

Special Issue

ISSUE 13 SPRING/SUMMER 1998

What is Enlightenment?

An inquiry into the most important spiritual questions of our time

What is the
relationship
between

~~sex~~

& Spirituality?

Tantra?

MARGOT ANAND

BARRY LONG

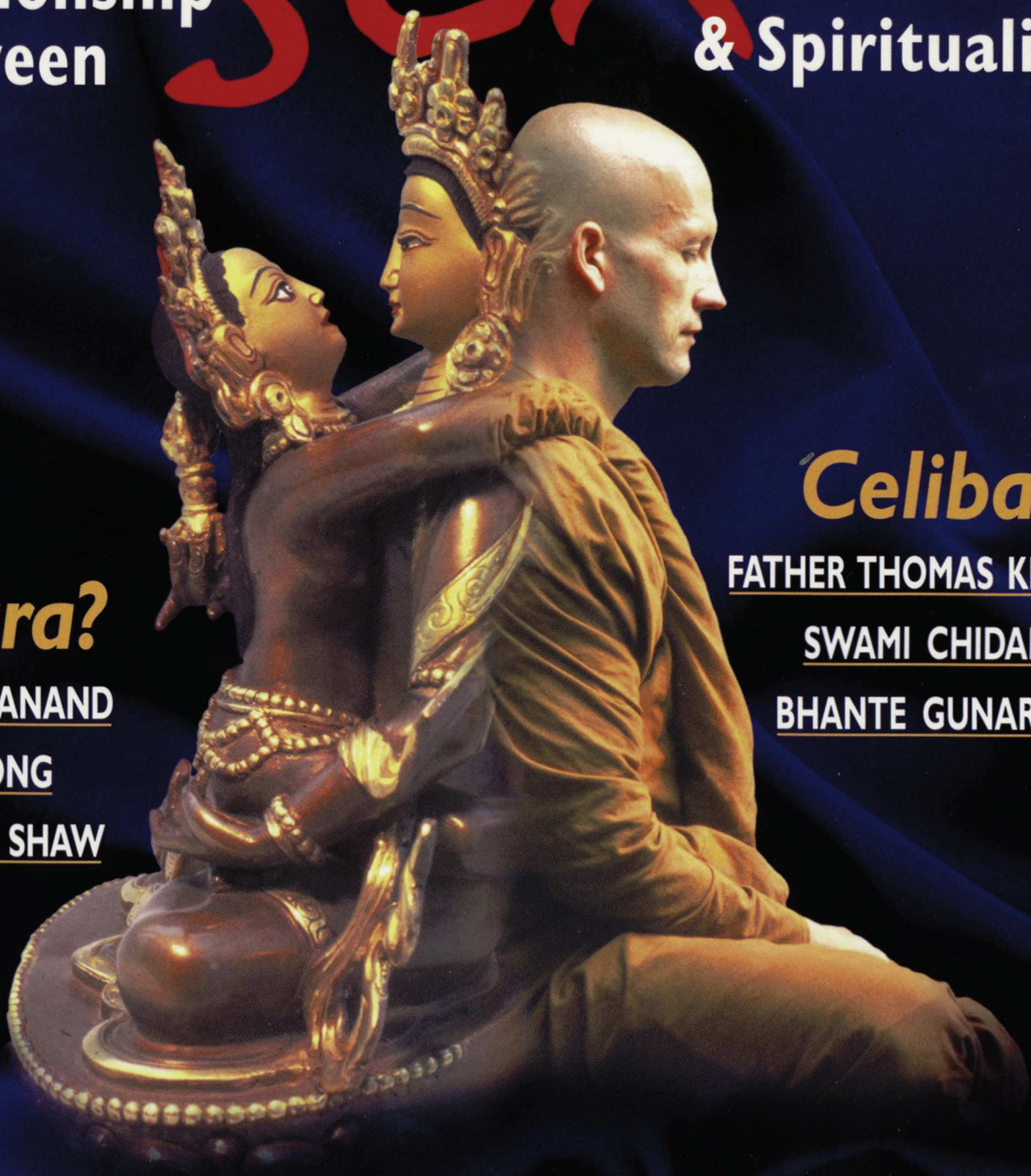
MIRANDA SHAW

Celibacy?

FATHER THOMAS KEATING

SWAMI CHIDANANDA

BHANTE GUNARATANA





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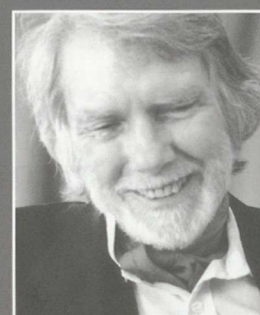
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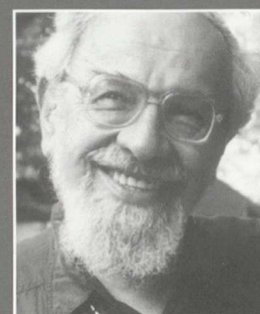
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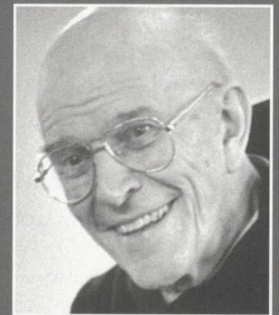
"Once made, this love is made forever." Two of Barry Long's former consorts tell us what it's like to be in relationship with a tantric master.

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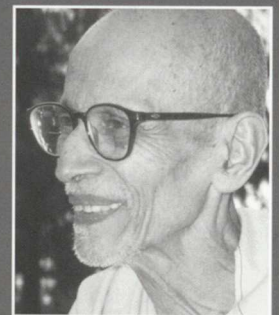
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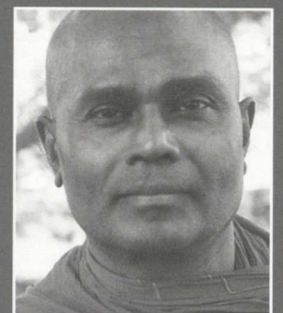
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Enlightenment? ^{What is}

"I have found and continue to find that there is so much confusion, misunderstanding and misinformation as to what enlightenment actually is and what it really means. That is why we publish this journal as a vehicle to present our ongoing investigation into this question, and to share our discoveries with those who are also interested in this vast and most subtle subject."

Andrew Cohen

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Andrew Cohen

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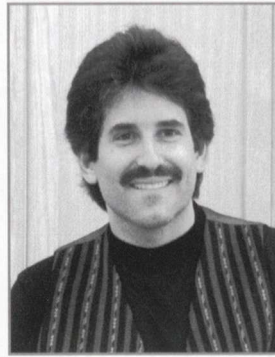
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ANDREW COHEN



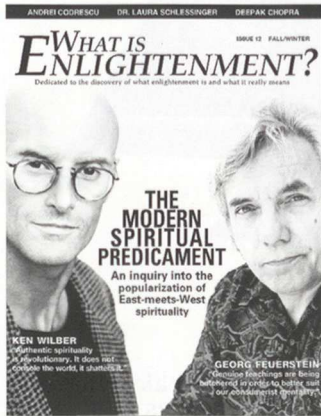
Spiritual teacher and founder of *What Is Enlightenment?* Andrew Cohen began teaching in 1986 after a spiritual realization transformed his life beyond recognition. Since that time the fire of his awakening has sparked a revolution in the hearts and minds of many people throughout the world. Andrew is outspoken in his questioning of many of the superstitious belief systems that are almost always associated with genuine Liberation teachings. This, coupled with his unwillingness to compromise in matters of the heart, has led to an original expression of a complete teaching that embraces both heaven and earth in a way that calls any who would hear it to question the definition of what is truly absolute. His teaching is modern in the sense that its reference point is the time that we are living in and yet its source is that unfathomable mystery that never changes and always lies beyond the barriers of time and space.

Those who have been touched by Andrew's teachings have found themselves immersed in a profound recognition of their own true nature and propelled into a thrilling discovery of what it means to reach beyond all limitations. For many, this has been the catalyst for coming together in a way that transcends barriers of conflict and separation. In the past few years, communities dedicated to living these teachings have formed throughout the world, with a network of centers in North America, Europe, Israel and Australia. Andrew now travels extensively around the world every year, giving public talks and intensive retreats.

Andrew Cohen is the author of *Freedom Has No History, An Unconditional Relationship to Life, Enlightenment Is a Secret, Autobiography of an Awakening, My Master Is My Self* and other books.

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LETTERS



Fall/Winter 1997

What Is Enlightenment? would like to hear what you think about our articles and the issues we raise. We welcome your letters. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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A WRITER RESPONDS

MY WIFE PICKED UP the Fall/Winter 1997 issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* because she thought that, having just completed my ninth book, *Everyday Enlightenment*, I might enjoy the articles therein. She was, as usual, correct.

Ken Wilber and Georg Feuerstein demonstrated their usual intellectual integrity and insight, although waxing a bit heady for my hobbitlike tastes. Deepak Chopra held his own in a challenging interview; I appreciated his perspectives as well as your editorial integrity for including his views. I was particularly impressed by the cogent commentaries of Andrei Codrescu. And your interview with the irrepressible Dr. Laura Schlessinger was a touch of class. She can come off like an Old Testament prophet at times, but is a sorely needed voice in a wilderness of moral relativism.

As a writer, I delighted in Shambhala publisher Sam Bercholz sharing his perspectives about applying and maintaining spiritual standards in choosing his list of books. I can only hope that my own work would meet Shambhala's standards.

The icing on the cake, Kenneth Moyle's review of *The Celestine Prophecy*, blending searing understatement with hyperbolic flights of literary carnage, expanded upon my own puzzlement about the book's appeal. Whether or not it expresses profound (or even accurate) spiritual wisdom, *The Celestine Prophecy* apparently fills a need for many readers, perhaps providing another step on their path.

A brilliant issue of your magazine. Keep them coming!

Dan Millman
via e-mail

LIGHTENING THE BURDEN

IT WAS EXHILARATING to find your magazine. My first contact with WIE was "Can Science Enlighten Us?" [Spring/Summer 1997]. The romance began with a more than skeptical thumbing through, but as David Bohm and Krishnamurti flashed across the pages ["Look for Truth No Matter Where It Takes You"], the time came to sit down with a cup of tea and read a few pages. An hour later it was clear that WIE was some kind of radical

phenomenon, a spiritual magazine with true depth and wisdom. By now, its well-worn pages and highlighted passages have ended up in a cozy spot amidst an assortment of Zen books. But could this solitary issue have been a fluke? Well, there'll be a next issue.

And of course, "The Modern Spiritual Predicament" [Fall/Winter 1997] consistently complemented the quality of its predecessor, the same uncompromising direction of the writers and subjects interviewed, breathing life into the essence of what enlightenment is—and is not. For most, separating the real from the unreal is a lifetime labor, and thanks to this issue of WIE, the ability to discriminate between translative and transformative [Ken Wilber, "A Spirituality that Transforms"] has lightened the burden. But with brightness comes darkening challenges. The clarity you offer is a serious spiritual catalyst on the path, intensifying, deep within, the Absolute's invitation to absorb the ego nature into the Source.

Ben Colimore
West Hollywood, California

LONG OVERDUE

I RECENTLY SAW your publication for the first time and was instantly absorbed by *all* of the articles and the clarity and directness of your scrutiny. *Finally* someone is showing some willingness to investigate and challenge some of the many and varied claims, technical approaches, goals and hard realities of spiritual exploration. Andrei Codrescu points out that we have a cultural problem with the "supermarket" of approaches available, and Georg Feuerstein expresses the "need for teachers and teachings to come together in some kind of ecumenical spirit so as to be more of a presence, especially in the media." Sam Bercholz says that Shambhala Publications has a publishing standard that they use to weed out publications that they feel may be more of "the snake oil variety."

This is exactly what I think the West is *long overdue* for: a council of elders, if you will—that perhaps could start as small as the mission statement of your magazine—that would begin to analyze, categorize, audit and to some degree accredit (like *Consumer Reports*) the entire spectrum of spiritual paths and practices, so that this most worthy of endeavors would be grounded in some responsible public standard, and so that seekers would have a benchmark by which to make informed choices. Isn't it time some concerted effort was made to reduce (or at least provide a roadmap through) the "noise" and confusion and tabloid nature of today's spiritual marketing?

James Chicoine
Birmingham, Alabama

MEDIA EGO

UPON COMPLETING my first issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* I was struck by several thoughts. Although the magazine is based in a spiritual family of traditions that are not my own, it is the first periodical I have read cover to

cover in many years. I particularly enjoyed how all the articles returned to common themes, resulting in a pluralistic, dialogic exploration of the issues being investigated. I hope you continue to include non-Eastern perspectives in future explorations.

Although I have the highest respect for Ken Wilber, I think dubbing him "a genius recognized in his own time" ("A Spirituality that Transforms") is an example of "making a spiritual package that is pleasing and saleable" (Andrei Codrescu, "The Disappearance of the Outside") that can easily melt in the New Age mind. It is a backhanded compliment to Mr. Wilber, since you (and he) have correctly described "his own time" as being consumed by superficiality, hype and the status quo. Wilber is an impassioned and perceptive commentator and synthetic thinker; however, an inauthentic elevation to the realm of genius sadly highlights the "media ego" of your publication and nothing more. True genius is quite well equipped to reveal itself and does not need to be ordained as such by journalists.

Finally, the title of your publication gave me pause. The question "What is enlightenment?" converts "enlightenment" into a noun, a state of being, when in reality it is a verb, a process of becoming. Enlightenment is not so much a question of "what is," but the how, when, where and who of enlightening. What about switching

the title to *How Is Enlightening?* (Just kidding—or am I?) Put me down for a two-year subscription anyway.

Steven Hecht
via e-mail

BROKEN CHAIN

I READ WITH GREAT INTEREST and growing excitement Ken Wilber's passionate and illuminating article in your last issue, and found the distinction that he makes between "translative" and "transformative" teachings important and clarifying. At the same time, it brought up some interesting questions. No one would deny that translative religion is the basic glue that holds societies together. But if we look at the condition that the world is in, couldn't we also say that the existence of different translative religions, all of which claim to be the ultimate interpretation of reality, contributes like nothing else to the conflict and war between societies? Not that religion is the source of the conflict and war in the world—that source lies in the psyche of almost every one of us—but it does seem that the reassurance that religions provide—that ours is the one and only true interpretation of reality—gives an extra-nasty edge to this condition.

Another question has to do with the effect that such translative teachings may have on the individual who begins to feel the precious longing for transcendence. Wouldn't they be better off if they had to struggle until they

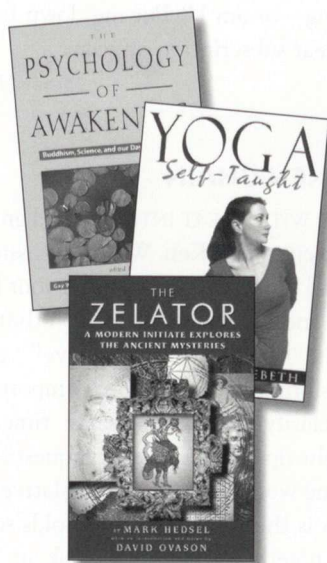
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found a genuine transformative teaching which would reinforce that longing, rather than a religion which, as is true in most cases, would stifle it with dogma? And even if most of us are not ready for a breakthrough, wouldn't many of us be able to bear some degree of the tension of a genuinely transformative teaching—the positive, creative tension between the possibility of total transformation and wherever we stand in relation to that possibility?

Maybe a distinction should be made, when speaking of translative teachings, between those in which a living genuine teacher maintains a clear and dynamic connection between “translative practices” and “ultimate transformation,” and those in which this connection has been lost and the ultimate goal of spiritual practice has been forgotten. In the first case, we can truly speak of an “integral approach to spirituality, which combines the best of . . . translative and transformative,” but in the latter (which unfortunately seems to be the more common type), the chain has been broken and the two do not meet.

Reading the interview with Deepak Chopra [“The Man with the Golden Tongue”], I was appalled by his answers to your razor-sharp questions, for they revealed the deep corruption and slick pretense that this man emanates. Chopra's goals are clearly materialistic—wealth, health, success, relationships—and stand, therefore, in diametric opposition to spiritual goals. What he advocates is nothing but a strategy for achieving these materialistic goals by pretending to ourselves that we are free from them and do not want anything for ourselves. This is warped and corrupt! Chopra preaches pretense and self-deception to whoever is willing to listen, and then skillfully diverts whatever spiritual impulse he may have awakened in his audience back toward the material world.

A. Freimann
Tel Aviv, Israel

AN OBLIGATION TO TRANSFORM

I THOROUGHLY ENJOYED your most recent issue, and can relate especially to the discussion of *translation and transformation* as my entire life has been transformed this last year. I believe that those of us who are called to question our lives in the most basic ways, those of us who are called to have the honesty and courage to be utterly transformed, have an *obligation* to surrender to that call completely, without attachments, without expectations. Lately I feel alone in this idea, but strangely content. And that is why I have reread your issue a couple of times! Thank you for affirming what I already knew in my heart and mind to be true.

Lisa Tretout
Longmont, Colorado

WHAT LOVE'S GOT TO DO WITH IT

I WAS QUITE DISAPPOINTED with Ken Wilber's article in your latest issue. His egghead approach to spirituality lacked that which he tried so desperately to describe. Spirituality is not simply intellectual, it is experiential. As the expression goes, you cannot think your way to heaven, which is what Wilber tries in vain to do. Intellectualizing that which is divine is nothing more than “spiritual masturbation.” Not once did Wilber mention the word “love,” and although he hinted at the concept of compassion, the hints were quite shallow indeed. Moreover, I found it nothing less than ironic how the discussion about the modern spiritual predicament was sandwiched between advertisements for books, lectures and seminars on spiritual enlightenment. A mixed message?

Brian Luke Seaward
Longmont, Colorado

MIXED MESSAGES

I VERY MUCH ENJOYED the most recent issue of *What Is Enlightenment?*, which

contained several excellent and informative interviews. I did experience a bit of cognitive dissonance, however, in noticing that several of the ads in the journal itself were for groups who, arguably, are bowdlerizing spiritual traditions in precisely the ways being criticized by some of the people who were interviewed. Perhaps there is no easy way around this issue, and I'm sure you've wrestled with it. Perhaps the bottom line is that we're in the *kali yuga* [dark age] and ought not to expect much more than we're really capable of.

Keep up the good work!

Michael E. Zimmerman
Department of Philosophy, Tulane University
New Orleans, Louisiana

I RECENTLY READ a copy of your latest issue. Your magazine promotes the very things that it decries—dilution of spirituality, the “enlightenment business.”

Awakening has its own agenda.

Mike Flatt
via e-mail

HURRAH FOR YOUR COMMENTARY on the hocus pocus of New Age spirituality. But is there not a hint of hypocrisy in disseminating your message through the use of advertising dollars provided by New Age merchants and spiritual charlatans? When I read *What Is Enlightenment?* with its abundant free-flow of adjectives like “radical,” “challenging” and “uncompromising,” I keep wondering how this translates into the nitty-gritty of how we deal with the material world. For instance, I noticed that about thirty percent of your current issue is taken up by advertising. Do you have a long-term business plan in which advertising will play a crucial role, or is this just a way to get started?

Advertising seems to be a particularly thorny issue. On the one hand you can have an “open door” and offer space to anyone willing to pay—irrespective of the possibly dubious nature

of what they are trying to sell. Or, you can vet the ads and then end up perhaps wrongly creating the impression that as a magazine you are actually trying to promote everything that is being advertised. Or, you can try to steer some kind of middle course or “acceptable compromise” between the extremes of promotion and prostitution. And this then begs the question which so many people have to grapple with every day in their efforts to make a living: Is there such a thing as an “acceptable” compromise?

In the context of your ongoing exploration of enlightenment, much of what I've said may seem to focus unduly on the mundane, but ultimately, isn't this the real testing ground, the place where it becomes obvious whether we do in fact practice what we preach? If the editors of *What Is Enlightenment?* are hoping to challenge the legitimacy of spiritual consumerism, why do they so willingly set up shop in the same marketplace? When Jesus went into the temple, he didn't just try to shout over the heads of the money-grubbing traders; he overturned their tables!

Paul Woodward
via e-mail

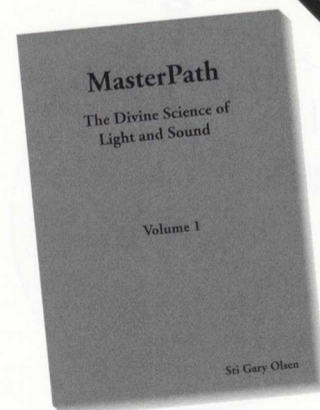
Editors' response:

We must admit we were a little surprised to suddenly receive so many letters questioning our use of advertising as a way to generate funding. While the question of whether or not to include advertising (and if so, how much and from whom) is indeed an issue we have discussed at great length, we had hoped that our readers would understand the vital role advertising plays in the life of a small, independent magazine. To illustrate the often challenging economic realities of periodical publishing, here is a look at some of the facts and figures behind the production of What Is Enlightenment?

First, for those unfamiliar with magazine publishing, it may come as a surprise to learn that sales revenues never come

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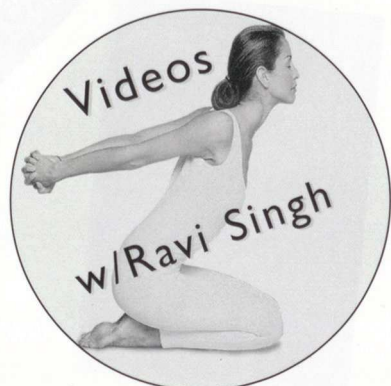
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close to covering even the most basic production costs. Thus, in order to bridge the enormous gap between sales revenues and expenses, magazines must raise additional money either by selling advertising, or through the financial support of charitable foundations and individuals.

In our case, even with an entirely volunteer staff, our sales revenues cover only about 30 percent of the bare costs of production, marketing and distribution. Another 25 percent is paid for by advertising, leaving a deficit of approximately 45 percent for which we depend entirely on charitable contributions. While we are actively seeking major benefactors to help us cover our costs, we have not as yet received any offers to underwrite a significant portion of our production costs.

With interest in our magazine growing by leaps and bounds, all of our costs are also increasing rapidly. So, rather than being in a position to reduce our reliance on advertising, as some of the above letters suggest, we actually need both to sell more advertising and to ask a greater number of our readers to make charitable contributions. This is particularly the case in light of our goal of producing four issues per year (as opposed to the current two issues). To make the leap to publishing quarterly, we would need funds not only to cover double our current production costs but also to pay salaries for some of our currently volunteer staff. For those of you who appreciate the work we are already doing and would like to see us on the stands or in your mailbox more often, we hope you will consider helping us out.

How can you help? First, if you do not already subscribe to WIE, please do. Although the magazine actually costs you slightly less when you subscribe, a much higher percentage of the selling price comes directly to us. Second, you can make a tax-deductible donation. Whether you can afford \$10, \$100 or \$1000, we would be extremely grateful for any help you can give. And third, if you know anyone who might be interested in underwriting our effort to bring a serious and courageous spir-

itual inquiry into print, please take the time to let them know about our work. We are excited about what we have been able to accomplish with the limited resources we've had available to us, and are eager to see where we can go with a larger stream of support.

On a final note, as the above letters point out, of course not all of those who advertise in our magazine would agree with the content of our editorials. However, like most publications, we have always operated on the assumption that the printing of an advertisement does not constitute an endorsement.

We appreciate your letters. And thank you for your ongoing interest in and support of What Is Enlightenment?

