoga (<i>annuttara-yoga</i>): Are the most esoteric group of tantras (include sexual symbolism).</p>	<p>To achieve Perfect Enlightenment (personified by <i>Mahā-vairocana</i>) – that is, to know one's mind as it really is (that is, the supreme, full, and faultless Enlightenment).</p> <p>To achieve the supra-worldly aim of Buddhahood.</p>
<p><i>The teacher's crucial role</i> Great importance is given to the role of the teacher – a spiritual preceptor, who gives empowerment to use, or consecration into, the various tantric practices.</p> <p>Effective practice (<i>sādhana</i>), then, of any tantra depends on receiving the appropriate consecration and instruction directly from a teacher who is a master of the particular tantra.</p>	<p>To visualize embodying the qualities of the Buddhas.</p> <p>To actualize the wisdom, compassion, and other spiritual qualities of chosen deities and Buddhas of sublime realms.</p>
<p><i>Engaging body, speech, and mind</i> At all stages of tantric practice, a complex and elaborate symbolism links visualizations, liturgy, and ritual in order to fully engage and focus the activity of body, speech, and mind. These rituals (and iconography) include the utilization of powers of concentration, the creative and transformative power of letters and words, symbolic hand gestures (<i>mudrās</i>), and mandalas.</p> <p>The higher tantras increasingly centre on an elaborate theory of yoga involving a complex physiology of the ‘channels’, ‘centres’, and ‘winds’ of the subtle body which the practitioner learns to control and manipulate.</p>	<p>To become identified, in one's body, speech, and mind, with the enlightened Buddha – to envision merging with a Buddha.</p> <p>To transform one's body into the body of a Buddha.</p>

<p>Equivalence of nirvāna and samsāra Building on the Mādhyamika doctrine of the inseparability of nirvāna and samsāra, some Tantrics seek out the equation with nirvāna by participation in some of the most impure forms of samsāra – involving, for example, meat eating, wine drinking, and sex. (The premise is that liberation comes through freedom from convention, thus justifying iconoclastic and eccentric language and behaviour.)</p>	<p>To attain enlightenment by employing things of this world – by means of one’s body, speech, and mind.</p> <p>To generate deep religious experiences in order to lead to Buddhahood more quickly (than the immensely long <i>Bodhisattva</i> path).</p>
<p>Vivid symbolism and imagery The elaborate use of magical methods is drawn on – esoteric teachings, ritual, ceremony, initiations, incantations, sacred circles, and so forth. In effect, there is skilful and joyful use of sense experience and imagination. The rich symbolism and imagery is especially noticeable in connection with sexuality or death.</p>	<p>To transform and eradicate desire – <i>not</i> to feed desire. Desire is used at an advanced stage of practice to finally reveal its nature.</p> <p>To bring about individual transformation.</p>
<p>Taboo- and convention-breaking practices Tantra has a marked tendency to make use of activities which are psychologically ‘loaded’, especially in its visualization methods. Death, sexuality, any kind of taboo act or substance, are all grist its mill.</p>	<p>To overcome attachments and aid insight into seeing everything as the <i>Dharma</i>-body, beyond dualistic divisions.</p> <p>To free the mind from ambivalent attractions and partly to startle the mind out of rigid habits.</p>
<p>Creative union of polar opposites This involves seeking to combine or merge perfectly inclinations in two directions. Symbols for expressing such polarities and their union include: sun and moon, vowels and consonants, right and left, male and female.</p>	<p>To have both wisdom (<i>prajñā</i>) and skillful means (<i>upāya</i>), and to be involved in both emptiness (<i>śūnyatā</i>) and compassionate involvement with the forms of this world (<i>karunā</i>).</p>
<p>Sources: Cousins, L.S. (1997) 'Buddhism', in Hinnells, J.R. (ed.) <i>A new handbook of living religions</i>. Hoboken: Blackwell Publishers, p. 431. Gethin, R. (1998) <i>The foundations of Buddhism</i>. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 268-269. Harvey, P. (2013). <i>An introduction to Buddhism: teachings, history and practices</i>. 2nd edn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 180-3; 190-191. Pagel, U. (2001). <i>The sacred writings of Buddhism</i>. In: Harvey, P., ed. <i>Buddhism</i>. London: Continuum, pp. 45-46. Strong, John S. (2008) <i>The experience of Buddhism: sources and interpretations</i>. 3rd edn. Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, p. 206. 2015 Alexander M. Peck</p>	