STAR-SPANGLED BLINDERS

IT IS A SHAME that your publication has not yet transcended its American origins and perspective. To read *What Is Enlightenment?*, one would think that Western materialism and its spiritual wasteland are an exclusively American phenomenon. It is, in fact, a worldwide phenomenon. Western civilization, based largely on Christianity, is now in its decadent phase, and we see the results all around us: the total lack of any sense of meaning, purpose or values; the tendency to make pseudo-religions out of any conceivable trend (particularly "political correctness"); the obsession with sex and physical attractiveness; the perpetuation of socially destructive policies; and the proliferation of New Agers who can't tell self-transcendence from self-indulgence.

In short, the spiritual wasteland that we see all around us is not an American phenomenon. America is a little further down the track of decay than the rest of us, while other countries, like my own, follow with a blindness equaled only by their enthusiasm: a classic case of the blind leading the blind.

W A T E R M U S E TM
HOME AND OFFICE FOUNTAINS

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FOR FREE NEW DESIGN BROCHURE

In spite of what Americans think, America is not the center of the universe. If you have any interest in improving your publication, the first thing you could do is take off the star-spangled blinders.

Neil Paton
Sydney, Australia

HOMOSEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY

THANK YOU so much for the work you are doing. Though I have plenty to think about from your last issue, I eagerly await the next one. I've heard that the subject is "Sex and Spirituality," and I wanted to make a request. I realize that you are certainly well into creating and designing the issue, but I was hoping that you might in some way mention homosexuality. Being gay, it is a rather selfish request, but I have found that this subject is generally ignored, and for myself, the confusion, shame and lack of recognition around homosexuality have served only to further the sense of isolation. Luckily, I have begun in a powerful way to see through the trap of the "homosexual distinction," but I think that many might benefit very much if your magazine, which has so much integrity, talked at least in a peripheral way about it—not to make homosexuality special, but for the sake of seeing through the inevitable conditioning, which is so rarely mentioned. That's my two cents!

James Sealand
via e-mail

Editors' response:

Several times during the course of creating this issue, we considered directly addressing homosexuality in relation to spirituality, either by soliciting an article from or doing an interview with one of the increasing number of writers who are dealing with this subject. In the end, however, we felt that to address questions relating to sexual orientation would be straying from our theme, which is the spiritual aspirant's re-

lationship to the force of sexuality itself. Our goal was to create an issue of relevance to everyone—regardless of sexual orientation. We hope we have succeeded.

POINTS OF CONTENTION

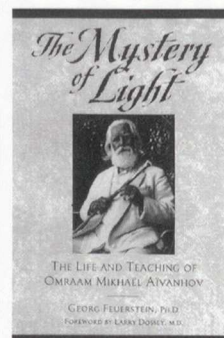
I ENJOYED YOUR ISSUE on "The Modern Spiritual Predicament." Thank you for publishing it. I would like to enter into the dialogue by responding to some points of contention that came up in the pieces about Deepak Chopra.

It seems that one major difference between Chopra and the interviewer, Susan Bridle, has to do with whether the spiritual journey is hard or easy (Chopra portraying it as easy, Bridle as hard). I think it is both. Certainly the work on the personality is very, very hard. We must face every fear, every attachment and every wound if we are to make personality transparent to true nature. Yet it is also my experience that we fall into Being when we are relaxed and open. This can be obscured when we try too hard or hold onto images or ideas about spiritual work. Ideas can get in the way. As I wrote in my book *The Tao of Contemplation*, if spiritual work is portrayed as only stern and dry, those with a joyful heart will not be as interested.

A second difference between Chopra and Bridle relates to the danger of self-interest. While I agree that authentic transcendent spirituality involves giving up self-interest, it is worth considering how this happens. Can we meet some of the needs of self without dangerously inflating it? Is self only and always the enemy? It is my experience that the self will literally beg to lay itself down for the sake of Being when we have been deeply touched by our essential nature and understand that it is the identification with and activity of the self that is the barrier. Ego dissolves when we see through it or when our love for true nature has

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The Mystery of Light



by Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D.
Foreword by Larry Dossey, M.D.

The Mystery of Light is the first book-length account of the remarkable life and teachings of Bulgarian-born Omraam Mikhael Aïvanhov, one of the greatest Western spiritual adepts of this century.

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—Larry Dossey, M.D., Author, *Meaning and Medicine*



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INTRODUCTION

What Is the Relationship between Sexuality and Spirituality?

BY THE EDITORS

WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP between sexuality and spiritual freedom? Where does sex fit into the pursuit of ego transcendence, the quest for perfect enlightenment? When six months ago we started our research for this special issue of *What Is Enlightenment?*, we could never have imagined how far our journey would take us. Our encounter with the overwhelming diversity of approaches to sexuality thriving in the modern spiritual world turned out to be a wild, often shocking, occasionally surreal, and always concept-challenging adventure that, as of this writing, still has our heads spinning.

Almost everyone has something to say about sex. In fact, in beginning our exploration, we were intrigued to find that the most compelling thinking on sexuality came to us from contemporary sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists and feminists whose willingness to question deeply held cultural assumptions in their pursuit of the truth about sex has led them to some provocative and even revolutionary insights. But while this made for engaging reading and many intriguing discussions lasting late into the night, we quickly realized that in order to stay focused on the subject at hand, we would have to resist many a temptation to venture down yet another fascinating but ultimately tangential avenue. It was clear that

to really find out what sex has to do with spirit, we would have to seek out spiritual teachers and thinkers with insight and experience in this arena.

We didn't have to look far; in the modern spiritual world, sex is a hot topic. "Sacred Sex" workshops abound. Dozens of books, tapes and videos describing the ancient Eastern sexual practices of tantra and Taoism can be found in almost any bookstore. And popular spiritual magazines routinely feature smiling couples in loving embrace touting the power of the sexual relationship as a spiritual path. Yet while we had all been exposed to the popular face of today's idiosyncratic sex-meets-spirit culture, it wasn't until we jumped in with both feet that we began to have any idea *how* strange the attempt to unite sex and spirit can be.

First, there was Father Andrew Greeley—Catholic priest, sociologist, newspaper columnist, vocal advocate of Church policy reform—and best-selling author of over forty sexually explicit romance novels.

Then there was the German TV talk show featuring an animated discussion between Dr. Ruth, two tantra therapists, a porn star, an actor-turned-Catholic-priest and a Protestant minister who, upon admitting that his wife was the only person he had ever slept with, was met with

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BY ANDREW COHEN

AFTER TRAVELING AND TEACHING around the world nonstop for the past twelve years, I think I can say with confidence that for most spiritual seekers today, SEX IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN GOD. I have been married most of that time. Earlier in my life, when I was seeking for liberation with great intensity, there was a point when I began to feel uncomfortable with what had become a fundamentally mechanical and conditioned relationship to the experience of sex and lust within myself. It gradually became apparent to me that I knew little freedom in relationship to this at times overpowering force that could rise up out of nowhere and completely capture my attention—whether I wanted it to or not. This was disturbing.

Several living teachers from the East whom I was deeply influenced by at that time spoke about the significance of transcending the sexual impulse and/or conserving the sexual energy itself in order to remain one-pointed and undivided in one's pursuit of spiritual enlightenment. Also, I became aware of the fact that many spiritual giants throughout human history had for one reason or another chosen to be celibate.

As my spiritual yearning grew, slowly but surely I began to find the romantic/sexual experience to be an an-

noying distraction. The more my passion and attention were drawn to that infinite unknowable source within, the less interested I became in bearing the emotional intensity and personal focus that the romantic/sexual drama almost always involves. And as I was paying closer attention to my experience in general, it became apparent that the enticing promise that the sexual/romantic impulse always offered was rarely fulfilled. And even when it was, even *that* proved to be a distraction from the longing for spiritual union that always returned to the center of my consciousness when the intensity of the romantic/sexual interlude subsided. I longed for simplicity. I longed for the end of the interminable confusion and distraction that the romantic/sexual experience always seemed to include. And because I recognized myself to be a conditioned automaton, rather than a free human being, in relationship to the sexual impulse—*whatever that was*—I decided to be celibate for a time.

Over the three-year period that I was celibate I learned more about sexuality than I had from all of my previous sexual experiences. I learned about the enormous power that sexuality has in its relationship to the mind. Most importantly, I learned two things: first, I saw through paying ever closer attention to my own inner experience

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INTRODUCTION

continued



1
BY THE EDITORS

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unanimous indignation and forced to defend his apparently sacrilegious belief that he “had not missed anything.”

And then there was the night we watched the *Sacred Sex* video. An inside look at a “hands-on” week-long “tantra intensive” in Maui, the video also features interviews with and demonstrations by several of the leading figures in today’s sacred sex movement, including former porn star Annie Sprinkle, whose leave-nothing-to-the-imagination sex-education nightclub act culminates in an onstage grand-finale orgasm dedicated to world peace. After this, the sight of Margot Anand spitting wine all over her boyfriend during ritual foreplay seemed almost conservative.

Wondering if such adventurism might simply be a product of our sex-infatuated modern world, we consulted the history books. However, in reading the Buddhist Vinaya, or monastic rules of conduct, we learned that the Buddha had found it necessary to make explicit rules to curtail behavior far more outrageous than anything taught in a modern tantra workshop—including copulation with animals, skulls and corpses. Beginning to suspect that we might have missed a chapter in our study of ancient religious practices, we turned to Buddhist scholar Miranda Shaw, who confirmed our suspicions when she informed us that in traditional Tibetan tantra, as an act of devotion to and worship of their female partners, male practitioners were expected to feel honored to ingest *any* of their partner’s bodily fluids.

If all of this seems too strange to be true, we would do well to remember that this is after all a world in which the star of *American Gigolo* and *Looking for Mister Goodbar* is a devoted disciple of the world’s second most famous celibate. (Speaking of Hollywood, we tried several times to

get Madonna to talk with us, and were pleasantly surprised to hear that, although too busy to give an interview now, she did find the magazine “very enlightening” and offered to speak with us in the future.)

While modern attempts to bring sex and spirit under one roof take a bewildering variety of forms, the fundamental view pervading the contemporary spiritual scene seems to be that sex, long seen as the enemy of the spirit, is actually its ally. This sex-positive spiritual view holds that to truly become whole, we must liberate our sexuality from the chains of guilt, shame and repression, and allow it to find full expression as a natural, healthy and even sacred part of life. One of the most vocal and eloquent proponents of this “new paradigm” is ex-Mother Meera devotee turned prophet of passion Andrew Harvey, who states in his book *Return of the Mother*: “It’s lethal and obscene to keep alive the old patriarchal fears about sexuality. What is needed is for the body to be blessed. Why? Because we’re in it. Why would we be here if we were not meant to love and celebrate our bodies, and to find out that sexuality can be the physical grammar of the love-making of the soul? . . . When you finally learn how to love and celebrate your body and your sexuality, it’s then that the full miracle of life becomes obvious to you.”

This belief has become so widespread that today the spiritual practice of celibacy—considered for millennia to be a profound, powerful and even crucial aspect of spiritual life by Christians, Buddhists and Hindus alike—seems to have all but fallen by the wayside. In fact, it’s difficult even to find mention of celibacy in contemporary discussion, other than in debates over whether it should still be a requirement for Catholic clergy. The modern consensus seems to be that in a psychologically enlightened

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BY ANDREW COHEN

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that most of what we think about the sexual experience has *very little to do with actuality*; and second, I recognized over and over and over again that there is absolutely *nothing personal* about sexual feelings. These discoveries were, have been, and continue to be very liberating.

For the true seeker of liberation from ignorance, the question is of course: *How does one realize objectivity* in relationship to that most powerful instinct, which by its very nature seems to possess a capacity to cause delusion

minded, who more often than not will not touch this question with a ten-foot pole. How many times, when I have brought up this subject in the most simple, honest and human terms, have I felt the unmistakable presence of the visceral *No* rise up from the crowd seated before me—and I'm a married man! How many times have I seen the shock and horror suddenly appear on otherwise warmhearted people's faces when they hear that some of my students have chosen to take a vow of celibacy for a few years?

**FOR THE MAJORITY OF THOSE WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES TO
BE SINCERE SEEKERS, THE FACT IS, SEX IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN GOD.**

like none other? It has been my experience over the last twelve years that this question is rarely asked, even by those who should be interested in cultivating some degree of sanity in relation to this explosive dimension of human life. Why is that? It is because for the majority of those who consider themselves to be sincere seekers, the fact is, *sex is indeed more important than God*. I have continually been amazed to discover that most of us are terrified to question the overwhelming significance that we blindly give to our sexual experience—even if it's not that great! Sex is in fact the sacred cow, the ultimate importance of which we rarely dare to question because we fear that, if we discover that it was not what we imagined it to be, *there would be nothing left*, no final refuge from the misery and torment of almost unending existential doubt. Why this has been so intriguing to me is that it is precisely those who profess interest in the spiritual dimension of reality, those who believe themselves to be truly open-

The fact is that the climate in the modern spiritual world, in spite of how it may appear, is *deeply conservative*. That conservatism is expressed as a collective rebelliousness that automatically condemns any "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts" as the manifestation of a patriarchal and fascist god. At the same time, there is little recognition that that rebelliousness in and of itself is the very rigidity and oversimplification of human experience that *always* blinds us to the radical depth that leads to liberating insight.

Is sex more important than God? As long as it is, it will be impossible for us not only to see clearly but also to live a human life that expresses profound sanity. It is always a mistake to underestimate the overwhelming power to create delusion that the sexual instinct possesses. In the end, unless that unknowable mystery alone is our only and final refuge in this very human life, we will not be able to navigate our way through the ever more subtle complexity of sexual experience and leave no trace. ■

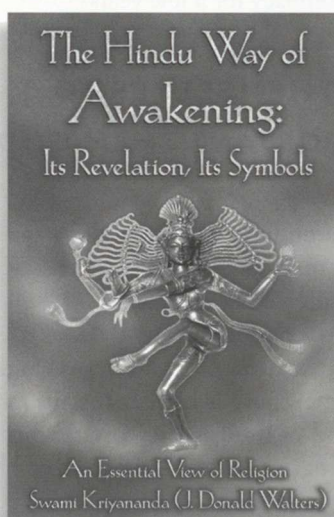
**OUR ENCOUNTER WITH THE OVERWHELMING DIVERSITY OF
APPROACHES TO SEXUALITY THRIVING IN THE MODERN SPIRITUAL
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SURREAL, AND ALWAYS CONCEPT-CHALLENGING ADVENTURE
THAT STILL HAS OUR HEADS SPINNING.**

culture such as ours, celibacy no longer has much relevance.

Most tantrists say there can be no enlightenment without sexual practice. Most celibates, on the other hand, say there is no chance of enlightenment without giving up sex altogether. Is sex really a path to enlightenment? Or is it essential to renounce our sexuality to attain the highest spiritual states?

Propelled headlong into the unknown by the force of these and other questions, we found ourselves careening, tumbling, gasping and laughing our way through the labyrinthine, fascinating and challenging exploration that ultimately became this issue. We spoke with some extraordinary individuals: Father Thomas Keating, Swami Chidananda and Bhante Henepola Gunaratana, whose moving descriptions of the fruits of celibacy evoke a sense of wonder and reverence at the potential for simplicity and purity of heart their practice holds; Barry Long and

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, whose inspired portrayals of the essence of sacred sexuality convey a palpable sense of how the spiritual vision can become manifest in the world; and Margot Anand and Miranda Shaw, whose fierce challenge of sexual taboos would force even the most progressive among us to question how free we really are from the grip of Victorian values. And we saw, one after another, our own ideas and assumptions stretched and expanded as our experience showed us again and again that, in this arena perhaps more than any, things are rarely as they seem. If anything has become absolutely clear to us over these past four months, it is that sexuality is an unavoidable fact of human life, that navigating its often turbulent waters is a challenge for all of us, and that, for anyone intent on finding his or her way to spiritual freedom, it is a primal and potent force that *has* to be reckoned with. ■

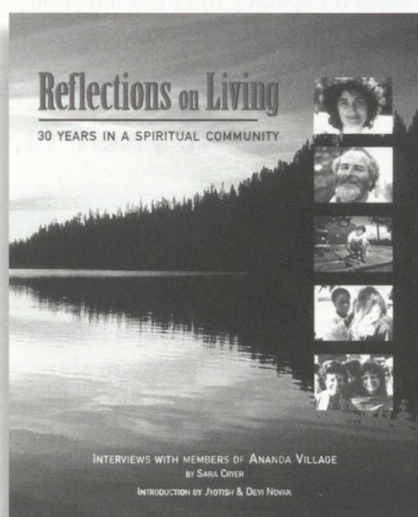


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The Promise of Perfection

by Andrew Cohen

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE, taken from a public talk given by Andrew Cohen at the Harvard Divinity School in late October 1997, provides the essential underpinning, framework and context for this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* With bold simplicity, he articulates the relationship between our most fundamental desire to have and possess for ourselves, the compelling excitement these desires elicit in us, and the enormous potential for suffering and confusion they engender. Andrew Cohen's words echo and renew timeless teachings on the causes of human suffering and the end of that suffering. The distinctions he makes are vital to any contemporary inquiry into sexuality and spirituality because it is only from the perspective of such perennial wisdom that this endlessly confusing subject can be seen with extraordinary and liberating clarity.

The Promise of Perfection

I think that one of the most difficult things in human life is to be able to see things clearly, or to be able to see things as they are. And after teaching continuously for twelve years now, I think I can say with a great deal of confidence that it is the ability to see things clearly, to see things as they actually are, that even the most sincere seekers struggle with enormously.

The hardest part of spiritual practice is to get to the point where we can actually trust our interpretation of our own experience. We are all constantly in the process of interpreting our experience, and sometimes we are aware of that process and sometimes we're not. But whether we're consciously aware of it or not, the fact remains that we are all almost constantly interpreting our experience from one moment to the next, and if a human being wants to be free, if a human being wants to be able to know the truth, and if a human being wants to be able to live in a way that expresses and demonstrates that depth of perception, then of course it is absolutely essential for that individual to cultivate the ability to see things as they actually are.

Now we often hear in the spiritual literature words such as "illusion." We're often told that what we're seeing is not real, and it can be very difficult to understand what this kind of thing means—what it actually means when we are told that we're not seeing things clearly, that we're not seeing things as they are, and even worse, that what most of us are perceiving may only be "an illusion." If that were true, it would be something that would be a little bit intimidating or even frightening; it's the kind of thing that, I think for me, if it were true, would scare me to death.

So what does it actually mean? What does it mean when we hear these kinds of words spoken, when we're told that we're not seeing clearly, not seeing things as they are, and that as a matter of fact what we're seeing is illusion, that what we're actually perceiving so much of the time is illusory? If something is illusory, it means that it literally does not exist. It means that what we are per-

ceiving—experiencing with our mind and our senses—really has no independent self-existence, that it does not exist independently of our own personal experience or perception, that it does not actually exist outside our own mind and field of sensual experience. It means that what we're perceiving is something that we're creating—somehow, in some way, for some reason—through and with our own mind and our own senses, and that we're projecting it onto the world around us, or onto particular objects, places and individuals.

Now I really do believe that most of us, even though we're rarely aware of it, live a great deal of our lives very much lost in and distracted by psychological and sensual experiences that have no independent reality outside the field of our own inner experience, which means that a large part of what many of us experience in our own inner personal sphere has no objective reality and is something that we actually create. And I can tell you what my own experience has taught me and continues to reveal to me about this. It's quite simple, but it's also very tricky.

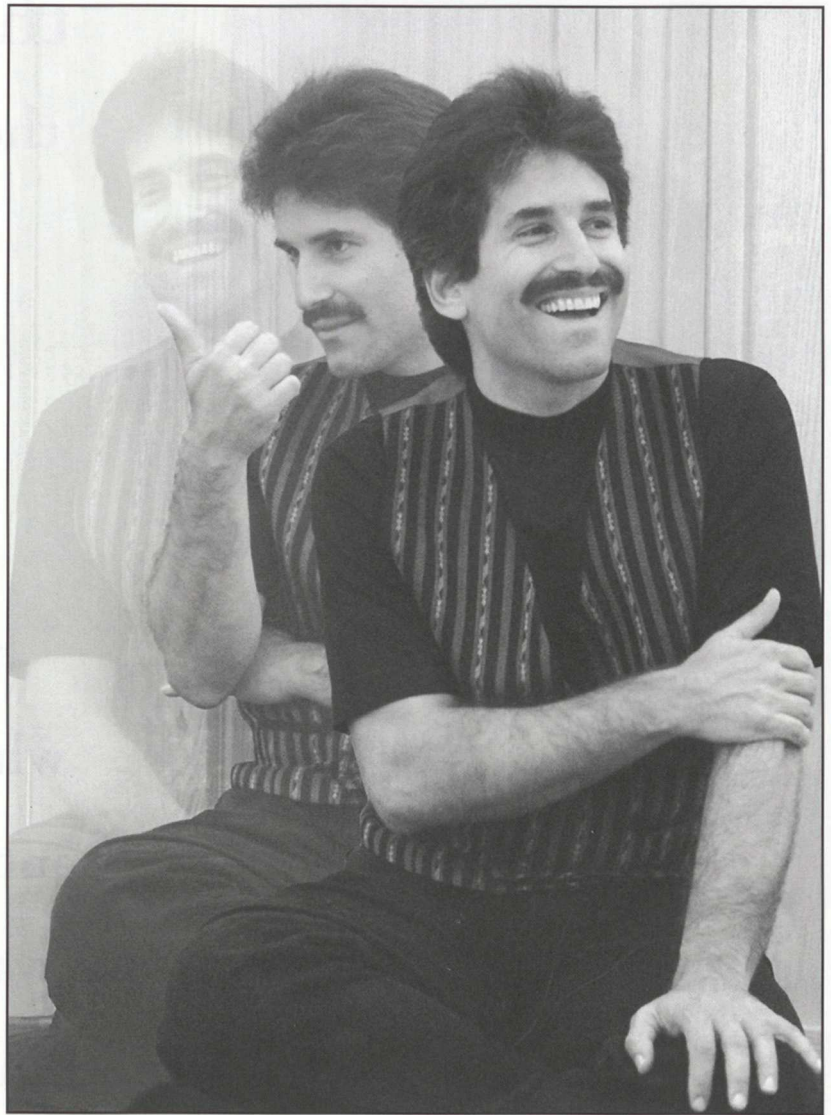
What creates this continuity of illusory thought, this illusory stream of thought and sense perception—this movement of inner experience which has no independent self-existence and which does not exist outside our own personal sphere—is an endless craving, an endless *wanting* for personal gratification. This is very simple and may be even very obvious to some of you, but the fact that it may sound very simple, and may even appear very obvious, does not mean that its implications are not unthinkably profound. Because the fact is that in order to truly understand the implications of what it is that I'm speaking

by Andrew Cohen

about, it is necessary to look very, very deeply into our own personal experience.

For example, you might hear the kind of talk I'm giving today simply intellectually—in other words, “Does what I'm hearing make sense? Is it intellectually sound?” Some people may listen to it that way and if intellectually it makes sense to them they might say, “Hmm, that makes sense; that's very nice.” Or not; maybe it doesn't make sense, and they might therefore conclude that it's not worth listening to. But listening in that way to the kind of talk that I'm giving is not really enough. For what I'm speaking about to have any impact, for one to experience its liberating potential—and there's an inherent power to liberate in what I'm speaking about if one lets it in—we have to be willing not only to listen, but simultaneously to *look* very, very deeply *as* we're listening. We have to be willing to look very deeply into our own experience of our own self in this moment, and hopefully in every moment, because then we're listening not only from the point of view of “Does this make sense?”—which of course is important—but we're also looking very deeply into our own self and our own experience in order to see what it really means.

Now, the experience of perfect peace, perfect happiness, is the result of the *cessation* of this endless craving for



oneself, this endless, endless, endless wanting for one's very own self. But once again, in order to truly recognize this, we have to look into our own experience to find out whether what I'm saying has any profound and significant relevance or not, because if this is merely an intellectual exercise it's not really that important. But if we dare to look very deeply into our own experience, we find that as



“As much as our ego
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we wanted absolutely
nothing from the world
or from anyone else.”

much as our ego hates to admit it, the truth is that those times in our lives when we have experienced the greatest happiness, the deepest peace, have been moments when for some reason or other we *ceased to want*, moments when for some reason or other—it doesn't matter why—we wanted absolutely nothing from the world or from anyone else. I don't know if I can put it any more simply than that.

Of course in the world that we live in—the world of the ego, the world of the separate personal self—equating happiness with wanting nothing doesn't make sense because in the world of the ego and the personality, it is the wanting of this and the getting of this, the wanting of that and the getting of that, that generates anticipation, intense longing and excitement. And we find that it is usually when we *want* something or someone that we experience ourselves as being more alive, because we are very much in touch with this drive within ourselves to *have*.

Now you have to understand that this *wanting*, this compulsion to *have*, is experienced by the personality, by the ego, as a positive thing, as a very *good* thing. "I want for *me*. I want a particular object for *myself*. When I think about that object it makes me feel *excited*"—whatever it is, whatever beautiful thing it is that we're interested in—you know, a new house, a new car. And of course it's even easier to get in touch with the emotional significance of what I'm speaking about if we look into what it means to want another—another individual, another human being—especially if we look, for example, at the romantic/sexual arena. When we really want another person, what we perceive them to be in the midst of that intense longing and wanting is infinitely more than what they actually are. Because as we all know, falling in love is one kind of experience—a delightful experience—and falling out of love is another. And it very rarely happens, if ever, that we remain so deeply in love that we continue to find the mere presence of the other individual intoxicating, that we continue to find the mere sight of them mesmerizing. Because of course after we get to know them intimately and spend some time with them, really get to know them as a human being, it's almost impossible to sustain that experience of intoxication. We may still find them attractive, and we still may feel tremendous affection for them, but that special something, that magic, is gone.

If you want a new car, if you really want a new car and then decide that there's a certain car that you want, then you think about that car quite a bit and when you see that car you *love* it. You love everything about it; just to look at it makes you feel special. And when you think about the moment when you're going to buy that car you get

very excited. It's very interesting to realize that, if we dare to look at this phenomenon from a certain point of view, there's not that much difference between falling in love with someone and really wanting to buy a new car.

The particular aspect of our experience that I'm trying to bring to light in this way is that when certain objects appear in consciousness—things or people, for example—they can appear to be more than they actually are. And this is the point. This is a specific aspect of our experience that I think is very important to make the effort to become aware of. When certain objects in consciousness appear to be more than they actually are—and just to keep it simple here, I've been narrowing it down to things and people but it could just as easily be thoughts or places or anything else—it means that when we perceive that object or that person, *we are experiencing more than what is actually there*. We're *seeing* the car, we're *seeing* the other individual, but because both of them are objects of our desire or our longing, we're also seeing *more* than what's actually there, more than just a car and more than just an attractive person, and that *more* that we're seeing has very little to do with the object we're perceiving—very little to do with the car, very little to do with the attractive individual. It has only to do with what we are imagining. It is what we are imagining—what we are adding to the picture—that makes our nerves dance and our hearts beat a little bit faster. It's very important to understand this, *very important*. Because of course what we're seeing does not actually exist. It has no independent self-existence, no objective reality outside the sphere of our own mind and senses.

We may have walked by that car in the window of a car dealership every day for a year and then suddenly, one day, something happens, and we find ourselves looking at it differently. Now every time we see that car we stop and we look; it has an effect on our mind and on our senses. We find it exciting and thrilling. It's a sensual experience just to look at it, and there's an *excitement* in that. Before, we didn't notice it, but something has happened inside us and now *that* particular car has become very special. It's the same way with people. You can see certain people every day, and then suddenly something happens, and *then*. . . . In fact, I think it's actually very revealing that from a certain point of view our experiences with the car and with the person are not that different.

As I said before, what "illusion" means is that we are experiencing something with our mind and senses that does not actually exist, that has no independent self-existence. It does not exist outside the field of our own mind and senses—we're *creating it*. When that magical some-

“When that magical something happens —when suddenly the car

thing happens, when suddenly the car is not just a car but “the car *I want*,” or when suddenly the individual is not just whoever they are or have been but “the person *I want*,” in that moment, and in all the moments that follow, a very significant part of what it is that we’re experiencing has nothing to do with the object itself, but only has to do with the power of our own desire to create the illusion of *perfection*. Perfection, you see? Because when you don’t *have* it, when you *want* it but don’t yet own it, when all you can do is stand in front of the window and look at it, you *know* it’s much more than just a nice car. There’s something about that car that is simply magnetic. And what that something is, of course, is the promise of perfection. And it’s exactly the same kind of experience when the object of our wanting is another human being.

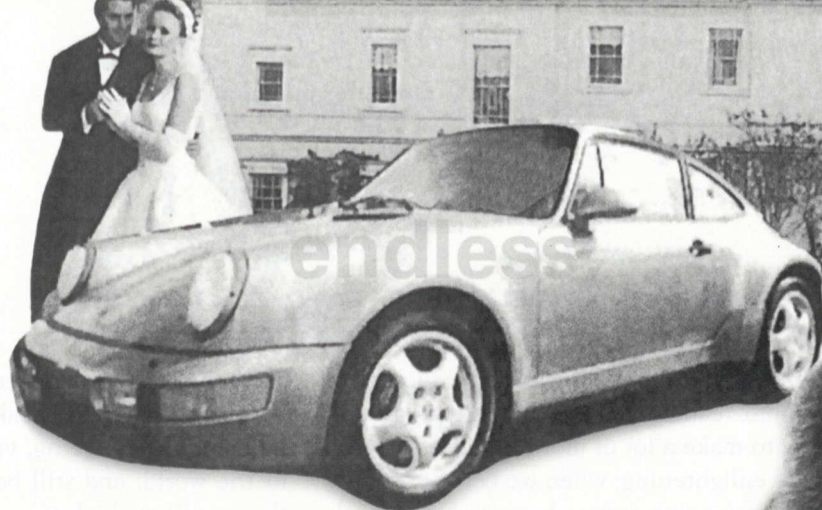
In the promise of perfection, you see, and in the wanting of that experience of perfection from sources outside ourselves—from things, from people, from objects outside our own selves—there’s a psychophysical experience, a titillation, a thrill. That’s part of what the fun is, part of the thrill of falling in love, part of the thrill of buying that car. What is so exciting about it is that there’s literally a psychophysical experience in the wanting itself. And that’s why, as I said earlier, it’s almost impossible for the ego or the personality to recognize the experience of wanting as a bad thing. *Because the experience of wanting in and of itself is quite thrilling.* To recognize a beautiful car and to make the decision that you want it and that you’re going to have it causes a light to go on inside yourself, so that whenever you think about that car you feel warm inside. There’s a sense of fullness. And the experience of falling in love with another person you want to have and possess is identical. You merely think about that person and then a light goes on inside, so that even just the thought of them seems like it is almost enough.

So it’s important to understand that for the personality, for the ego, *wanting* in the way that I’m describing is perceived as a very positive experience, and the reason it’s experienced as positive is that it’s *thrilling*. It’s thrilling to want a beautiful thing or a beautiful person, because it causes one’s nerves and mind to begin to dance.

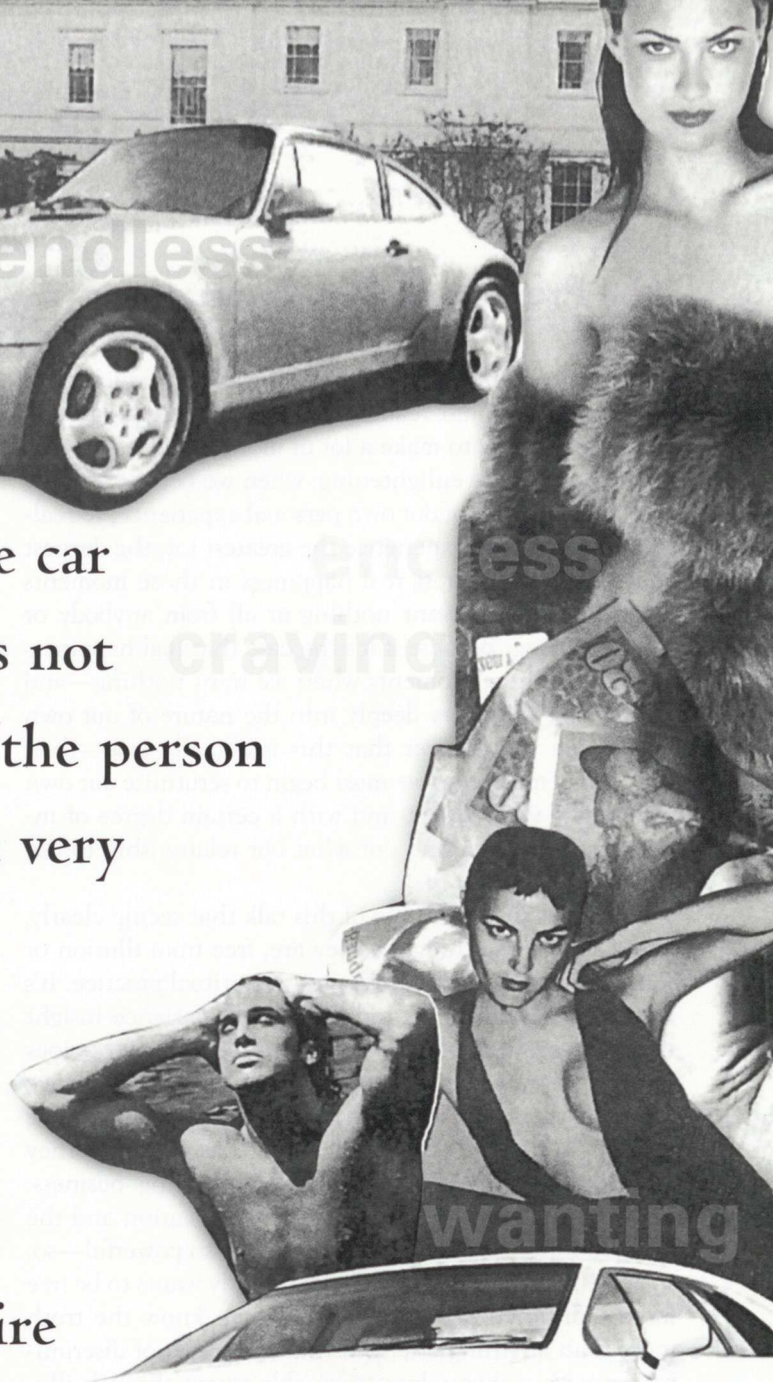
Now of course once we get the car and we’ve had it for a while, it no longer seems to give us the same kind of pleasure. As a matter of fact, now to our surprise—maybe it has been only a few months since we purchased it—we may suddenly find that we have our eye on another one. And now we feel frustrated. And it’s the same when we fall in love. Once we actually get to know the person, we may still feel that they’re a wonderful person, but it’s the not the same as before we had them, before we really had them, before we were able to possess them, or at least to experience the illusion of possessing them.

So now all we see is just a nice car or a nice person. That magical something extra that made all the difference is no longer present. And my point is that what was so attractive to us, what was so irresistible to us about the car or about the individual, that special mysterious X-factor that caused us to experience such enormous anticipation that we were suddenly willing to take the risk of saying, “I’m going to get that car,” or, “I’m going to ask that person to marry me,” has little or nothing to do with what’s actually there. Most of what we’re responding to has to do with whatever it is that we’re imagining, which does not actually exist and is in fact illusory and therefore completely unreal.

What’s so captivating, then, in this kind of experience could not be the *having* of the individual or the car because once we are actually able to possess the object of our desire, we usually experience a process of gradual or perhaps even immediate disillusionment. In fact it’s very



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significant and can be very enlightening to discover that the most exciting part of the whole process we've just gone through was in the wanting itself: *It was the wanting itself that was so thrilling!* You see, to the mind, to the ego and to the personality, happiness is equated with the thrill of *wanting* to possess, of *wanting* to acquire, of *wanting* to have for oneself. "I want that car for myself! I want that person for my very own *self*! I want them for *me*!" And inherent in this wanting for oneself is a tremendous thrill that the ego and the personality experience as excite-

ment, and which causes the mind and the senses to begin to dance. The heart begins to beat faster and faster, and to the mind and the personality this *wanting* in and of itself is perceived as an ecstatic experience.

And if you look at the world that we live in, you see immediately what it is that we're all encouraged to do: We're all *encouraged* to be endlessly obsessed with objects and with people, with wanting to possess people and wanting to possess objects. But this is not the fault of the culture we're living in; this kind of thing is part of the

The Promise of Perfection

human condition. And you can't blame it on advertising, either. Someone just realized what we're really up to and figured out a way to make a lot of money.

It can be very enlightening, when we begin to deeply consider the truth of our own personal experience, to realize that in fact we experience the greatest joy, the deepest peace and the greatest real happiness in those moments when we actually want nothing at all from anybody or from anything. Because if it's the case that real happiness is found in those moments when we want nothing—and if when we look very deeply into the nature of our own experience we discover that this is actually true—then that would mean that we must begin to scrutinize our own experience very closely, and with a certain degree of intensity, in order to find out what our relationship to our experience actually is.

I said at the beginning of this talk that seeing clearly, being able to see things as they are, free from illusion or self-deception, is the hardest part of spiritual practice. It's not that difficult for an individual to experience insight now and again, and it's not that difficult for a serious seeker to have some kind of experience of transcendence now and then if that's what they really want. But to be able to see things clearly, to be able to see things as they actually are—this is a very, very challenging business. Because, you see, the experience of intoxication and the promise inherent in that intoxication is so powerful—so, so powerful. Only an individual who truly wants to be free more than anything else, who wants to know the truth more than anything else, will find the power of discrimination within themselves to be able to cut through illusion. Most of us won't be able to do it because we are going to be too lost in the intoxicating experience of wanting itself.

Because the thing is: *We don't want not to want*, you see? This is what the problem is; we don't want that. A lot of people say, "I just want to be happy, I just want to live a simple life, I really do"—but of course it isn't true because in order for that to happen, *we have to not want the wanting*. It's only when the wanting diminishes that we can begin to experience the fullness that is already there. Otherwise we'll never be aware of it because we're so captivated by, intoxicated by—endlessly, over and over and over again—the experience of wanting.

In this world, in this miserable world, it is the experience of wanting, the thrill of wanting, that most people

are completely hypnotized by, and intelligence has no bearing on what I'm speaking about. You can be a very intelligent human being, very well read, a powerful person in the world, and still be utterly and completely lost in this wanting which is such a big part of the fundamental problem of the human condition. And as long as we allow ourselves to be hypnotized and hypnotically distracted by the wanting of this and the wanting of that, and by the illusion of perfection that is the promise that we're entertaining, we will never be able to see things clearly, we will never be able to see things as they really are—not for more than a couple of moments, and definitely not when it really counts.

It may be easy to see clearly if you're sitting on a meditation cushion, but the point is that there are certain times in life that count more than others, moments in life when it matters a lot more that we're actually able to see things clearly, able to see things as they are—precisely those moments, in fact, when we experience this wanting with the greatest intensity. Those are the moments, you see? Because when any one of us experiences that kind of wanting with a great intensity, we don't know what we're going to do. When we begin to want something that badly, we may do whatever we need to do to get it because our desire for that object has become so compelling, so thrilling, so difficult to resist that we're willing to lie or cheat—not only to other people but to ourselves—in order to *possess* that object, *possess* that person. So this matter of being able to see clearly, being able to discriminate between the real and the unreal, between truth and falsehood, is a lot more important in those moments when we experience that wanting with the greatest intensity; it's a lot more important in those moments than when we feel relatively peaceful. This is very important to understand: It's one thing to be able to sit very quietly, very still, but it's something else altogether to find oneself very much in the midst of the intensity of this wanting. When we are in the midst of this wanting, can we cut through it? If we can, nothing's going to happen. But if we can't, then, as they say, entire universes are born.

So this matter of seeing clearly, and being able to see illusion for what it is, is entirely dependent upon our fundamental relationship to life. For most of us, our fundamental relationship to life is essentially driven by the unending desire to have and to possess for ourselves—"I want for *me*." For most of us, this is our *modus operandi*;

wanting for ourselves is what our fundamental relationship to all of our experience is based on. As long as this remains the case it will be very difficult, if not almost impossible, for us to be able to cut through illusion, for us to be able to see things as they actually are, for us to be able to distinguish clearly between truth and falsehood for more than a few brief moments every now and again. Why? Because our fundamental relationship to life is this wanting itself; our very reason for being is: "*I want.*" It really is, in the end, "*I want, therefore I am.*" For most of us, this is the foundation of our entire relationship to life.

The way to be able to see clearly, the way to be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood, is discovered not simply by trying to make the *effort* to see clearly, because if you're trying to see clearly and you still fundamentally want for yourself, where are you going to end up? You're only going to be able to see a little bit more clearly what it is that you really, *really* want for yourself. So simply making the effort to look with greater intensity is not enough. We have to be willing to look into our fundamental relationship to life. "I want for me, I want for me *always*"—this is expressed and demonstrated in gross and subtle ways thousands of times in every single day: when we turn our head, when we look, when we reach out. Almost everything that we do is motivated by this fundamental wanting for ourselves. It is only when this movement begins to slow down that we're going to start to notice that our perception, the way that we interpret our experience, has begun to change in conjunction with the lessening of this wanting for ourselves. It happens automatically. It's not something that you have to cultivate through making effort, or through straining your brain cells in order to see in a different way. It happens by itself; it's a by-product.

So if we want to see clearly, it's not a matter of getting better glasses. If we want to see clearly, we have to look into our fundamental relationship to life and begin to see that for most of us, our entire relationship to life is based on what is in the end this very ugly, lustful, greedy and entirely selfish wanting for *me*, wanting for *me*, wanting for *me*. And merely the clear perception of that, without any movement away from it, merely having the courage to experience that and to stay with it, will in and of itself open the door to another possibility, another way of being. And in this other way of being we will discover, not once or twice but over and over and over again—especially if

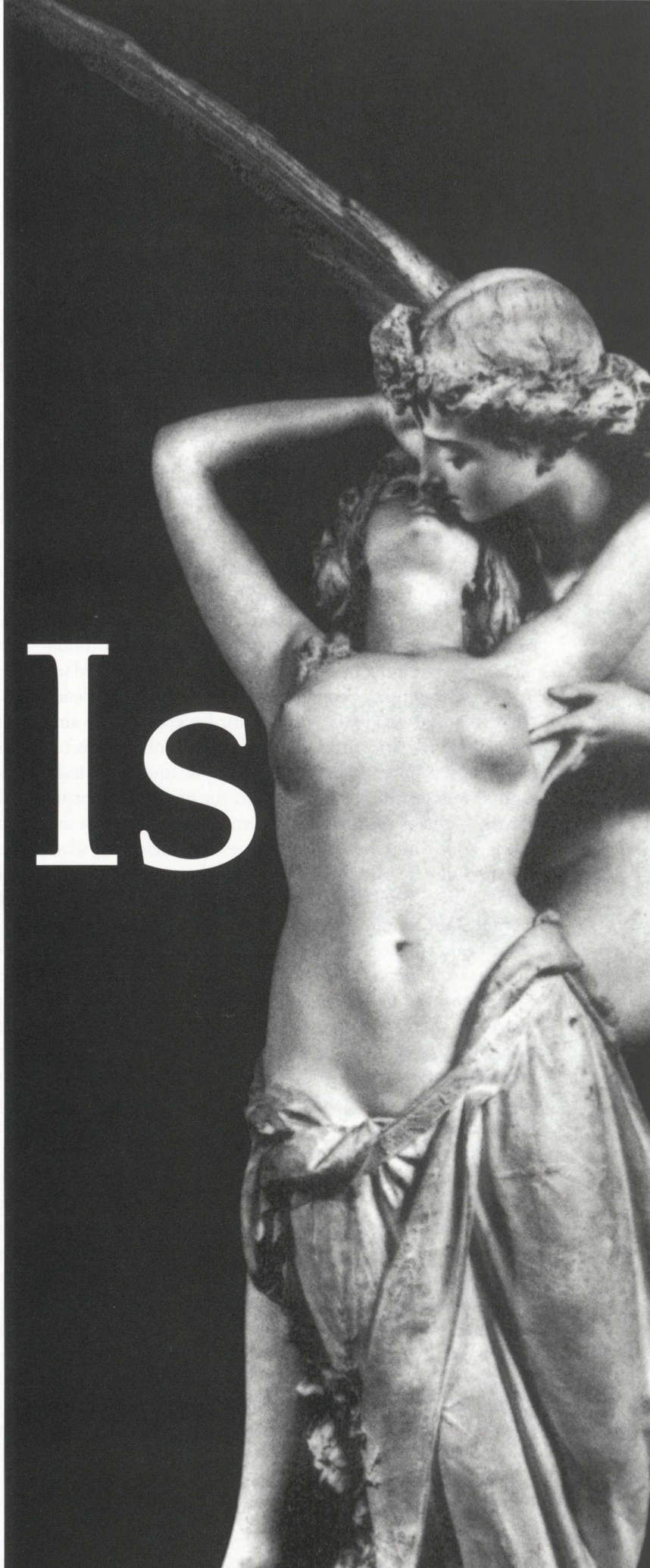
we're very interested—that real happiness, simplicity, profound peace and true sanity are experienced directly when we want nothing, when we experience liberation from, or freedom from, this painful wanting.

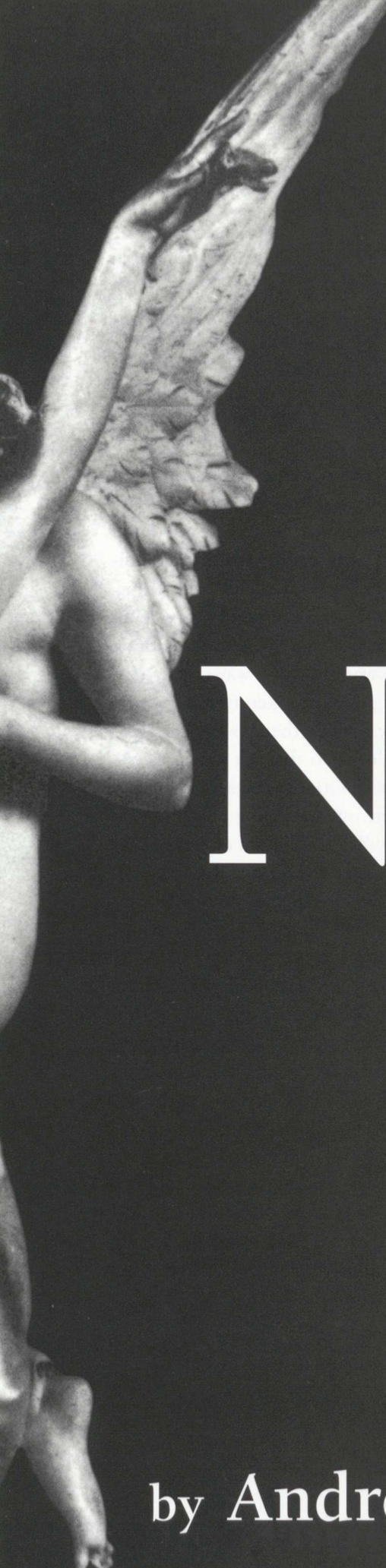
It's the wanting, you see, that is so painful really. Of course we—the ego and the personality—experience this wanting as pleasure. But when we look very, very closely, we become aware of the fact that this wanting is not pleasure—but pain. It's pain. It's an endless tension. And peace, joy, happiness, sanity and clarity are discovered when that tension is no longer present, when it is absent. When that tension ceases, or when it begins to lessen, or even if it has only just begun to slow down, instantly we begin to feel more comfortable, more at ease; and when the tension decreases even more, we begin to feel *even more* at ease, suddenly present, finally at home in our own body, in our own skin, in our own mind, in our own personality—whoever we thought we were. However miserable we thought we were, suddenly we find that we're very comfortable being exactly who we are and exactly who we always have been. This is a new experience for us, very marvelous and very unknown. And in this experience, the wanting and all the tension inherent in it, which before we perceived as pleasure, now we recognize as pain. This is one aspect of enlightenment, or at least it's one expression of it.

So what it is that makes it so difficult for us to be able to see clearly is this ceaseless wanting. And if we're interested in seeing clearly, if we're interested in knowing the truth, if we're interested in being able to distinguish between truth and falsehood, then we have to be willing to give up wanting, which means *renunciation*. We have to be willing to practice renouncing the thrill of wanting. I'm trying to say this as clearly as I possibly can, and I hope that all of you will be able to remember it: *The thrill of the wanting itself is what has to be renounced*. That may be very easy for us at certain times, and at other times it may be so difficult that it's impossible to put into words. But one way or the other, it doesn't really matter; it's still the thrill of this wanting that has to be renounced. When the thrill of wanting is renounced, I promise you that you'll recognize that thrill not as the pleasure it appeared to be; but you will recognize it as pain. And so the challenge in all of this, the great challenge, is to discover the willingness to renounce the wanting itself, the *thrill* of wanting. This is the greatest challenge for the ego and the personality. ■

Is it possible to have
a relationship with
the powerful force
of sexuality that
consistently reveals
its impersonal nature?

Sex Is





Neutral

an investigation
into sexuality and
its relationship
to the multi-
dimensional
nature of
true humanity

by Andrew Cohen



Sex Is Neutral by Andrew Cohen

Sex Is Neither Positive nor Negative

PART I

“It is rare when a human being is able to experience the tremendous power of the sexual force rising up within them without instantly taking emotional and psychological refuge in one fixed position or another.”

The awesome force of sexuality and its power to create confusion in the human mind is *enormous*. Indeed, the intensity of desire that the force of sexuality arouses within the human mind and body almost always creates a sense of insecurity within the individual. The presence of insecurity in any form is often frightening. Many experience a loss of equilibrium in the face of overwhelming desire, and the tremendous insecurity experienced at times like these causes the individual to want to find a way to escape.

There are fundamentally two positions taken in relationship to the awesome force of sexuality. One is that sex is positive—Good, Healthy and Natural. The other is that sex is negative—Bad, Dirty and Evil. Both of these positions represent a form of escape from the insecurity that the overwhelming power of sexual desire arouses within the individual. The form of escape that I'm referring to represents a *fixed position*. And it is this fixed position that enables the individual to avoid the inevitable confrontation with their humanity that the arousal of the sexual force always demands.

The sexual force in and of itself is neither positive nor negative. But the tremendous insecurity that its presence generates within the individual and the desire to escape from that insecurity cause almost all to perceive what is inherently a *neutral* force as either positive or negative. The sexual force is the expression of the impersonal power of creation itself. The impersonal power of creation cares not for the individual. Its relationship to the individual is always neutral and could only be neutral, as the sexual force is blind, creative energy that has no consciousness and no individuality. The individual's desire to escape from its overwhelming intensity alone is what creates the illusion of polarity where none actually exists.

Sex Is Neutral

PART II

Is it possible for a human being to have a positive sexual experience and still retain the ability to directly perceive the inherent neutrality of the sexual force? Is it possible for a human being to have a negative sexual experience and still retain the ability to directly perceive the inherent neutrality of the sexual force? Only if the individual is able to sustain a relationship with the sexual force that consistently reveals its true nature as inherently neutral and *impersonal* will he or she be able to avoid the paralyzing confusion and almost inevitable suffering that result from any lack of clarity in this area.

The price that has to be paid in order to achieve the degree of clarity necessary to survive the storms of confusion that accompany the presence of overwhelming desire is very high. That price is the willingness to bear the experience of intense insecurity without succumbing to the temptation to see the sexual force as other than it actually is.

It is rare when a human being is able to

experience the tremendous power of the sexual force rising up within them without instantly taking emotional and psychological refuge in one polarity or the other. For example, the conclusion that the true nature of the sexual force is *always positive*—Good, Healthy and Natural—automatically relieves the individual of the enormous burden that the presence of the sexual force imposes on the personality. In the same way the opposite conclusion, that the true nature of the sexual force is *always negative*—Bad, Dirty and Evil—*equally* allows the individual to avoid having to come to terms with the true nature of the power of the creative energy in every moment. This is very important. Why? Because if our relationship with that most powerful of instincts is ever going to be able to demonstrate the fearless integrity that the full fruition of our humanity demands, then it is absolutely essential that one be able to see the true nature of the sexual force for what it actually is.


The Sexual Experience Is Multidimensional

PART III

It is essential to be able to consistently perceive the true or inherently neutral nature of the sexual force in order to see it clearly. But, even more importantly, viewing the sexual force from either the positive or the negative pole alone does not and cannot ever fully embrace the *multidimensional* nature of the human experience of sexual feelings, i.e., physical, psychological, emotional and even

spiritual. The human experience of the sexual instinct is never static, but is ever changing. And because the human experience of sexuality is multidimensional and ever changing—unless that fact is addressed directly, the individual's perspective in relationship to the sexual experience will never be able to accurately embrace every aspect of their own very human experience. ■

TAN



Our exploration of tantra has been a fascinating experience. We found ourselves deeply challenged, because any sincere investigation always demands honest self-inquiry. Most of the proponents of tantra whom we encountered boldly declared that in order to achieve enlightenment, it is absolutely essential to face directly into the storm of sexuality as the *very means* to transcend fear, confusion and ignorance. Could such a seemingly outrageous albeit age-old claim actually be true? Could it be that through the harnessing and directing of the procreative energy upward, rather than outward, our spiritual evolution is guaranteed?

TRA

According to respected scholar **Miranda Shaw**, tantric Buddhists “believe that in order to attain full enlightenment you have to release the energy of your heart. . . . They feel that only the energy that is generated through the practice of union with a consort could have the power that is necessary to blast through the residue of centuries of egoic behavior and immersion in illusion and negativity.”

Margot Anand, the mother of modern tantra, declares that “Enlightenment happens through spiritual orgasm,” and explains, “Tantra is an activation of all of our energies. And by channeling the sexual energies through the various chakras, you can reach levels of ecstasy, states of merging and fusion through your partner with the divine that are so powerful that I would certainly say that tantra is a shortcut.”

And finally tantric master **Barry Long** states unequivocally, “The cause of most of the unhappiness on earth is that man and woman have actually forgotten how to make physical love. This is the greatest tragedy of all time.”

The question we are left with is this: If enlightenment is and always has been only about death of the ego, how could approaching this most challenging, complex and precarious of endeavors by diving into the Pandora’s box

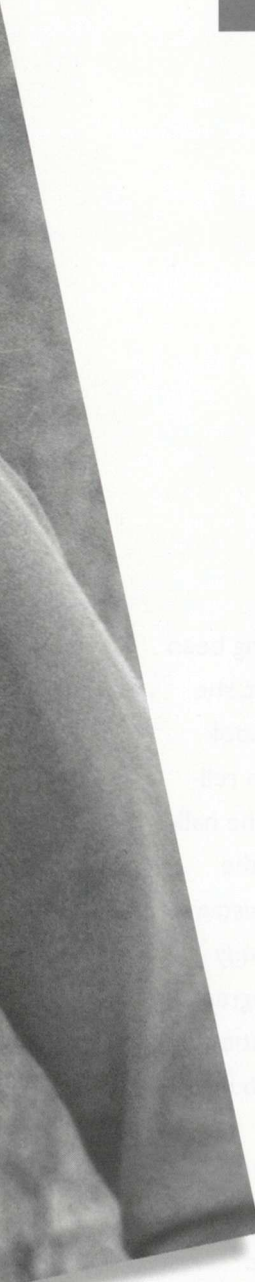
of sexuality—*albeit consciously and in a spiritual context*—finally liberate us from fear, ignorance and confusion? Could it be that the extended ecstasy that is the gift of tantric love-play is not what it seems to be? Could the movement of powerful energy and the experience of intense bliss, which *appear* to be the event of ego submission, in fact be its very opposite—complete ego *satiation*? Is it actually true that opposites must come together and merge in undifferentiated fullness *on the physical plane* in order to transcend duality? Is enlightenment in the body—or in the mind?

There’s obviously no doubt that in order to be truly free, we cannot live in fear of our own bodies or of the opposite sex, but what role sexuality plays in the spiritual life is a very BIG question. Is sexual yoga, as it is claimed to be by some, the fast road to enlightenment? Is the renowned taoist yoga master Mantak Chia correct when he tells us, “You can either pray 100,000 hours or you can consciously guide the sexual energy up the spine”? To be completely honest, we’re not sure, but here are some extraordinary individuals who will definitely inspire any open-minded person to think very deeply about these questions for him- or herself. ■



an
interview
with

Miranda Shaw



Everything you always wanted to know about tantra*

***but were afraid to ask**

When Professor Miranda Shaw looks at women in Tibetan paintings, she does not see colorful two-dimensional figures born of an artist's mind. She sees "numinous, sky-borne women," "revelers in freedom," "enchantresses of passion, ecstasy and ferocious intensity"—radiant reflections of the powerful, enlightened women who helped to shape the world of Buddhist tantra.

by Craig Hamilton

INTRODUCTION continued

She writes: "One can almost hear the soft clacking of their intricate bone jewelry and feel the wind stirred by their rainbow-colored scarves as they soar through the tantric Buddhist landscape." It was her encounter with these images at an art exhibit during her sophomore year in college that first captured her imagination and inspired the curiosity that fueled her life's first major work—a research quest that carried her from the Harvard Divinity School to the remote reaches of the Tibetan plateau in search of an authentic firsthand understanding of the theory and practice of tantra.

Raised by Methodist parents in a small town in Ohio, Shaw first became interested in Eastern religions at the age of fourteen when a family friend showed

her a copy of the Bhagavad Gita. Despite having been raised with little exposure to religious thought, she found herself mesmerized, unable to put the book down. It was the beginning of a love affair with religious literature, the tokens of which still line the hallways and rooms of her small apartment near the University of Richmond, where she is now Assistant Professor of Religion. Her zeal for religious study eventually propelled her into the doctoral program at Harvard, where working on her Ph.D. dissertation, she found her way to the forefront of research into tantric Buddhism.

The culmination of that research is her 1994 book, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism*. Now in its fourth printing, *Passionate*

Enlightenment has been hailed as a groundbreaking contribution to the study of tantric history. Drawing on her exhaustive study of the central tantric texts in their original languages, as well as two and a half years of field research in India and Nepal, Shaw's book presents a revolutionary reexamination of the nature of tantric practice, revolving around one simple point: In addition to serving the spiritual progress of men, tantra was also for the enlightenment of women. While there has been a great deal of scholarship on both Buddhism and tantra over the past quarter century, prior to Shaw's work, the assumption underlying that research had always been that women were included in tantric practice only to the extent that they could support men in *their* pursuit of enlightenment. By setting that assumption aside and taking a fresh, in-depth look at both written and living sources, Shaw discovered a world in which women not only lived and practiced on an equal footing with men in their own pursuit of spiritual transformation, but in many cases even led the way. In fact, Shaw learned that for the serious male tantric practitioner, women were to be worshipped, honored and revered as the bringers of enlightened energy into the world. Through this revolutionary reinterpretation of the tantric texts, Shaw was finally able to make sense of many of the seemingly disparate strands of this complex tradition and, in so doing, to create a foundation for a new chapter in the study of tantric theory and practice.

While this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* is not directly concerned with the topic of gender in relation to spiritual practice, we knew as soon as we read Miranda Shaw's book that we wanted to speak with

her. As a pioneering thinker in her field and a researcher with firsthand experience among traditional teachers, she appeared to be in a better position than almost anyone to help us sort through the confusing message of contemporary tantra. And, in a manner uncharacteristic of the writing of many scholars, her adventurous prose revealed a dynamic and seemingly personal interest in her subject. What intrigued us most of all, however, were the apparent ease and confidence with which she was able to shift from subtle and insightful explications of esoteric Buddhist teachings to detailed descriptions of the more graphic dimensions of tantric sexual practice without missing a beat. Miranda Shaw, we thought, must be an unusual professor.

But despite having read her work and having spoken with her a few times on the phone, the day Miranda Shaw picked me up at the Richmond airport, I think I was still expecting someone more closely resembling a librarian than the attractive, spirited woman who greeted me. "I didn't expect you to be so young!" she said, shaking my hand and smiling warmly. And as we sped into town from the airport, tires screeching around at least one corner, I began to get a sense of the Miranda Shaw who had found so much inspiration in the images of the sky-dancing tantric heroines. Later, sitting lotus-style in the living room of her apartment, surrounded by erotic imagery from both classical and contemporary art, she shared both her understanding of the views and practices of Buddhist tantra and the personal passion for her subject that had taken her to the far corners of the earth.

WIE: *In your book *Passionate Enlightenment*, you describe how tantric Buddhism began as a revolutionary movement or rebellion against the rigidity of traditional Buddhist monastic institutions.*

Who were these revolutionaries?

MIRANDA SHAW: The founders of tantra came from all walks of life. We find royalty and aristocracy as well as tribal people and people practicing all kinds of trades and crafts. But interestingly, we also find people from the monasteries. As tantra was being founded and shaped, some of those in the monasteries left because they didn't want to be removed from life-as-lived. The main impetus for the movement, though, did take place outside the monasteries, from what we would call laypeople—people who wanted to practice yoga and spiritual disciplines, but not necessarily in a monastic context as celibates, and not in separation from members of the opposite sex or outside of the context of their intimate and familial relationships.

WIE: *Prior to the emergence of tantra, Buddhism was generally practiced only within a strict monastic setting, so if you wanted to become a serious spiritual practitioner within Buddhism, you joined the monastery?*

MS: That's right. There were ethical practices and simple meditations that laypeople did, but they wouldn't be the intensive spiritual pursuits in quest of enlightenment.

WIE: *What were the pivotal events that spurred this new movement?*

MS: The development of Buddhism has been marked by ever increasing expansion into new geographic areas and new social groups and cultural contexts. During the tantric period, we find Buddhism once again expanding its base and actually reaching out to people, for example, in the mountains, at the borders of society, and at the lower rungs of society. As these people entered Buddhism, they brought with them their own forms of spirituality, their own symbolism and ritual skills. So their insights became woven into the tantric Buddhist vision. One of the ritual skills that is associated with those groups is the shamanic practice of "transforming into deity." These techniques of transforming into deity then combined with the tantric goal of attaining Buddhahood in this very life.

WIE: *Transforming into deity—what does that mean exactly?*

MS: Embodying the presence of deity on every level of your being: body, speech and mind. Not only mentally seeing the world as a deity would see it—as harmonious and pure and perfect as it is, as a realm of aesthetic splendor—but also speaking as a deity would speak: with words of insight, liberation and compassion. What I find very exciting about the tantric vision is the practice of realizing the presence of deities within your own body and manifesting divinity through your physical actions. But it is not only manifesting the presence of a deity so that the deity can receive worship, or to heal or to perform other activities, but to manifest the presence of full enlightenment, of Buddhahood, in the world.

WIE: *This was obviously an entirely new context for the practice of Buddhism. What was actually happening at that time?*

MS: The institutional pattern of tantra followed the ancient yogic model in India, which is that a teacher comes forth with teachings, revelations and methods, and then disciples who want to practice that gather around the teacher and often live near the teacher. They practice together and perhaps go on pilgrimage together and form a small community. There was no central organizing or authorizing body that would censor the teachings in advance or would limit who could teach, which is one of the reasons why it was such a creative period.

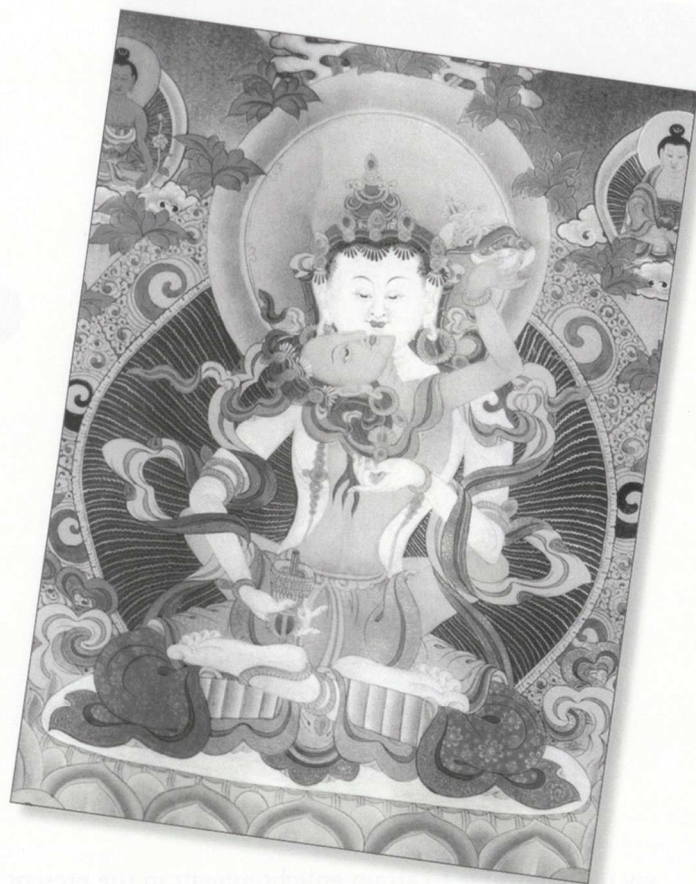
WIE: *What were some of the key practices of the tantric approach?*

MS: The basic mindfulness techniques and ethical teachings of Buddhism were already in place by this time. What was added at this point was the incorporation of a number of yogic techniques, specific ways of directing the breath and the inner energies of the body, which were drawn from the broader yogic knowledge of India. A lot of ritual elements were also incorporated, as well as magical techniques and dance practices. Probably what was most distinctive about this period, though, was the introduction

“Some tantric pioneers felt that a celibate lifestyle

did not, in fact, represent

a mastery of one’s sexuality, but rather a repression of and even a flight in fear from one’s sexuality. There is a tantric teaching to the effect that without the practice of sexual union, it is impossible to attain enlightenment in the present lifetime.”



of the yoga of union—the practices that men and women could do together in order to transform the energies awakened by sexual union into very refined states of consciousness, wisdom and bliss.

WIE: *Until that time, there had been no sexual practice in Buddhism, right?*

MS: Right. There were ethical teachings about sexuality but there were no yogas for using those energies to attain enlightenment.

WIE: *How was sexuality or the practice of sexual yoga seen to be of benefit on the path to enlightenment?*

MS: Sexuality is an extremely powerful, primal and irreducible aspect of human nature. One of the contributions of the tantric paradigm was the insight that sexual energies were being wasted in some forms of meditative practice. Some of the tantric pioneers felt that a celibate lifestyle did not, in fact, represent a mastery of one’s sex-

uality, but rather a repression of and even a flight in fear from one’s sexuality. One was in fact postponing for future lives work which must be done to integrate every aspect of one’s being and to master every form of energy at one’s command.

WIE: *So the idea was that if you took a lifelong vow of celibacy, there was no way you could actually achieve mastery over the sexual impulse?*

MS: There is a tantric teaching to the effect that without the practice of sexual union and without integrating one’s energies at that level, it is impossible to attain enlightenment in the present lifetime.

WIE: *I read in your book that one of the tantric texts goes so far as to state that even the Buddha did not in fact attain enlightenment under the bodhi tree, as is commonly believed, but while practicing sexual yoga in the palace with his wife.*

MS: That’s exactly the teaching I’m referring to. They



“I was surrounded by images of divinity in female form, and seeing the unclothed female body in a religious context rather than in a commercial, secular context as it is in the West was profoundly affirming for me as a woman.”

say it's impossible to attain enlightenment in the present lifetime without uniting with a yogic consort. So they claim that even Shakyamuni Buddha had a consort with whom he practiced—his wife, before he left the palace—and that if he had not done that, he could not have attained enlightenment.

WIE: *You say in your book that although he had already actually achieved enlightenment in the palace, he renounced his kingdom, became a homeless wanderer and did years of austere practices in order to inspire people to take up the spiritual life—people who might be moved by such a powerful act of renunciation.*

MS: Yes, he attained enlightenment in union with her. Then, in order to draw people who would be inspired by renunciation and who are in fact destined to follow a path of renunciation during this lifetime, he provided that illusory display of austerity.

WIE: *It's a fascinating story. But I would imagine that the Theravadins or other more traditional Buddhists would argue that that was just a rewriting of history to serve the tantrics' own ideological aims.*

MS: What Shakyamuni actually did and attained and said is so lost in the mists of time that by the time we get the earliest written sources, it's already hundreds of years later. I do feel that the tantric account is possible.

In speaking about this, though, I want to make it clear that the tantrics did not make a value judgment about people who could not or did not want to integrate their sexual energies into their spiritual path during this lifetime. They realized that celibacy is appropriate for some people because of where they are karmically. But what the tantric insight added was the recognition that some people have an abundance of passion—a very sensual, sensuous, aesthetically alive, emotionally intense character. They wanted to offer tantra as a way that those people could use this intensity so that they would not have to waste all this energy which was at their command, and which in all likelihood they could not really renounce or repress in any case.

WIE: *In talking about it this way, you seem to be saying that there are different paths for different types of people and that tantra was intended for passionate people, those who expressed an unusual degree of fire and intensity in their character.*

MS: Absolutely. The texts say this over and over again: Tantra is for passionate people.

WIE: *How does that fit with the view you just described, that tantric union is the only way that anyone can actually attain full Buddhahood in this lifetime?*

MS: Full Buddhahood in this lifetime is a tantric goal. It is not a Mahayana or Theravada goal. Therefore, it's fully consistent.

WIE: *But in whatever lifetime it happens, at that point it will be in this lifetime. So in the end, they do seem to be saying that the only way anybody is ever going to get there is through the practice of sexual yoga or tantric union.*

MS: That's right. Because, interestingly, they believe that in order to attain full enlightenment you have to contact and release the energy of your heart, which for them is the center, the core of your being, of your consciousness, at the deepest level. That is where you are storing the fears, hatreds and angers of many lifetimes. They felt that only the energy that is generated through the practice of union with a consort could have the power to blast through the residue of centuries of egoic behavior and immersion in illusion and negativity, and to dissolve the layers of hatred and fear within the heart.

WIE: *How does this "blasting through" occur? In your book, you state that "practice with a [tantric] partner is believed to make it possible to open the heart fully at the most profound level, freeing it from all knots, constrictions and obscurations created by false views and self-cherishing emotions."*

MS: One of the purposes of the sexual yogas is to concentrate the energies in the abdominal area of the body, which is the seat of inner fire that the tantrics seek to kindle and fan into flame. Through the practice of sexual union, the attention is concentrated in that area, which is several inches below the navel, in the region where the sexual sensations would be arising. However, unlike ordinary sexuality, where the partners would simply allow the pleasure to take its course, tantrics would concentrate their energy and their thought at this one point and use it to arouse that inner fire. When that fire is kindled and starts to burn very brightly, there are several meditations that can be done to refine the energies at the heart. One of them is to direct the energy upward into the heart and, because of the quantity of energy involved, as it goes through the heart, it naturally unties a knot, as they say, and bursts through these residues. However, as the residues are being released, one will sometimes have an

experiential sensation of the emotion that is being released as it floats up into conscious awareness. Sometimes if it's a hatred, for example, or a fear that's floating up, one will actively experience the emotion as it's being released. It takes a great deal of awareness to be able to process the emotions that are coming up from the past and release them as they arise, rather than project them onto the present situation.

WIE: *It sounds as though the practice requires a lot more than just the generation of intense energy. It must also demand a cultivation of certain qualities, and of one's character, in order for the practitioner to be able to bear everything that such an intensity of energy is going to stir up.*

MS: The potential for reattachment is there because as these emotions and powerful mind-states are being generated, if you are not really poised to detach from them, you can become reinvolved in these past neuroses. They demand at that time to be dealt with in one way or another, and that's why practicing tantra is said to be like walking along the edge of a sword. It's not without its danger. The intensity of energies you're working with and the level of psyche that you are excavating is potentially dangerous to your peace of mind.

WIE: *What is it like to be working so closely and intimately with another person when dealing with such powerful energies and emotions? Tantric relationships must be unusually intense.*

MS: The relationship provides an opportunity to observe ourselves, to mirror one another and to work with these energies as they arise in an ongoing way. When that direct involvement is combined with the power of the yoga, the entire relationship becomes a crucible of inner combustion and total transformation.

WIE: *It would seem, then, that the spiritual involvement between two partners goes far beyond just doing the energetic practice together. Does it also confront the challenge of living together and finding a way to become decent human beings?*

MS: It goes vastly beyond becoming decent human beings. It has to do with how we are going to support one another in attaining enlightenment, which is another level of interaction altogether. It might involve things that in an ordinary way don't look decent. That's why it's very important in choosing a tantric partner to find someone who has a comparable level of emotional, intellectual and spiritual sophistication. Because the processes involved require not only a high degree of emotional detachment, but also the possession of certain intellectual skills,

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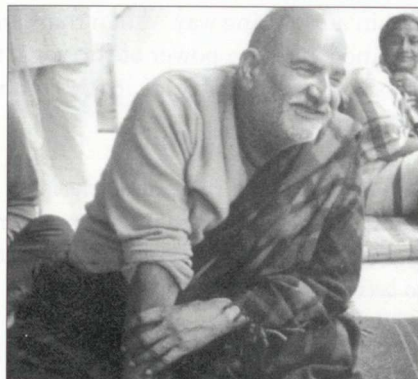
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such as the capacity to deconstruct the contents and interpretations of one's experience in a precise way.

WIE: *It sounds as though getting into a tantric relationship is a serious event requiring a lot of forethought. This doesn't seem like something you could just add to your relationship.*

MS: It would be harder to add tantra to an existing relationship than it would be to start it as a tantric relationship from the beginning, because in an existing relationship so many patterns would already be in place. And then you'd have all those patterns in addition to all the patterns from the previous lifetimes that you're trying to clear up. I like to think that in theory it could be done, but that's not the way it seems to work.

WIE: *One of the other practices that you detail in your book has to do with the combining of bliss and emptiness, or the attempt to bring the realization of emptiness to bear on one's experience of bliss. When you say "bliss" in this context, do you simply mean erotic pleasure—the same pleasure that most people are familiar with?*

MS: In tantric practice, one goes beyond pleasure and follows the pleasure to its root, which is the core of the mind, which is made of pure bliss. You go into the realm of pure bliss which is beyond the senses, but you have used the senses to reach it. You've used the sense pleasure and gone deeply into its core. But when you're in this deep level of bliss, it's very easy to become attached to the object of the bliss, or source of the bliss—which is your partner—and also to the experience of bliss itself, and to turn the bliss into yet another experience of entanglement. That is why the experience of bliss is combined with meditation upon emptiness. It is necessary in tantra to com-

bine this experience of very intense bliss with the realization of emptiness.

Tantrics would already have familiarized themselves with the philosophy of emptiness, the understanding that all phenomena are devoid of intrinsic identity, of permanent, independent selfhood. So in that sense, there's an understanding that the world is illusory and thus is not capable of providing satisfaction or ultimate bliss. What tantric partners do in the midst of the experience of bliss is to take this specific insight and apply it to the experience of bliss itself and to deconstruct it, to see that there is no self that is experiencing the bliss. The bliss has arisen in a kind of empty space. There's no owner of the bliss. There's no source of the bliss. The combination of bliss with this insight into its emptiness should then lead each partner into vast, sky-like awareness, a decentered awareness—in essence, an experience of universal awareness.

WIE: *There's another point in your book where you describe the transformation of sensual pleasure into spiritual ecstasy.*

MS: This is exactly how it happens. The ordinary pleasure is turned into transcendent pleasure by the application of insight into emptiness.

WIE: *Okay. So there's this intense experience of erotic pleasure and you're completely concentrated in that.*

MS: Yes, and then you're applying your insight into emptiness. You're deconstructing it. You're seeing it as empty. As you move through that process, you're actually removing any possible elements of attachment within it, so you're taking yourself out of the bliss as the experiencer. You're taking the object out of the bliss as its cause. You're taking even that interpretation of the experience

as bliss, even the word "bliss," out of it also. As you deconstruct the different aspects of the bliss, it is transformed from ordinary bliss or pleasure into the transcendent bliss that is devoid of characteristics, and which cannot be described.

WIE: *So does the bliss actually change or do you just peel away everything that you've imposed on it in order to illuminate what it was already?*

MS: In the tantric analysis, you're removing the obstacles to experiencing it in its fullness. According to tantra, that transcendent bliss is fully present in every moment of experience, but it's covered over by what we have projected onto our experience, which are the demands of our ego upon that event.

WIE: *One of the main topics of your book is male/female gender relationships and gender roles. You make it quite clear that in the practice of tantric sexual yoga, men are to worship women. Throughout the text, men are variously referred to as "devotees," "servants" and even "slaves" of the women, and in particular, men are advised that they should "take refuge in the vulva of an esteemed woman" and should even "be willing to touch and ingest every substance discharged by a woman's body."*

MS: And lick any part of her body, if requested to do so!

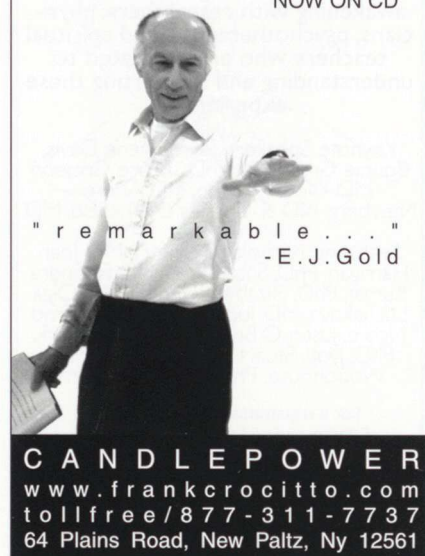
WIE: *That's an extreme degree of willingness to worship and to accept a decidedly subordinate relationship to the woman. It's literally treating the woman as a goddess.*

MS: As a goddess, yes. The goal of tantric practice is to transform into deity. The woman's path involves realizing that she is, in essence, a goddess or a female Buddha. The man's treatment of her supports her in her

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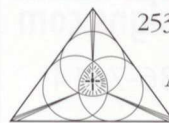
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emerging realization of her enlightened essence. If he were treating her merely as an equal or as a subordinate, she would have to struggle against his vision and his treatment of her in order to realize her innate divinity. Tantric women do not want to do that.

WIE: *If embodiment of deity is one of the main goals of tantra, is it also a goal for the man?*

MS: Oh, absolutely.

WIE: *Does she then treat him like a god?*

MS: He's also realizing his innate divinity and his Buddhahood, only he believes that the proper expression of his Buddhahood is to honor *her* divinity. In this worldview, it is the role of the female to channel enlightened energies, the energy of transformation, into the world in a powerful way. It is the role of the male to be the recipient of those energies and to honor them and their source. Some men may disagree, but that is the tantric view.

WIE: *In your book you mention that in bringing the woman to arousal, "a man must be careful to incite arousal without detracting from her mindfulness." How does he do that?*

MS: It's a question of virtuosity, of precision, of delicacy. He can't approach it in a sloppy or—

WIE: *A gross-minded kind of way?*

MS: Yes. I guess delicacy is the best word for it. Not imposing himself and his advances upon her but eliciting her pleasure. It's a different orientation. It involves a great deal of attentiveness to her state of mind and her stages of arousal. It precludes the kind of aggressiveness in the sexual act where the man has a set of precon-

ceived stages in his mind that he's going to get through before he reaches his goal, and the quicker the better.

WIE: *That would distract her from her meditation?*

MS: Undoubtedly.

WIE: *You mentioned earlier that tantric union or sexual yoga is considered to be one of the highest, most advanced practices, requiring tremendous preparation, including intensive meditation practice, the cultivation of a sense of universal responsibility, compassionate motivation, and even the abandonment of the illusion of a separate, isolated self—all this simply to prepare to do the practice.*

MS: That's right. And it requires solitude. It's something that you would do in most cases in a retreat type of situation.

WIE: *What kind of retreat?*

MS: The couple might go to the woods, to a cave or a meditation hut—someplace where they have silence and solitude. Because of the rarefied states of awareness that one would be cultivating, one really wouldn't want interruption at that time. One would need to concentrate and go into the experience very deeply.

WIE: *So this wasn't a practice that couples were doing in the evenings after work and dinner?*

MS: Once the practice was stabilized and mastered, they could do that, but at the beginning, while they were developing it, it wouldn't be like that. You hear about people going on retreats, for example, for six months or a year, where they would perform sexual yoga practice intensively before they would try to integrate it into their lives on a more natural, ongoing basis.

WIE: It's interesting to hear that this is how it has historically and traditionally been viewed because our reference point for tantra these days is something much different. Looking through the spiritual magazines, we see countless tantra workshops being taught by couples, which other couples attend together or to which singles come and pair up for a one- or two- week "intensive." Compared to the spiritual context you've described, from what I've seen these workshops seem to be based on more of a Western therapeutic approach.

MS: The main distinction, I think, between some of the modern, more secularized or Westernized versions—but also some Indian versions—is that in these contemporary approaches, the relationship itself is the focus, and they're importing elements and practices from tantra in order to enhance their relationship. Whereas in authentic tantra, you're using the contents of your relationship in order to pursue and attain enlightenment. So the focus, the goal, is completely different.

WIE: How much of what's currently going on around us in the West in the name of tantra do you feel actually lives up to the seriousness of what you have been describing?

MS: It seems that in general Westerners do not have the foundation that Eastern practitioners would have. For example, the practice of tantra in India, Nepal and Tibet presumes five years, on average, of study of the philosophy of emptiness. People who are considering doing tantric practice ask one another: "What philosophies of emptiness have you studied?" "What texts?" They'll question one another on technical points of emptiness. What Westerner has done that? The fruition of tantric practice is the union of bliss and emptiness. If you

continued on page 130

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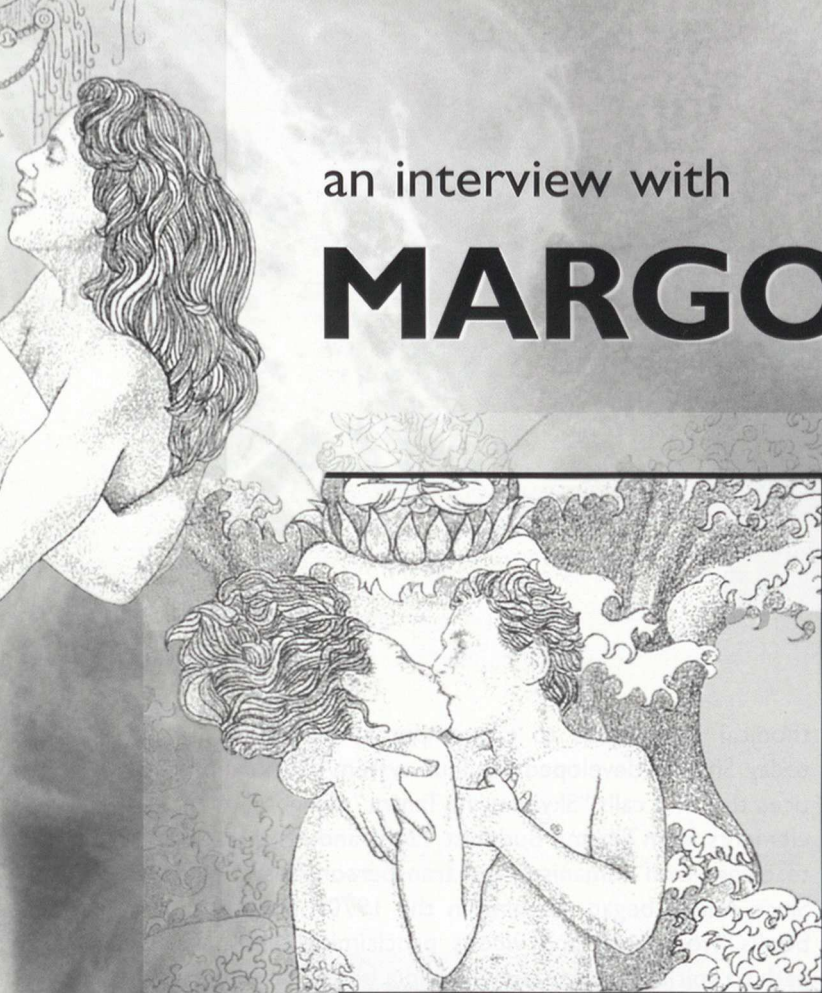


YOU HAVET

an interview with

MARGOT ANAND

by Susan Bridle



“You have to go into the hell of darkness

You have to f__ your brains out

You have to play the dandy

You have to get clothes from Christian Dior

You have to taste the best foods

You have to go into a cave and meditate

“O DO IT ALL”



INTRODUCTION

“Absolutely not. I totally disagree with you. I would say radically no. The tantric path is profoundly a spiritual path,” she stated emphatically. Had I gone too far? I had just asked Margot Anand [formerly Margo Anand], the world-renowned teacher of tantric sexuality, if modern tantra may not really be a genuine spiritual path.

Only four hours earlier, sitting in a crowded café in Larkspur, California, sipping a fruit smoothie colored green with spirulina, I had been testing my tape recorder and reviewing my notes before going to meet Anand. I laughed to myself—just when I thought I had escaped the paradisa blue skies, the reluctant-casual displays of wealth and the sensitive New Age smiles of Marin County, California, I found myself drawn back again. With both more BMWs and meditation cushions per capita than anywhere else in the United States, it is a strange land where almost everyone has a spiritual teacher, a spiritual therapist, a spiritual health regimen or a spiritual lifestyle. I was relieved, after having spent five years as an ambivalent Marinite, to have finally relocated to the rural East Coast, where you can’t necessarily find smoked tofu or arugula pesto in your corner grocery, but where things are much more—refreshingly, straightforwardly—as they seem. Only Margot Anand could have brought me back.

Anand, a pioneer in the movement to bring the ancient esoteric practices of tantric sexuality to a popular Western audience, was one of the first people we considered interviewing for this special issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* Her books, *The Art of Sexual Ecstasy* and *The Art of Sexual Magic*, which together have sold over 200,000 copies, present one of the clearest, most me-

thodical approaches to contemporary tantra in print today. She has developed a unique system of sexual practices that she calls “SkyDancing Tantra,” which combines elements from Tibetan Buddhist, Taoist and Hindu tantric teachings with humanistic and transpersonal psychology. Since Anand began teaching in the 1970s, hundreds of books, workshops and videos proclaiming tantra as a path to spiritual enlightenment and a better sex life have sprung up to meet burgeoning interest. All the while, Anand herself has remained one of the boldest and most popular voices on the subject. She has established SkyDancing Tantra Institutes in eight countries and certified close to a hundred people to teach her “Love and Ecstasy Training” programs. And she is currently working on a third book.

Sitting in the café, I reflected on the two weeks I had just spent preparing for this interview. It had been a mind-expanding experience—not only because Anand’s approach to the spiritual path is so unusual, but also because her books describe in graphic detail some very unconventional sexual mechanics. For Anand, “sex and spirit are one”; sex is both the doorway to ecstatic mystical experience and an expression of the spiritual force itself. And while this is not a unique belief, Anand does have a particularly original approach. In *The Art of Sexual Ecstasy* she describes the pinnacle of tantric practice as the “orgasm of the brain.” This experience, she writes, “creates a bridge between the left and right hemispheres, fusing the intellect of the left hemisphere with the intuitive faculties of the right. It is this fusion that creates the experience of ecstasy, in which body, mind, heart and spirit all participate.” And in *The Art of Sexual Magic* she writes, “In deep sexual embrace, the mind stops. Quite literally, you ‘f__ your brains out.’ Your consciousness

becomes clear, innocent, fresh." As a guide to attaining these "ecstatic states," Anand provides an extensive (and explicit) manual, or "menu" as she calls it, of exotic sexual practices.

With a high-society upbringing in Paris and a graduate degree in psychology from the Sorbonne, Anand has traveled extensively around the world, studying and practicing tantra with a number of different teachers. The greatest influence on her own philosophy probably comes from the renowned "sex guru," the late Bhagwan Rajneesh (now known as Osho), of whom she was a disciple for many years and who gave her the name *Margo Anand*, which means "the path to bliss." It was Osho who encouraged her to begin teaching the tantric methods in which she was becoming adept. Anand is an extraordinary woman, someone who has chosen throughout her life to follow a calling that led her outside the mainstream, someone not afraid of taking risks. Confronting and harnessing the power of sexuality has given her an unusual confidence and sense of personal power. And she is at times bold, outrageous, even shocking in her defiance of sexual taboos.

The Art of Sexual Ecstasy, Anand's first book, guides the reader step by step through a series of exercises designed to break through sexual inhibitions, increase trust and communication between partners, and develop sexual yogic skills. While she does introduce spiritual themes periodically throughout the book, it is primarily a collection of therapeutic techniques for improving psychological and sexual well-being. It was her second book, *The Art of Sexual Magic*, that raised the most questions for me. In it she combines sexual techniques with creative visualization for the purpose of manifesting personal desires. She has developed a unique method of

projecting a visualized object of desire into the "astral network" at the moment of orgasm. She writes, "It is in these moments of expanded consciousness that you can project a vision of your goal, your creation, into the harmonious fabric of the universe that surrounds you. In ecstasy, you come very close to the universal source, the creative womb out of which all things arise. What better moment to make magic?" Throughout the book she includes examples of how to use this technique to acquire, among other things, a new job, a new home, or even a new lover. According to Anand, her system of sexual magic is a means to access higher states of consciousness and to bring more of the spiritual dimension into her work; she often describes it as a spiritual practice. Yet as I read her book, while I found it educational and innovative, I couldn't help but wonder again and again, What does all this really have to do with the spiritual path?

When I arrived at her sunny hillside home, Anand greeted me graciously, and as we sat down to begin the interview, I took in the decor. The walls were adorned with *thankas* (Tibetan religious art) depicting male and female deities in tantric embrace. Crystals, softly colored cloths and pillows, bells, candles and numerous ritual objects were carefully placed throughout the room. There was a faint scent of incense in the air. She put on a tape of soothing New Age music for atmosphere and told me that the previous day she had been in a "very enlightened space," which she thought would have been good for the interview—but which was disturbed because today she had gotten enmeshed in a number of frustrating and difficult encounters. We proceeded to talk for several hours, and she was charming, animated and generous throughout.

WIE: *I'd like to start, if you will, with a simple definition of the path of tantra.*

MARGOT ANAND: I would say that tantra is a path that opens a person up to the possibility that sexuality can be a door to higher states of consciousness. And another definition I have is that it is a way to weave the many contradictory aspects of your personality into one unified whole for the purpose of the expansion of your consciousness. The beauty of tantra is that it is a spiritual path that teaches about enlightenment, yet it is one of the rare spiritual paths that actually does not leave sexuality out but teaches that sexuality can be a door to personal illumination or waking up. Many, many spiritual traditions, as you know, especially Christianity, have taught that in order to achieve enlightened states, you have to let go of sexuality or you have to consider that it's of the lower realms. You have to just be "above the belt." What is "below the belt" is just not to be dealt with. So that's why I appreciate tantra. It's an approach of the whole person that includes everything.

WIE: *Why do you think tantra has become so popular in the United States and Europe in the last decade or so?*

MA: I think the reason it's so popular is that we're now healing ourselves from the Christian tradition that taught a complete separation between flesh and spirit and impregnated us with the idea that we're born in original sin—which is the most ridiculous idea I've ever heard. The Church and the people in power have all been in a kind of conspiracy to preserve the anti-ecstatic attitude that we live in, because when you keep people in bondage through guilt

and shame, you cut off their most vital, powerful force and energy. That is the energy of orgasms, which opens the door to one's own direct, creative self. When you cut people off from that, they are despondent, and then they go to you to tell them what to do and expect you to be the intermediary between them and God.

If you study the traditions we come from, you know that about a century or two after Christ, through the apostles and the writing of the New Testament, the power of the Church was developed. And there was a tremendous association with pain, suffering, being martyred, being sacrificed. So it became almost more desirable and more respected to be someone who was in pain, sacrifice and martyrdom than to be someone who was in pleasure.

This is why in my Love and Ecstasy Training I always bring forth the mythology and cosmology of the tantric perspective, with the idea of the marriage between Shiva and Shakti, between consciousness and energy, between life and spirit. This is a much more life-affirming, pro-ecstatic approach than that of the Judeo-Christian tradition. It is in this union between the masculine and the feminine, which is a creative and erotic act, that all the forms of the universe are born. I think that now we're at a crisis point, and we need to come to a holistic consideration about spirituality that includes the body, that includes the emotions, that includes our sexuality.

Another reason why tantra is popular is because we need sexual healing. Unfortunately, the downside of that is that there's a tremendous misunderstanding of tantra, espe-

cially in America. For many years, tantra was misunderstood as simply sexual healing and indulgence. Many so-called tantra teachers and so-called tantra movements—and even the Hollywood socialites, you know, some of whom I used to teach—think that you just need to tickle your G-spot for four hours and take a few drugs and then you reach enlightenment and that's what tantra is about. No, it isn't. There has been a great misunderstanding, a feeling that after such a long time of sexual repression, now we are entering into the garden of delight, and we can basically do whatever we want—cavort and f___ and suck and do all these things—albeit more consciously than before. This is still not tantra. So I think it's very important to really make the distinction that tantric spirituality is not about just indulging in sexual orgies.

WIE: *You've been speaking about the fear and shame about sex, about the body, which are the legacy of our Christian heritage and which, in spite of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, still are very deeply rooted in our culture. One of the most important aspects of your work, it seems to me, is that you give people powerful tools for facing and liberating themselves from this fear, shame and guilt, which are so often repressive and destructive.*

MA: Yes, well, it's interesting to know how the idea of original sin was actually introduced into our religious thinking. It turns out that St. Augustine was a very devoted man, devoted to God, and at a very early age wanted to enter into the Church, into priesthood and celibacy. But he was also a very sexual being and he

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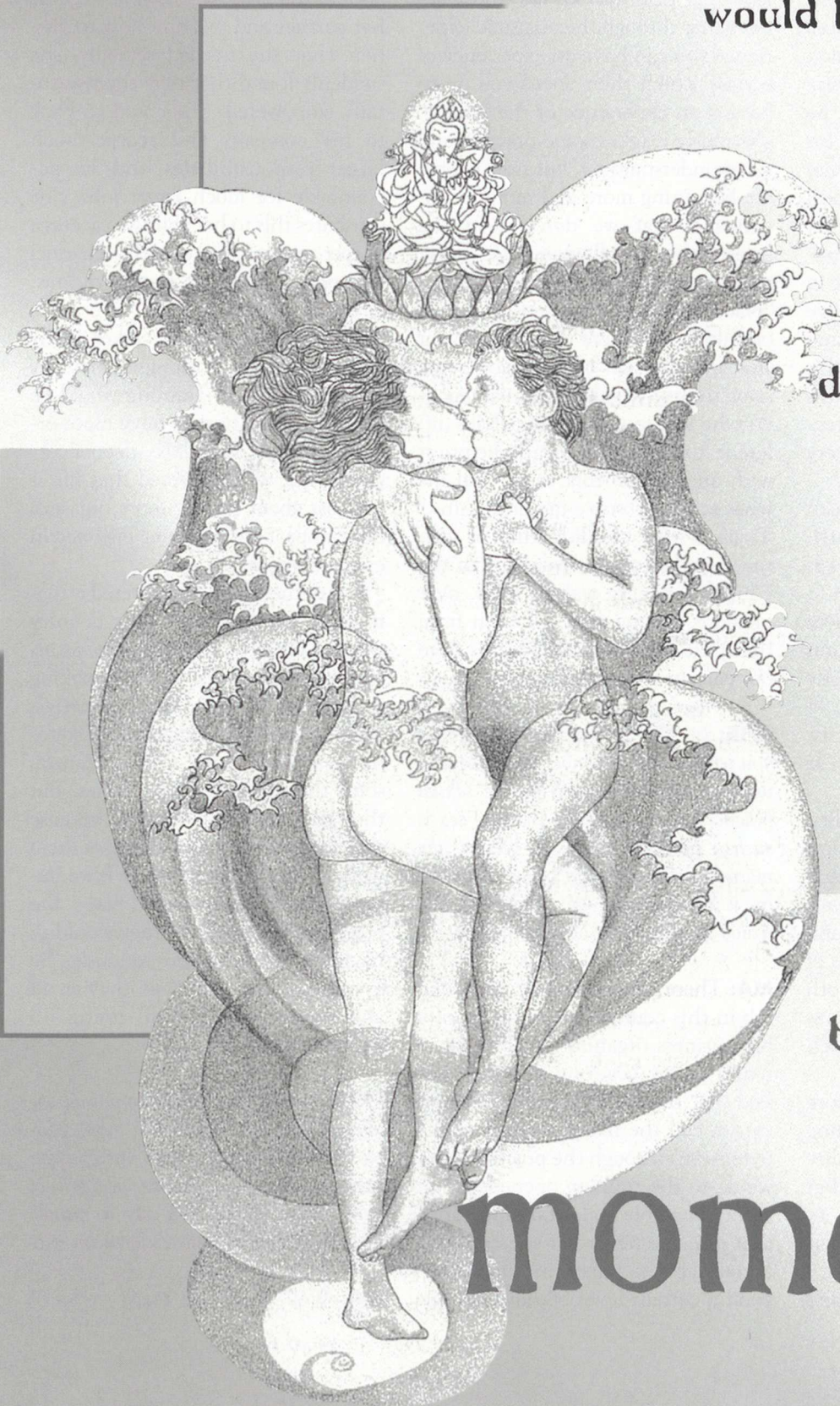
but rather

it's about

being orgasmic

in every

moment."



had a lot of sexual energy. Throughout his entire life, he struggled without success to control his libido. And so it ended up that almost every day, he couldn't resist; he had to pleasure himself and release himself. St. Augustine was in great pain because he was really sincere, and he couldn't understand why, with all of his desire to be with God and to transcend, he didn't manage—why the urge of his instinctual libido always plagued him so and why he always had to deal with it in a way that he didn't want to. So finally, out of this, he concluded that there was an element in us that predates the control that we can have through our mental and spiritual powers, and he called this “original sin.” He introduced this idea into the doctrine of the Church. And it was then adopted as a very useful *tool* for the Church.

There is also the split between male and female, where the patriarchy basically took over and it was considered that anything that had to do with women was secondary. There are so many myths in our religious traditions that are simply totally ridiculous, including the myth of Adam and Eve or the Virgin Mary. How could Mary have given birth as a virgin, and why should that be?

There can be no true spirituality, in my estimation, if there isn't a complete reconsideration of the fact that God has a masculine face and a feminine face, that there is the father and the mother and that they are both of equal necessity, that they're both equally valid archetypes to help us understand the totality of God, which transcends both genders of course.

What is finally becoming more and more prominent is an awakening of a spirituality that takes sexuality along. It is the understanding that now it's possible, and it's *attractive*, to have a direct experience of God, that in fact it's possible to have what I would call a “spiritual orgasm,” and

that enlightenment happens through this experience of spiritual orgasm. There was an article by Deepak Chopra in *Playboy* magazine that asked, “Does God Have Orgasms?” I love that title, you know. And I believe that through the orgasmic experience you can have an experience of ecstasy which then opens you up to having an experience of the Divine. Obviously it takes some practice and some understanding, but now people are beginning more and more to understand that we don't need the priest, the middleman. We don't need to think of spirituality as a “place” where you just go to church on Sundays—where you confess your sins and then go back to doing the same things. We need spiritual teachers who will initiate us, but that's different from going to a Catholic priest with an attitude that says, “Tell me what to do. Absolve me of my sins.” That's a very childish kind of attitude. And all of this results from the Church's having valued pain over pleasure, having split the flesh from the spirit. And we still get this from our parents and grandparents.

WIE: *In The Art of Sexual Ecstasy you write about a number of people who were greatly empowered by the sexual practices that you teach. Because sex is such a powerful force, to become the master of it rather than being controlled by it in one way or another clearly would give one a lot of self-confidence.*

MA: There's a woman who has a top job in this country as the leader of a big business organization. She's currently in my yearlong training. She said that the ability to clear her yoni (as we call the female sexual organ) of tensions through the practices that we do in the training opened her up to an incredible understanding. Until that day, she never felt she could be accountable to important clients beyond a certain level because she felt

she would fail. She felt she didn't have it together as a woman and wouldn't have enough power. When she cleared herself and was able to access much deeper levels of orgasm and, in the process, was able to guide her partner and tell him how to give her what she needed sexually, she suddenly found that now she was totally empowered. She could go back to her company and accept much larger responsibilities and be accountable for much larger jobs. She attributes this to her ability to access a deeper orgasmic power and to channel that power through her other *chakras*, or energy centers.

This empowerment takes many forms. At first I thought that my Love and Ecstasy Training would be about learning how to have more orgasms, better orgasms, deeper orgasms. But we discovered that life is not just about having more orgasms, but rather it's about *being orgasmic* in every moment.

Another thing I discovered is that most of the people in this country who are creative, who are innovators, who are visionaries, who are making a difference are closet ecstasies. They're all cultivating ecstatic states in their lives, many through tantra, some through other approaches. But they just don't talk about it because they know if they did—some of them work in the White House or have important jobs—they would have the press on their backs, or they wouldn't be respected or taken seriously. So everybody pretends that they're all aboveboard, but it's all going on with everybody.

WIE: *Tantra, as it's become more popular, has become equated in many people's minds with sex only, rather than understood as a comprehensive spiritual path. What would you say to people who are critical of tantra's focus on sex?*

MA: Well, there are many paths of

"The deeper you can love yourself,
the deeper you can love God. Since you are God's creation, when you
experience a great orgasm, you are rejoicing in the joy of connecting with
the **Divine.**"



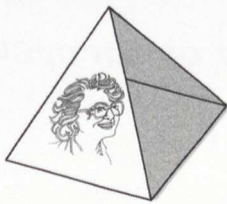
tantra. I certainly respect the traditional Tibetan approach, which says that these sexual practices should be kept secret because they require a tremendous amount of preliminary education, purification and spiritual practice before a person is actually ready to tackle the question of sexual tantra. Now people haven't done this preparation in this culture, and everybody goes around saying "tantra" just because they had a blissful experience through an extended orgasm during lovemaking. But in truth, to really access the spiritual dimension or ecstatic freedom and maintain it

while you make love, you need to purify, you need to cleanse yourself majorly. Otherwise, you get stuck with your orgasmic energy, and there's sort of an ego aggrandizement—"Oh, this is special; this is great; now I have more power; now I have you and you have me." You see, as long as you stay in the first three *chakras*, you're stuck. You'll be stuck in dependency, neediness, jealousy, the whole bit. To be able to transcend that and move to the higher *chakras* requires a combination of intense spiritual inquiry as well as developing the skill of channeling sexual

energy. Ideally, I speak of a process in which you can do both in a parallel sense.

Osho, who was one of my greatest teachers and masters, used to say that sex is like the fruit on the tree. When the fruit is ripe, the fruit falls off the tree and there is no longer any need for the fruit to be on the tree. He was saying that you need to really go to the roots of what this sexual energy is, you need to fully explore it, to fully taste it. Then you will transcend it. This approach is to go *through* the sexuality, live the sexuality to the fullest, and take that energy and

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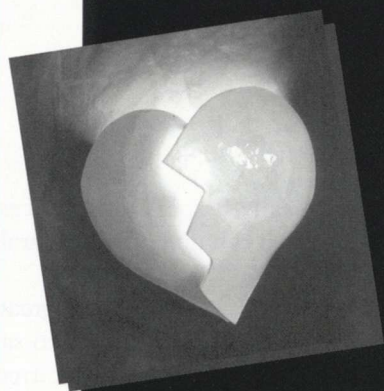
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begin to channel it to all the other areas of your being.

WIE: *You're saying that tantra is a path that is definitely supposed to be about more than sexual pleasure?*

MA: Yes. The energy of sexual pleasure can transform consciousness when it moves through the *chakras*. But you may ask: What about the spiritual domain? I would say that there comes a point for some people, depending on their past lives and their karmic predicament, where sexuality has been known, understood and tasted, and it's not so important anymore. What Osho meant is that at a certain point in a person's spiritual evolution, the intense concern about sexuality drops away. One is not so dependent on it anymore. One doesn't need it so much. It seems to me that, more and more often, I feel that I am free. Freedom for me means that I am equally happy and feel equally satisfied whether I am with my partner or on my own. I don't need to have the security of something fixed and established in terms of a sexual menu or sexual practice. Sometimes it's there, and it's immensely intense and incredibly enlightening, and sometimes it's not there, and then it is my task to be just as open and enlightened without sexuality in my life. Ultimately, all the rivers lead to the ocean.

And love doesn't just depend on sex. With or without sexual bliss, everything is all ultimately an expression of love for Self. The deeper you can love yourself, in the true sense of the word, the deeper you can love God. Since you are God's creation, when you experience a great orgasm, you are rejoicing in the joy of connecting with the Divine. Now you can experience orgasm with sex, or you can experience orgasm without sex. You can also have an ecstatic experience through meditation or

through dance. This too can be orgasmic. Moreover, when you dwell in the ecstatic freedom of spirit, sexual orgasm sometimes seems like a poor parent to this sense of unbounded freedom. Spiritual awakening is all-encompassing and all-transcending. It is vast, spacious, as if your consciousness expanded beyond the boundaries of the body. Sexual orgasm, on the other hand, is grounded in flesh and bone. I guess you could say one needs to have strong roots—and sex is such a strong root—in order to be able to fly.

WIE: *Traditionally, as you just mentioned, before one was initiated into tantric sexual practice, one was supposed to have done a lot of preparatory practices and demonstrated a certain spiritual maturity. For example, in Tibetan Buddhism, which has a strong tantric tradition, even the Dalai Lama has said that he personally hasn't achieved the level of spiritual attainment required to do the tantric practices with an actual consort. What do you think about the idea that if tantra is to be taken seriously as a spiritual practice, one has to be able to demonstrate a significant degree of spiritual maturity first?*

MA: The Dalai Lama's answer is very real and legitimate. Like him I could say also that I haven't achieved that level either. The Dalai Lama has a mission, which, it seems to me, goes beyond the exclusive focus on sexual tantric practice with a consort, you know? Tantric practice requires focus, time, devotion. It is a profound process. It tends to take you away from the world, and the Dalai Lama has an immense mission in the world. And the bigger the mission, the less time you have to devote to the cultivation of tantric sexual practices. When you're a *bodhisattva*, you are dedicated to the enlightenment of all beings. Of course, a tantrica would say: "I dedicate my orgasms to

"When you're a bodhisattva you are dedicated to the enlightenment of all beings. . . . And in sexual tantric practice, you

can dedicate your orgasm to the enlightenment of all beings. It's your contribution to the transformation of the planet. Every time one person is doing it, they heal themselves and they contribute to the healing of the whole

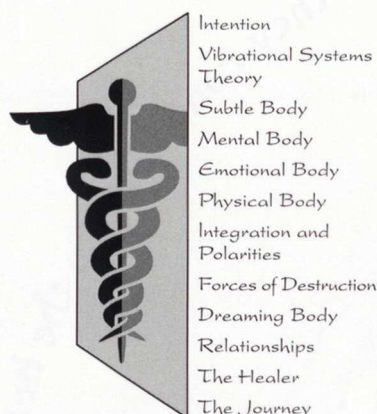


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the enlightenment of all sentient beings!" The Dalai Lama's practice is totally committed to serving all of the Tibetan people. It requires great sacrifice and compassion. You have to give up many pleasures. And, ultimately, it doesn't matter. I have also experienced many times when I had to give up what seemed like greater tantric pleasures because I had to be of service to others, to my work, to my own dharmic [spiritual teaching] path. So I've also made a lot of sacrifices—but that's fine; I'm not complaining.

WIE: I'd like to come back to the idea that if you're going to do sexual tantra as a genuine spiritual practice, then it is a serious practice that requires preparation and commitment—versus something you try to do on weekends, for instance.

MA: Yes. And in this modern and busy time, such preparation is not always possible. I have fallen into the trap many, many times of mixing the romantic with the spiritual; of having a crush on someone and being totally led by the *vajra* [the male sexual organ] and the *yonis* and all that. I did that many, many times until finally I burned through it, and I understood that the higher practice resides at another level. Now I have very clear boundaries and parameters, and I tell my tantric partners who want to practice with me that these are the rules of the game—so we can keep the energies pure.

WIE: What about the people who come to your workshops?

MA: I have followed every guideline I've gotten from every master I've worked with, and there have been many. And I haven't chosen to be a teacher of tantra; that's the other thing you need to know. I was put on this path. I was sent out to do it. There is a magic and a transmission in this training that is beyond any

kind of logical explanation. What can I say? This is just how it is. It was meant to be. I have total trust, and if someone takes this just to one level and goes off and forgets about it, then that's all it will be. They will have a little something. If they take it all the way, hey, great. But if they really want to understand this practice, they will go so deep that there is no end to it.

WIE: Why should one practice tantra rather than meditation or other kinds of spiritual practices? Taoist sexual yoga master Mantak Chia said in a recent review that "You can either pray 100,000 hours or you can consciously guide the [sexual] energy up the spine." Do you agree with this statement? Is it really that simple?

MA: Well, I'll answer that by saying that tantra is an activation of all of our energies. And by channeling the sexual energies through the various *chakras*, you can reach levels of ecstasy, states of merging and fusion through your partner with the Divine that are so powerful that I would certainly say that tantra is a shortcut. It's a shortcut for courageous people, the ones who take risks, who jump into the fire, who confront themselves with a lot of uneasy and difficult parts of themselves. It is a very powerful path. It is not an easy path if you take it in its totality and not just simply as sexual indulgence—"Let's have long orgasms," and stuff like that. So in that sense, yes, I would agree with him that it will quicken your ability to connect with the Divine. However, I would also say that it is possible, through meditation and other kinds of practices, to have access to experiences that are just as ecstatic and fulfilling as the sexual experience. You see, you can either start from the root and go to the crown, or you can start from the crown and come to the root. You thereby manifest the two functions of the human being, which are to be the

continued on page 134



stuartdavis

false prophet

designed by anthony brandenburg photo by sheila ryan



*"It can be said that I have been taught
by the divine principle of woman,
I have been led by her, I have been crucified by her
and most certainly I have been loved by her.
I am a product of that love, as is my teaching."*




"I am a TANTRIC Master"

An interview with
Barry Long
by Andrew Cohen

"I am well and I would be pleased for us to spend some time together in September, if you let me know closer to the date. *Could we leave the Absolute where it always is and talk about the love between man and woman, which seems so absolutely problematical?*" Barry Long wrote to me last summer. . . .

This was to be my second meeting with Barry Long, spiritual teacher and self-proclaimed tantric master, who lives on the north coast of New South Wales, Australia, with Sara, "the only woman he now makes love with."



INTRODUCTION continued

I had heard about Barry Long on and off over the last ten years, but met him for the first time one year ago at his country home north of Byron Bay, where I had been teaching. Our first meeting had been warm and respectful, initiated by myself as I had been curious to meet this enigmatic teacher for a very long time. Whenever two teachers meet as peers there is always an atmosphere of heightened attention as both individuals scrutinize each other in order to find out if the other is for *real*. In this meeting there had never been a discourteous moment or even a hint of competition. From this man who obviously had a very different teaching from my own, I had felt only respect and a deeply moving tenderness that was the mark of a man whose heart had been irrevocably touched by something infinitely greater than himself. In our first meeting we'd spent most of our time getting to know each other and had spoken only in generalities about our different approaches to that most delicate task: daring to teach others about the mystery of liberation. I was familiar with the fact that in Barry's teaching, the primary spiritual practice was "making love rightly," which was Barry's unique and very original approach to the ancient "left-hand" path of tantra. At the time I knew very little about what it was that he was actually teaching with regard to tantra; I only knew that he put great emphasis on it. When I returned to Australia last September, one year later, we had already decided to devote the upcoming issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* entirely to the investigation of spirituality and sexuality, and it therefore became obvious that we had to speak to the man who confidently refers to himself as "the only Western tantric master."

In preparation for my meeting with Barry, one evening I got together with our editorial staff to read excerpts from one of his books about the tantric path that he teaches. To my surprise, something unexpected happened. Simply through "listening" I received *transmission*, which means that I experienced a direct *recognition* of what it is that Barry is endeavoring to share with those who come to him. This was an important event for me personally, for it was the first time in my life that I was able to understand what spiritual sexuality could be all about.

Since my interview with Barry, I have studied more about his teaching on "making love rightly," and no matter what one thinks about the ultimate potential of spiritual sexuality in any form to truly liberate a human being, there is no doubt that what Barry Long is teaching is a serious spiritual path that demands sincerity and profound commitment from anyone who endeavors to pursue it. While Barry is often outrageous, regularly audacious and unapologetically romantic for a teacher of enlightenment, his calm abidance in absolute singularity always shines through—especially when you're sure that he's gone one step too far.

ANDREW COHEN: *Some time ago I was sent a copy of your book Stillness Is the Way, and as I was reading it out loud with our editorial team I actually got transmission from the piece and then, in an instant, I felt that I understood what it was that you were trying to communicate to people. I really began to appreciate it in such a way that I was actually very touched by it. What you were describing, I think, was a modern tantric perspective. I'd like to tell you what it was that I understood, and since I'm sure I haven't understood it completely, please do correct me as we go along. Your main point, I think, was that the inner experience of revelation, of oneness, does not mean anything until it's brought into this world, into this very real, actual and material world.*

BARRY LONG: Yes, that is so.

AC: *And that the only way, or the most significant way, to bring that revelation into this world is through the perfect union of man and woman.*

BL: That is so.

AC: *And that through man and woman coming together in romantic or sexual union, an experience of this perfect non-separation, perfect oneness, will be experienced by both.*

BL: Yes.

AC: *And in that, both will experience, shall we say, the embodied fulfillment of the inner spiritual revelation.*

BL: Well, yes, although that might be giving to people too much as an expectation of something for themselves—because there's nothing in it for themselves. But what this experience does bring into the woman is utter and complete love of the man, and when a woman utterly and completely loves a man—a man who loves her, of course—she sees the God in him. And that's all woman can do, and all that she needs to do. Because when she sees the God in her man and she is being perfectly loved, she is in the state of woman.

You see, a woman doesn't have enlightenment; she only thinks she does. A woman is already enlightened when she is in a state of love such that, for instance, even if I died, Sara here would not suffer because I am already in her, and she knows what I am. And so she is protected from suffering anymore at the hands of man because she has realized or seen God in man, and she has that consciousness that is just woman—which is to say, pure love. There's no great blinding consciousness. That's only a parlor trick of spiritual commentators. I don't have any blinding light now. I mean, I used to have what we call realization and great wonderful insights when I was ignorant because insights occur in darkness; and therefore you get lovely lights. But eventually when the ignorance disappears there's just a constant state, whatever it is. There's neither light nor dark, and so what have you got?

So this is where woman—a woman—becomes or is the love of God. That's what she does. Now she can't know anything in that state, and that's the extraordinary thing. Because in the love of God, the true love or union with God, you know nothing. Isn't that right, Andrew?

AC: Yes, absolutely true.

BL: And she is brought into that state because woman's nature is utter and complete love. She is God in female form in existence. And if she can reach that place through the love of man, who is God in masculine form, then you have God making love to God in the two forms that God has created so that God may know love, because unless you have two forms, you don't have any distinction. If there were only one form, you would have no distinction and therefore, in this existence, no possibility of realization.

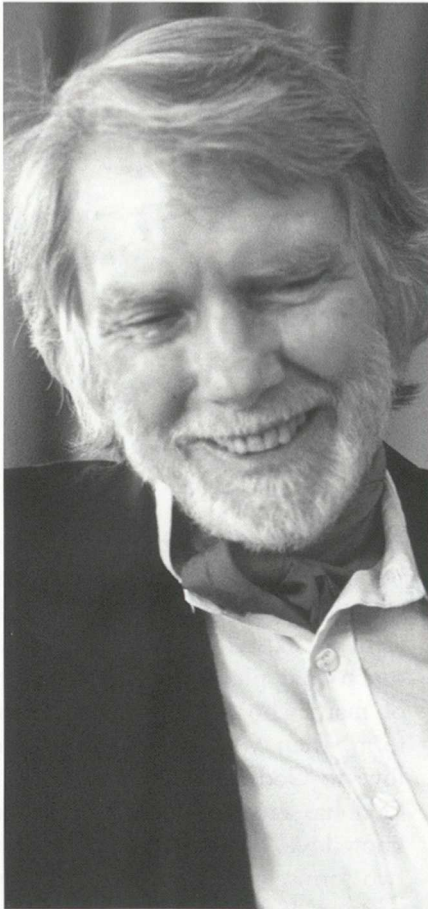
AC: *No self-recognition.*

BL: Yes, that's right.

AC: *Now, what I also understood from the piece I read was that in this practice of making love, or of man loving woman or woman loving man, there is an absolute imperative that the ego completely surrender in the face of the demand on the man to utterly, totally and completely adore woman, and on the woman to unconditionally and absolutely embrace man.*

BL: Yes.

AC: *And I understood that in truly making love, in man's truly embracing woman and woman's truly embracing*



“THE CAUSE OF MOST OF THE UNHAPPINESS ON EARTH

is that man and woman have actually forgotten how to make physical love. This is the greatest tragedy of all time. This means that only the individual man or woman has any chance of starting to correct it. There can be no mass solutions. The problem is too personal and too deep. Everybody has to do it for himself or herself or it can't be done.”

from *Making Love*

man—for this ultimate union to actually be able to take place—the ego has to completely subside. And that is really what makes this particular practice so powerful. In order for it to work, an absolute surrender has to occur; otherwise the fulfillment inherent in it could never be realized.

BL: Yes, otherwise you would have only what we call human love, which is the love of all couples on earth. And that's why there has to be a preparation, which my teaching also includes: How do I get there? How do I do this? Well, for one thing you've got to be honest, or you'll have a dishonest love and a dishonest connection. And therefore, for

the sake of honesty, the woman cannot allow her man to get away with anything. She's not allowed to say, “Oh well, I don't want to tell you what to do,” or anything like that which she might be tempted to do. She's got to say, “Wait, I may not want to tell you anything, but we agreed when we first started this relationship that we were going to be honest to God, honest to truth. And what's the good of a relationship if that's not what it's about?” As they've agreed to that, she must say, for example, “You have just spoken to me in a way that endeavors to pull woman down. You might not be aware of it, but you have. Now I'll tell you what you said. You were

pulling me down”—which is fundamentally man's human nature, to pull woman down—“You were trying to undermine me. Now, is that true or false?” And the man, if he's already said, “I want to be honest with you,” will look at what he said and then he'll say, “Yes, I see. I laughed when I said, ‘Well, you often make mistakes, don't you?’ I laughed, didn't I?” Now, that's a form of pulling woman down under the guise of some sort of humorous aside. And she has to put a stop to all that stuff because that's what man does. He uses everything to undermine her. That's just one example of how woman has to watch man.

And then it goes on, of course,

into sex, where he gets excited. And she's got to say, "Well, I can't have an excited man inside my body because what you do then, you see, you transfer your excitement to my body. And if you continue to make love with me like that, which is what happened to me in the past when I was an ordinary woman and with sexual men—I was dragged down; I got self-doubtful and I got depressed every now and again. I didn't have self-confidence, and so I lost my way. And I know that's because sexual men with sexy desires—'sexman'—was in me. And now I don't have any sexman in me. I have a man who is not excited, who just wants to love me and does that with his body and not with his mind." Because the mind has never made love in its life and never will. It's only made sex.

AC: *So what you're speaking about when you use the term "making love" is the renunciation of aggressively pursuing an experience and using the other person—man using woman, in this case—just to have some kind of sensual experience for himself.*

BL: Well, that is utter selfishness, isn't it? It's not honest, not honest to God, not honest to anything. Certainly it's not honest to the woman. Now that's all finished where I'm concerned. And the way to do that is what I'm endeavoring to impart as much as I can.

AC: *Is it true that in approaching love-making as a spiritual path, the personality—for example, the personal identity of the man—has to be transcended in order to embrace what it actually means to be man?*

BL: Yes.

AC: *And the same for the woman? By personal identity I mean neurotic self-fixation and everything that would in-*

clude. Would that have to be transcended in order to embrace what it really means to be a woman? So that a man could allow himself to experience who he really is when there is no neurotic self-fixation, and the woman could experience who she really is, and in that they would each experience the ultimately impersonal Self?

BL: Well, I don't use the word "Self." I use "Being."

AC: *In that impersonal Being then, would there be the living, conscious knowing of who they really were before there was ever a thought of being the separate personality?*

BL: Well, I wouldn't say it that way. What I'd say is that they are completely and utterly in the knowledge of love. And the knowledge of love is the knowledge of nothing. So there is no self experience. There's no description at all except to say, "This is beauty. This is beautiful. I love you. You are beautiful." There's simply nothing more to say.

AC: *Would there be, in that, an experience of fullness?*

BL: Yes, but it's not a fullness that you can get. It's a fullness of Being, and you would understand it and realize that the fullness of Being is nothing to speak of. That's the thing: Nothing to speak of. Because people get terrified when you say, "God is nothing." So I add after that, as best I can, that it's "nothing to speak of" because they will get frightened when they find it out for themselves. "Oh, my God," they will say, "am I going to be nothing?"

AC: *So in this path, in lovemaking and relationship as a spiritual path, what it is that puts such enormous pressure on the ego is the demand to surrender all the separate and false notions of self in order*

to be able to be man or be woman. Is that how it works?

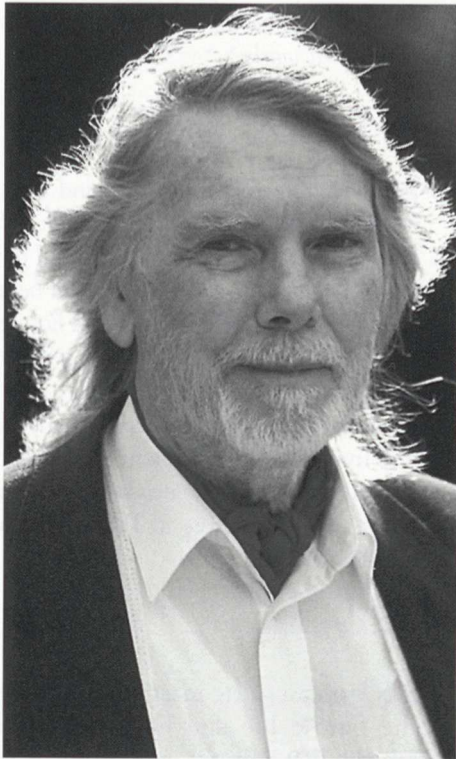
BL: Yes.

AC: *That's very powerful—and very beautiful. And as I said, I feel that I have only really begun to understand for the first time how and why it could be a genuine practice of liberation and how it really could work.*

BL: Yes, well, it does work because I am living that. And you see, what I've lived is what enables me to teach. If I didn't live it, I'd only be a commentator.

AC: *Of course.*

BL: I am a tantric master. And I live the tantric life and have lived the tantric life and am still living the tantric life, but I only do that with my one woman now. But I have brought several women to consciousness—sufficient consciousness. And they are now in the world and doing what I want them to do, which is to help man come to a greater knowledge of God, which is love. I am now living, with Sara, the impossible, which is a divinely given thing: how two bodies, which will die, can have eternal union. That's what I am living with Sara because if I live this, then I can pass it down, or it will be passed down, to those who are in my teaching and are practicing this love, this honest love. But I have to live it first because I am the master. And if the master doesn't live it, the people haven't got any chance to. They're getting it because there's a transmission through the psyche that goes on in us: If I live it, then that's transmitted down the line for those who are also trying to live it to the best of their ability. That's what is being done here. It is my way to have made love to women in my teaching, women in whom I have seen the light



“WOMAN MUST BE LOVED.”

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from *Making Love*

or in whom there is sufficient love to bring them to a greater realization of God. When a tantric master makes love to a woman, it's different from anyone else making love to her because he gives her a greater knowledge of the love of God.

AC: *Could I ask how he does that?*

BL: He does that not with his mind but with his physical body and his innocence. How else could he do it? He's got to be innocent.

AC: *Through his purity.*

BL: His body's got to be pure. That's all that every man is endeavoring to do on the spiritual path—to purify his body. First he starts with his mind, which is always impure; he's got to get rid of his mind. Then he's got to get rid of the ground of his

mind, which is his emotions and all these wrong things that he says he loves: He loves this, he loves that, he doesn't like this, he likes that—all emotions. So there are those two things he's got to get rid of in order to start to be innocent. And then he's got to be in his body, which still remains after he has purified himself of those things. We're always where our body is, aren't we? You can't be anywhere else unless you're a magician. You've got to be where the truth is, and the truth is where your body is. So when I'm making love, it's absolutely paramount that I be in my body because only my body can make love. If I'm fantasizing, I'm in my mind, and that leads to emotions; I've left my body and I cannot make love because I am no longer innocent.

AC: *No, of course not, because you're*

not even with the person you're with. You're not loving them.

BL: No, you're probably with some phantom woman in your mind. And it is this phantom woman you're thinking about that gives you an erection. Now you don't need that. But my goodness, as men come over to this, and men do live this in my teaching to the best of their ability, they find that if they don't have the excitement that is sex, they lose their erections and they lose their confidence and they lose everything because they've always been dependent on a false excitement called “sex.”

AC: Yes.

BL: Well, when you give that up, there's always a trap; there's always an intermission period, isn't there? Just as when somebody comes into your

teachings and they're filled with great enthusiasm and they say, "Andrew, you're wonderful. I've never had such a revelation," and then they go away for a few weeks or a few months and when they come back they say, "I've lost it! I've lost it!" It's all gone because they've started to enter a different part of their ground, and there's a confusion as the confluence between the old ignorance and the new change begins to form. They've got to start again. Then they can get rid of the confusion.

AC: In tantric lovemaking, do you stress that it's essential for the man to prolong the period before ejaculation or even to avoid it altogether? So that he's able, for example, to experience profound intimacy with the woman?

BL: Yes. In the beginning, he has to, as much as possible, practice retention, but without doing it by suppres-

sion. And it's just very difficult to get the distinction between those two. But eventually, because this is a divine thing and it is God who is making the love, not any person, there's no focus on retention or nonretention; there is just what is. And that's because the person has gone, whereas the retention has a certain person in it, a certain intention in it.

AC: A person who is still trying to do something or not do something.

BL: Yes, and of course, the question is, How do I get between these two—suppression and retention? And that's where he's got to give up trying with the mind. He's got to allow his body to just do it. There are times when he may have no retention at all, when he starts to have orgasms and he can't stop it, and that will lead him to doubt himself. Now the whole purpose of the spiritual life is to arrive at

a point where one has no self-doubt whatever. So he's got to give up one of his favorite attachments, which is self-doubt. And so, you know, God takes over more and more.

AC: And as self-doubt is given up or transcended, the ability to make love in a nonselfish, nonaggressive, nondualistic way would begin to occur more and more naturally.

BL: More and more naturally, that is so.

AC: And ultimately, one would be making love for very long periods of time—hours and hours at a time?

BL: What I'd say is that there's no interruption: that attraction is always there, it doesn't come and go, and so you no longer feel like making love. What I teach people is that you must give up feeling like making love, and you must give up not feeling like



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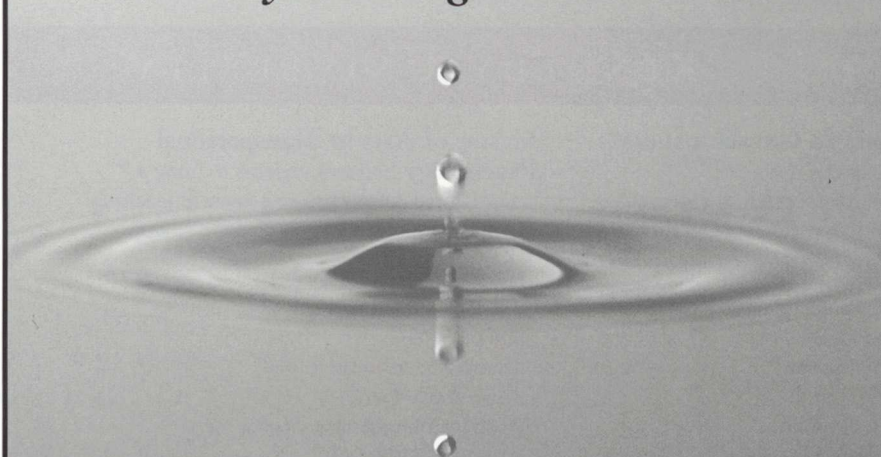
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making love. Because if you feel like making love, that's selfish. And if you don't feel like making love, that's selfish too. At one of my last meetings someone said, "Well, how do you get rid of wanting to make love and not wanting to make love?" This is something we're all familiar with. The man lying beside the woman says, "Am I going to or not? Do I want to or don't I?" And my answer was, "Well, you make love all the time." Now, if you're doing something all the time, you can't want to or not want to, can you? And they said, "Well, how often would be often enough?" And I said, "Well, morning, night, and if possible, at noon." I suppose that shocks everybody, but otherwise you will want to and not want to because you haven't given yourself to love. If you get a pause between making love, you will have a mental or biological urge to make love to a woman—you're a man, you can't help it—but that's a want, and you can't want in spiritual life.

You see, this is tantra. I'm the only Western tantric master. I know that's self-advertisement, but I don't hear anyone talking the truth of tantra, you see. Whereas I am very open; I'm open about the fact that I am a tantric master. I told my people at the time that I had taken on and was making love to five women from among them. Because I don't permit secrets, and I don't have secrets. I don't go into intimate details, but I don't like to mislead people either. So that's the way of my life, and if you don't like it, you leave. But if you listen to the truth that I speak, perhaps you will get something out of it.

Someone sent me an article from America about a tantric master, a Tibetan I think he was. Some women in the States were suing him, and I read in this article that as a result the American Buddhists have decided to lay down a code of con-

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duct for spiritual masters. That is such a contradiction because, of course, real tantra is not abusive. Tantra is love, God loving God in existence. And God is not abusive. What I so dislike is the secrecy of these people. This Tibetan teacher didn't let the people know what was going on—that he was making love to his students. He didn't announce, "I am a tantric master, and this is a holy state." It is because of this kind of thing that tantra is so misused, and we have tantric schools and tantric this and tantric that—everywhere I go I hear it—by people who do not know what they're talking about because what they have is not a God-given power. It's a God-given power to be a tantric master, to have that power in your body; it's a God-given state, just like Self-realization or God-realization is a state, just like enlightenment is a state. This is something given by God and it's for the people. But if you don't speak to the people about it, tantra becomes abused by commentators and frauds and sexualists and God knows what! So I try to avoid that by being open and honest about what I do with my life.

AC: *That's essential.*

BL: Yes, especially with such a tricky subject. The whole world is sexual, is sex. But I'm talking about God coming out of man and woman making love. I'm not talking about orgasms and sexual indulgence and excitement. I'm talking about something pure and beautiful coming out of it.

AC: *I'd like to speak just a little bit longer about the actual tantric practice of making love. You were saying that ideally one would be experiencing this kind of profound intimacy with one's partner three times a day. Now in that intimacy, where ideally there's no want-*

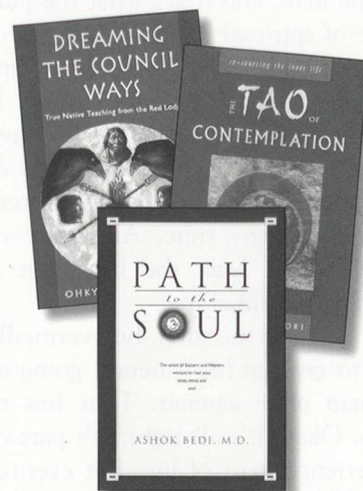
ing and there's no not wanting—there's simply being—would it always be a nonorgasmic experience for the man, and would it also be nonorgasmic for the woman?

BL: No, it would not always be non-orgasmic. Because this is God making love to God, and that stands whether there's orgasm or not. But the thing is, the wanting and the not wanting to make love disappears altogether. So after you have done this, after you have made love, there's no wanting or not wanting; it just becomes a state where you don't have to worry about wanting or not wanting because that's disappeared from you. Just as the self disappears from you, that disappears too.

AC: *I can appreciate that this kind of practice, if one engaged in it very sincerely, would create an experience of profound intimacy with the other that would be sustained and, on the interpersonal level, there would then have to be perfect honesty. No doubt or resentment could ever be accumulated because if it was, it would instantly destroy this perfect trust.*

BL: Yes, absolutely. But we've also got to be practical about these things. I'm not trying to present something in this existence that is perfect in the sense that there are no reactions. The man's got to start with an individual woman after all. Although he's seeing what he loves as the principle of woman, when he approaches this individual woman he's going to come up against her emotions, which is her past—her past sexual experiences and all the rest of it. And that's going to be in her body. And if she hasn't started to discard her identification with those things, he's not going to be able to adore her. He can love her and endeavor to reach her, but he won't be able to adore her because of the impediments

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of self which are between him and that which she really is. And what applies to the woman applies equally to the man, and that's what the purpose of spiritual life is: to get rid of these damned selfish, emotional impediments that are between us. It won't work until both of us have agreed to help each other get rid of this thing and not give it mastery over us at any time. Although we may fail, at least the intention is there to get rid of it.

Now for the man, he eventually has to give up his itinerant going to woman after woman. That has to stop. Okay, it's all right; it's part of experience, part of life. But eventually, if he's going to realize God in existence, which is the woman principle, he's going to have to take woman on. Now in my case, I've had five women whom I have taken on. I taught them and loved them for al-

most three years. We spoke of love and God and life and truth every time we were together, and we spoke together because all the women were together and of course no jealousy could possibly exist.

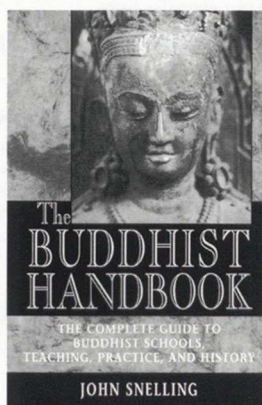
AC: *Were you living together?*

BL: No, but we would come together, and of course the idea is to remove the jealousy from woman, the competitiveness, because unless that's done this can't be lived. And so these women overcame their jealousies, overcame their competitiveness, because when God is being spoken about and taught and realized, there's this wonderful power that is there which is focused on and which helps women to do that. Most men, when they make love to other women, do so in secret—they go behind a woman's back and she discov-

ers maybe five years later that he's been having affairs, and she's shocked, absolutely shocked—but mine was an exercise in honesty and rightness and God. It's terribly important for a man to be able to talk to his woman about love, life, God, truth and death.

Now, not every man can take on five women and talk about love, life, God, truth and death and keep everything in order. An ordinary man can't do that. He becomes sexual; his mind goes and the woman's mind goes and they get competitive. Only a tantric master can do that. Otherwise it's just too demanding. But the tantric master is provided with that power. And so now today, when I am only with Sara, these women are out there and they are spiritual sisters. They love one another and they are beyond jealousy, beyond possessiveness, and because

continued on page 144



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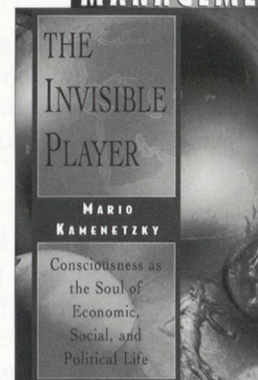
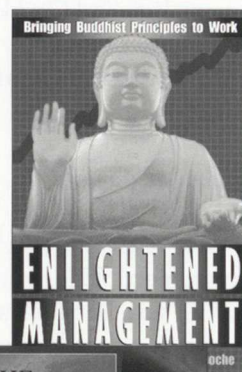
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For a period of three years, Barry Long made love with five women in the role of tantric master. We asked him if we could interview one of his tantric consorts in order to have a first-hand account of what it is like to practice sexual union with a living tantric master. While Barry denied our request to speak directly with any of these women, he said he would be happy to submit our questions to two of them and that they would respond in writing. The power of his teaching speaks for itself in their words.

Sally

QUESTIONS:

1. You were involved in a sexual relationship with a spiritual teacher who has described himself as a "Western tantric master." In what ways is being in relationship with a tantric master different from being in a conventional romantic relationship?

2. In your experience with your teacher, what are the components of tantric lovemaking that make it distinct from conventional lovemaking?

Sally is one of the women Barry Long speaks about in his interview. She was in an intimate association with Barry for five years and is now thirty-seven.

1 First, I would say I was never in *relationship* with a tantric master, although we were together many times as people in relationship are. Relationship is sought so individuals can be secure with each other, where I as an individual can live in a state of security and relative ignorance, where you give me what I want both sexually and psychologically, and for that I stay with you.

Being with a tantric master is going beyond my want of relationship and becomes a process of self-knowledge, self-annihilation and absence as I become more one with the divine consciousness he is. Fundamentally, through the physical making of love—the most dangerous thing on earth—all personal love and attachment, sexual want, insecurity, jealousy and possessiveness will be faced. This can never truly be faced sufficiently in conventional romantic love. Tantric love is love of God, the unknown, love of Nothing, not love of the individual man or woman.

2 Tantric lovemaking is used as a vehicle to become more nothing, more absent, more love, and in this way it is distinct from conventional lovemaking. There is no excitement—yet there is profound passion. No movement of the sexual imaginative mind—but great stillness where I love from my being. It is an absence of my self, of all *feeling* of love, but it is an immediate communication of love and beauty between two bodies.

Jade

"My name is Jade, and I am one of the five women Barry speaks about in his interview. I had an intimate spiritual and physical association with Barry for about seven years, which started when I was thirty-two; I am now forty."

1 To start with, I would like to define "tantric" because there's a lot of non-sense spoken about it. In my experience, tantra is the power to bring a woman more deeply into the love of God within through the act of making love. A tantric master has that God-given power.

I could not describe my association with Barry as a relationship in any conventional sense. A conventional romantic relationship is more of an apparently random, haphazard process usually entered into with minimal, if any, sense of purpose. With Barry the association was entered into consciously, as a process of purification for me, so there was purpose in it. This was known by me and stated by Barry right from the beginning. The association was always only about returning me to a deeper sense of God, impersonal love or truth; this was why Barry had taken me on. I was told I would be taken through love and in that process purified—the degree of purification was in God's hands. And that is what was done.

In a conventional relationship there are usually emotional needs, expectations, wantings and dependencies on both sides—in other words, the love is selfish or personal. This was not the case in my association with Barry. The love in Barry was impersonal and profound, an intelligence that wanted nothing for itself out of the association. It or he was not true to the person I was but was only uncompromisingly true to the divine will or what was right—the purpose, which was to bring me closer to God. How did I know he was true? First, the power of such love was able to communicate to the depths of me, in a place outside time and space. This was quite extraordinary and at the same time quite natural. And second, over many years I saw Barry consistently demonstrate selfless love and service; in fact his entire life was about bringing others to a greater sense of God. It was that which he served. So it was always clear to me that Barry was a God-man or realized consciousness and therefore provided a true reflection that would help to purify me.

2 Conventional lovemaking is largely selfish and self-satisfying. In making love with a tantric master, Barry, a quality of love was communicated through his body and the action of making love that I had never known before. I knew without a shadow of a doubt that I was being loved by true love, with no stain of selfishness in it. This love was also so utterly devoid of sentimentality or emotionality that it could almost be said to be cold by anyone looking for the comforting warmth of an ordinary love affair. But this coldness had a cosmic pristine purity and beauty which I knew to be divine. It was also profound and communicated stillness and joy. Its effects were long-lasting and intensified the love of God or purity within. Although it is several years later, that love is still in me now as I write; it has never left me and never will because it is timeless, profound. Once made, this love is made forever.

Sally

3. Were there any prerequisites for you to become Barry Long's consort? Did you have to prepare in any way in order to begin this practice?

4. What for you was most challenging about doing this practice?

5. What has been imparted to you through your intimate association with a living tantric master? How has this transformed you as a woman and as a person?

6. How is the fruit of your practice of this teaching visible in your life outside of a romantic/sexual relationship?

3 The only prerequisite to becoming Barry Long's consort, which was given to me by the grace of God, was my commitment, the absolute giving of my life to love, to God, to the divine consciousness he is. Love cannot be thought about, cannot be practiced. Any practice is still within the mind. So outside of this there are no prerequisites, no preparation, as there is no practice—no doing—no becoming. Only my being true to life itself and the divine will that brought me to him.

4 What for me was most challenging in being with a tantric master as one of five women was facing my sexuality—the force that would keep me separate from love and from which all problems arise. I had to face the hell of my self, all need to be “the one,” to be special, to have relationship, to have the man for myself, all want of love. I had to give to my sisters—the four other women—and the master, whilst facing all fear, self-doubt, jealousy or any emotion that would arise from this process so that in time the sexual energy could return to the power of love.

5 My absolute all-consuming love of God, the unknown, where there is and never will be the love of anything else. I have realized and continue to realize love as Nothing. I am able to love without fear and attachment and truly serve the purpose of love. Although my self still exists as potential, I am no longer seduced by feelings and do not battle with the sexual possession—my self—but instead am able to be the power of woman—love. I am no longer able to be manipulated by man.

I wait on the Lord, the Most High. Therefore I do not live in choice, decision-making and want of anything other than the truth of my life at this moment. In this I know God—joy without a cause.

6 I live a very simple and ordinary life where I have no need of experience and in that I am not attached to pain and making a problem of my life. Therefore I am free to do as I do in the world as any woman would, but I am always the intelligence, the consciousness behind the action. From this place of nothing, I do not infect those around me with my emotion and unhappiness, as is the human condition. But instead I endeavor—not through any trying to do something, but by remaining in this place, in God—to communicate the love, the sweetness of my being.

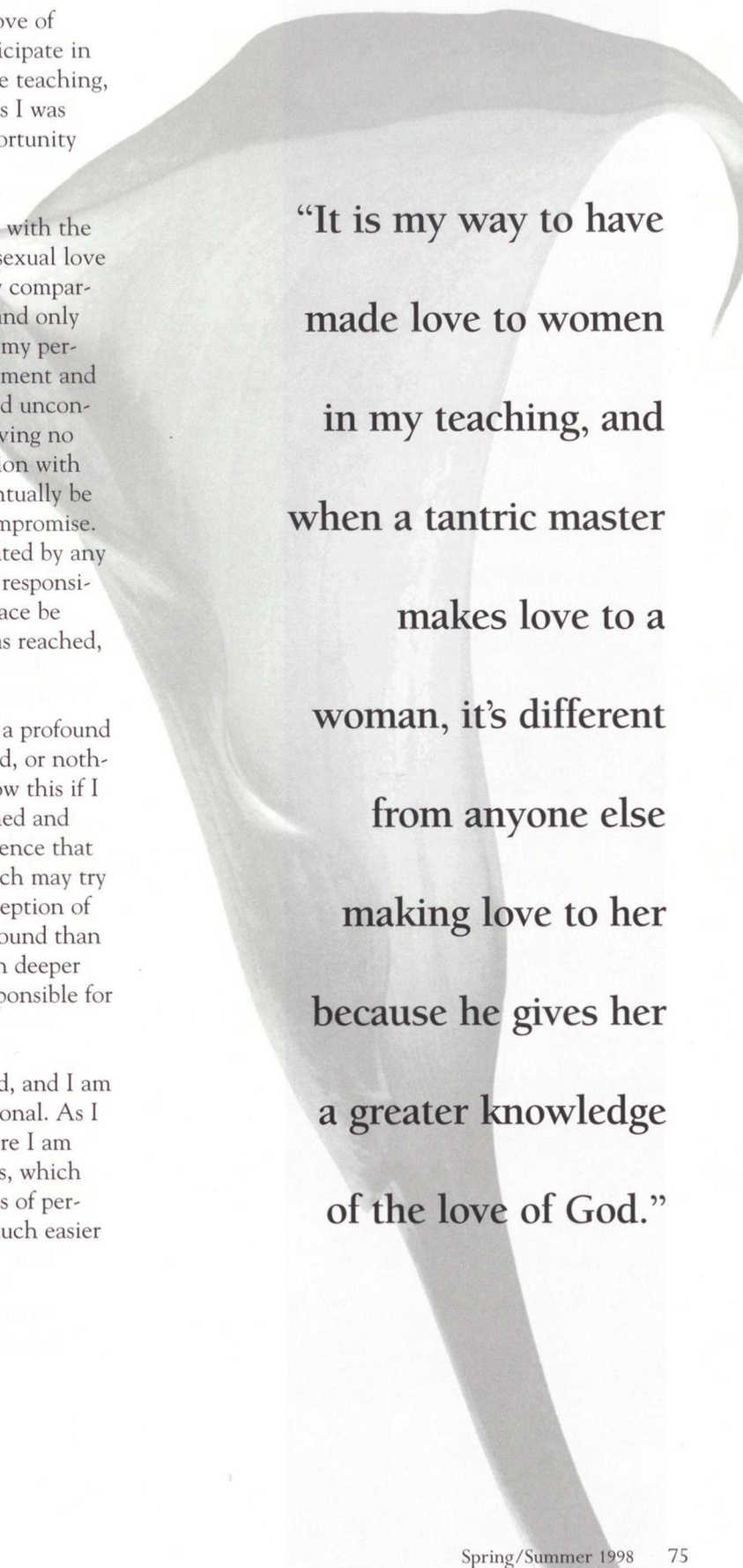
Jade

3 As far as I know, the only prerequisite was a love of truth and the master and a willingness to participate in the process. My only preparation was a love of the teaching, which I had been putting into practice as much as I was able. But fundamentally, to be given such an opportunity was an unearned grace.

4 Giving up my need for a personal relationship with the master. Dying to my wanting of his exclusive sexual love and attention, my possessiveness, my jealousy, my comparisons with other women, my need to be the one and only woman. In other words, the awful burning out of my personal, selfish feelings of love and romantic attachment and self-importance. Having to give up my deeply held unconscious notions of what I thought love was and having no room to move away from the ongoing confrontation with my selfishness. It was awful and wondrous to eventually be made to be responsible by the master's lack of compromise. By that I mean that, in his refusal to be manipulated by any emotionality or negativity in me, Barry made me responsible for the lack of love in me. It could then by grace be given up. But in the process, before that point was reached, there was great suffering as my self fought.

5 My consciousness has been changed. There is a profound knowledge of love and a conscious love of God, or nothing, which is my very being. But really I only know this if I reflect upon it. As a woman I am far more detached and unemotional than I ever was. There is an intelligence that seems to keep any emotionality or negativity which may try to arise at a certain distance. I would say my perception of life is much vaster and more impersonal and profound than before my association with Barry. There is a much deeper sense of being part of the whole. I know I am responsible for love, and that is what I serve.

6 The external circumstances of my life are good, and I am grateful for my life which I know to be impersonal. As I said before, I am largely unemotional and therefore I am usually able to see the fact and the truth of things, which helps me address life in a right way. The emotions of personal wanting are much reduced, and it is now much easier to rest in God's will.



**“It is my way to have
made love to women
in my teaching, and
when a tantric master
makes love to a
woman, it's different
from anyone else
making love to her
because he gives her
a greater knowledge
of the love of God.”**

7. How do you see your role or responsibility in the world as one who has completed this spiritual training?

8. Now that you have "graduated," are you a tantric master in your own right? How are you carrying forth the transmission of the teachings?

9. Are you in a tantric relationship now? If yes, what have you found to be the difference between your intimate association with a tantric master and your relationship with a tantric partner who is not a master?

Sally

7 There is no completion of spiritual training, as there is no training. That would imply the use of my self to achieve something, an end result where there is no result, no end to God or love. In my life that means to love wherever I am asked to love by life and God. To truly love enough where there is no compromise or self-consideration, only what is right and true in the situation. A practical example of this uncompromising love is: If you were my partner and you were emotional or demanding, I would give your emotional demands nothing. Because my love is this divine consciousness, it is impossible for me to love emotional unhappiness. Love is cold—not warm. In doing this, beneath your self, your pain, you would have the knowledge that you are being loved, being freed of your self; thereby together, we serve the purpose of existence, which is to become pure in God.

8 No, I am not a tantric master. I am purely a woman who has realized love and continues to go deeper into the knowledge of love as being nothing. Woman is not a master, not a teacher. If she thinks she is, in that alone, she is not. That would be the sexuality in her—the want to exist as something.

Woman in her purest form is still and nonprojective. Only from this place as a reflection of love can I communicate what I have received from this teaching.

9 There is no tantric partner; there is only the tantric master as the utter realization of love, both in and out of existence. This is the tantric power.

In being with a tantric master, this power of love—the rarest thing on earth—is always present, constant, immediate in the body, transformative in its divine beauty, fundamentally in the making of love.

I am currently in partnership with a man and although we are engaged in living a divine love together, this power, this consciousness is rarely seen in the man due to the ignorance of love. I, through my experience and knowledge of love that have come only from having been with a tantric master—the greatest privilege on earth—endeavor to communicate that which I have received, both in the making of love and our being together.

In this is a great responsibility to love as I endeavor to align him with one love—God, through the love of woman.

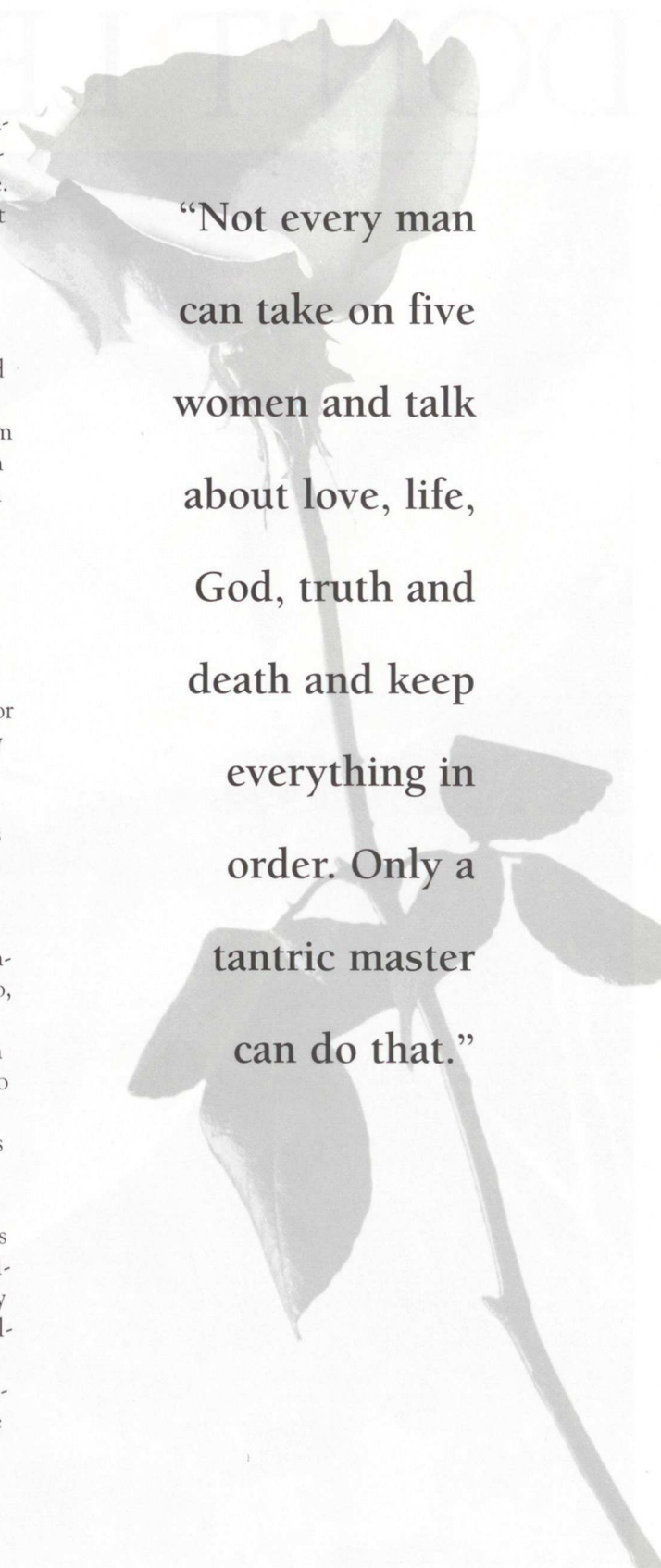
Jade

7 First I wouldn't say my spiritual training is completed. My life is my spiritual training, and so the depersonalizing process goes on. But my responsibility is clearly to be true to what I have been taught and know to be true within. In the first instance, this is to live my life free from negative emotions—in other words not to let that sort of selfishness impose itself on my life or the lives of those around me. In the second instance, it is to serve where I can or where it is asked of me. The challenge is to live the truth of love in the world and not to compromise. This is my purpose.

8 Again I wouldn't say I had "graduated." Life moved on, and it was no longer possible to be intimately associated with Barry. No, I am not a tantric master in my own right. A tantric master has a God-given power to awaken and I am an ordinary woman who loves God. Nor am I carrying forth any transmission of the teachings. But there has been much that I have absorbed in my years of exposure to the master, and this I communicate as it arises, particularly to my current partner, in all the circumstances of our life together.

9 Yes, I am in partnership with a man. I wouldn't name it as a tantric relationship, but my endeavor is always to communicate something of the divine love I have known or have the knowledge of within me. This is choiceless on my part because it is that which I love. I am not motivated by the desire to have a personal relationship but only by the endeavor to live the truth of love together, which is always going toward a greater impersonality in both of us. It is the virtue, rightness and profundity, in other words the God, that I love in the man—not his person or personality. It is my joy that my partner manifest more love of God and consciousness within himself. As this is my partner's desire also, in this sense the relationship could be described as tantric.

There is really no comparison between the association with the tantric master and an association with a man who is not a master. One is cosmic man and the other is earth man. The consciousness is entirely different. The master is a realized power who provides a communication of God-consciousness, presence or love at all times. In himself he is nothing, he doesn't exist. So it doesn't matter what he is doing, his presence just communicates something of the divine, which is quite natural. This is a very inspiring energy to be around and gives one a conscious reflection that is always pushing one beyond one's self in some way or another. Away from this reflection, I have to be more responsible. It is up to me to reach into my inner depths and live what has been imparted. ■



**"Not every man
can take on five
women and talk
about love, life,
God, truth and
death and keep
everything in
order. Only a
tantric master
can do that."**

DON'T LEAVE GOD



An interview with
Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

OUT OF IT



Western tantra, Christian and Hindu celibacy, Tibetan sexual yoga, Buddhist monasticism . . . as we began discussing these vastly divergent approaches to sexuality in spiritual life, I wondered what Judaism had to say about the subject. Raised in a Reconstructionist synagogue with a liberal Zionist approach, I knew, on a cellular level, the importance to Jews of family and children. But were there any teachings on sexuality itself, apart from the all-important injunction that my relatives never cease to remind me of, to be fruitful and multiply? To find out, I called Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi. Rabbi Schachter is renowned for his pioneering efforts to foster interfaith dialogue and spiritual renewal. Ordained as a rabbi in 1947, he is Professor Emeritus of Jewish Mysticism and Psychology of Religion at Temple University and currently holds the World Wisdom Chair at Naropa Institute. Reb Zalman, as he is affectionately known, brought to life for us the captivating Judaic teachings on sexuality.

By Amy Edelstein



INTRODUCTION continued

In our first conversation, he began by saying, “Really, a woman shouldn’t interview a man about these things.” I agreed. Then Reb Zalman surprised me, for he went on to describe a spiritual view on sexual union that was so deeply moving, respectful and explicit that I put down the phone in wonder, having glimpsed, from the picture he had painted, how sexuality could indeed be sacred.

The traditional Jewish teachings are about bringing God into the picture. “Don’t leave God out of it!” Reb Zalman says when he instructs his Bar Mitzvah students about sexuality. Between a man and a woman, specifically a husband and wife, God is made present in their most intimate contact together, and that time is seen as a blessing. Having sex is regarded as a *mitzvah*, the fulfillment of a divine commandment, and is to be approached as delicately and with as much respect as one would approach any other occasion of worship.

In Judaism, marriage is the threshold to active sexuality. The context is set at the beginning: the blessing uniting the bride and groom begins, “Give great joy to these beloved companions, as you gave joy to Adam and Eve,” and continues, “Blessed are you, Oh Lord, who causes the bridegroom and bride to rejoice in each other.” The couple’s attention is drawn from each other

as the source of pleasure to that source which is far greater than any individual, and perhaps most importantly, their sexual delight is sanctified.

Through Rabbi Schachter, I learned of a thirteenth century treatise on sexuality by Rabbi Nachmanides. In *The Holy Letter*, Nachmanides defines sacred sexuality and the vast difference between experiences of erotic joy within—and outside of—the bounds set in the Torah. He writes: “When a man cleaves to his wife in holiness, the divine presence is manifested. In the mystery of man and woman, there is God. But if they are only aroused, the divine presence will leave them and it will become fire.”

In Orthodox Judaism, detailed prescriptions are laid down for the man, instructing him on how to please his wife. He is meant to give her delight, carefully showing her his affection and desire, so that the woman does not feel unloved, undesired or objectified. When they make love, the husband is instructed to speak gently to his wife, and through his words excite her erotic passion. He should also speak to her about higher matters, lifting her thoughts to spiritual contemplation. The great Rambam [Moses Maimonides, 1134-1204] instructs: “You should first create an atmosphere, speaking to her in a

manner that draws her heart after you, appeasing her, making her happy, thus binding her thoughts to yours. It is fitting to say some things that will arouse her and generate love and desire, and some things that will inspire her with awe of Heaven and pious, modest behavior." And the husband is specifically prohibited from speaking with his wife about other matters during this time, for that will distract them, lessening their arousal and their pleasure. He is even urged to make love with her when he is about to go away on a journey, and again when he returns. Why? Because she will miss him while he is away.

"Is it true that Orthodox Jews have intercourse through a hole in a sheet in order to minimize the erotic experience?" I asked the Rabbi, referring to a tale I had heard from my peers in my Jewish youth group. "Not at all," Reb Zalman set me straight. "In fact, it's the opposite. According to the teaching, the couple should be completely unclothed. There should be nothing between them, as there should be no distance between us and God." What Reb Zalman told me was certainly true. I found a passage from one of the greatest rabbinic commentaries, the *Shulchan Aruch*, that takes this commandment one step further: "If a man says, 'I only desire to be

Oh, give me
the kisses of
your mouth,
for your love is
more delightful
than wine.

Your ointments
yield a sweet
fragrance.

Your name is
like the finest oil,
therefore do
maidens love you.

Draw me after
you, let us run!

INTRODUCTION continued

intimate while I and she are clothed'—he must divorce her and give her the amount of money specified in the marriage contract. Because the Torah requires specifically that there be physical closeness.”

There is a full-bodied sensuality expressed in Judaism, from the rich melodic prayers taken from the Song of Songs, to the swaying and bowing of fervently praying Jews, to the sweet smell of cloves and oranges at the close of the Sabbath, to the designation of the Sabbath as a specially consecrated time to make love. Practically, the Sabbath eve is a spacious and relaxed time for intimacy—the week’s work is finished and laid aside, the house has been cleaned, meals prepared; the day of rest stretches out before you. Symbolically, the Sabbath is God’s bride. In beautiful imagery and prayers chanted on Friday evening, the devoted worshippers beckon the bride, the Sabbath bride. And likewise, the husband courts his wife, honoring his commitment to her under the marriage contract, and honoring the Sabbath Queen.

These poetic rituals stand as metaphors of the Israelites’ love of God, and at the same time, they seem perfectly designed to address some of the most common, albeit often un verbalized, uncertainties in intimate relationships: How often? When? These questions, potentially a source of anxiety, conflict, miscommunication or projection, are addressed by this body of commandments. The rabbis have even commented on the sheer number and detail of the regulations surrounding sexual intimacy, explaining that these laws are not intended to restrict or prohibit intimate relations but to generate closeness and sanctity in the relationship.

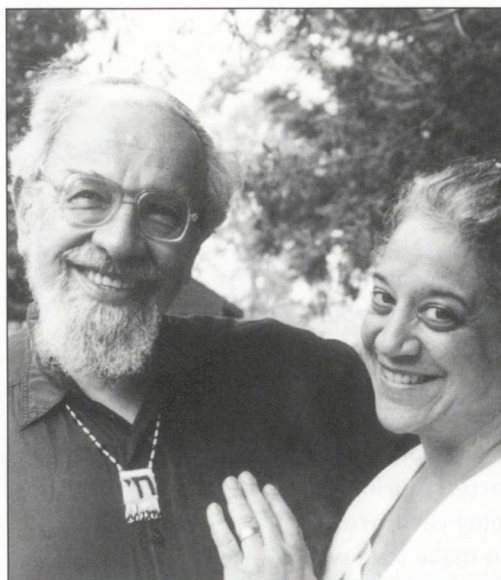
When asked, “Why did the Creator design such an intricate body of law?” One of the rabbinic commentators said: “Because if a husband gets used to his wife through constant contact, he might become disinter-

ested in her. Thus the Torah said, let them be separated for [specified periods] so that she will be as beloved to her husband as she was when she entered the wedding canopy.”

I was struck by the humanity in these teachings, which communicate a very sweet and dignified relationship to sexuality and to one’s partner. Through Judaism’s acceptance and demystification of sexual desire and sexual expression, sex becomes matter-of-fact, simply part of the human experience. And yet, at the same time, with their constant references to that which transcends the

participants, the Jewish teachings on sexuality again and again evoke a sense of wonder.

Compared to the detail that the rabbinic commentaries go into regarding the practical meaning of the Torah’s laws for man and woman, not much is written about the more esoteric, mystical view. Yet the Kabbalah [Judaic mystical teaching] does address a transcendent potential in sexual union not unlike that described in Eastern tantric traditions. Not only should God be present in lovemaking, but sexual union itself is seen as a vehicle for transcendence, where the union of husband and wife sym-



Rabbi Schachter with his wife Eve Ilse

bolizes the kabbalistic goal of *yichud*—cosmic merging. I was intrigued to find that a body of law so precise in its code of ethical conduct also contains a teaching on the dissolution of separate existence and the realization of absolute unity.

Through his personal warmth and effusive nature, Rabbi Schachter himself conveyed much of the spirit and humanity of these teachings. In each of our conversations, he gave generously of his own insights, contemplations and knowledge. His obvious enthusiasm, coupled with evocative traditional commentary, illuminated a broad and multifaceted view on sexuality, leaving us with much to contemplate about the Jewish view on how best to navigate this challenging area of life.

WIE: Since you come from a long line of Hasidim [an Eastern European orthodox sect], I wanted to speak with you about how sexuality is viewed in traditional Judaism. What would you say is the general Jewish perspective on sexuality?

RABBI SCHACHTER: In Judaism, it is marriage that opens up sexuality as a “yes” after it’s been a “no” for so many years. Marriage is called “ke-dushin,” which comes from the root word *kadosh*, meaning holy. In giving the ring, people say, “*Harai, at mekudeshet*,” which means, “You are consecrated.” So that’s a very, very special attitude.

WIE: How do the rituals surrounding sexuality influence the way the individual would approach this area of life?

RS: Traditionally, the woman wasn’t supposed to invite the man except through looks and gestures. She wasn’t supposed to say anything directly, but when a man saw that she was adorning herself, he had to understand that he was getting an invitation, and he was to act on it. If the man wanted to invite the woman, he might say to her, “Are you ready to do the *mitzvah* [divine commandment]?” With this attitude, it was both gentle and inviting, and the issue of consent was very important. You will find that to be with a woman against her consent was prohibited. In fact, all the spiritual writers say, “Spend time with her, talk with her beforehand, see that her heart intends to the same thing.” And the model is always, “As God and the divine presence are one, so let us make that kind of union.”

Married sexuality provided laws of family purity that had to be observed. For example, not to have congress during menstruation and so on. And while the Puritans wouldn’t think of making love on the Sabbath, with us it’s the opposite way around. It was considered to be a *mitzvah*! But

you always have to distinguish between whether the setting is kosher or not.

WIE: Is it primarily the setting and the intention that would make sexuality a sacred event?

RS: That’s right.

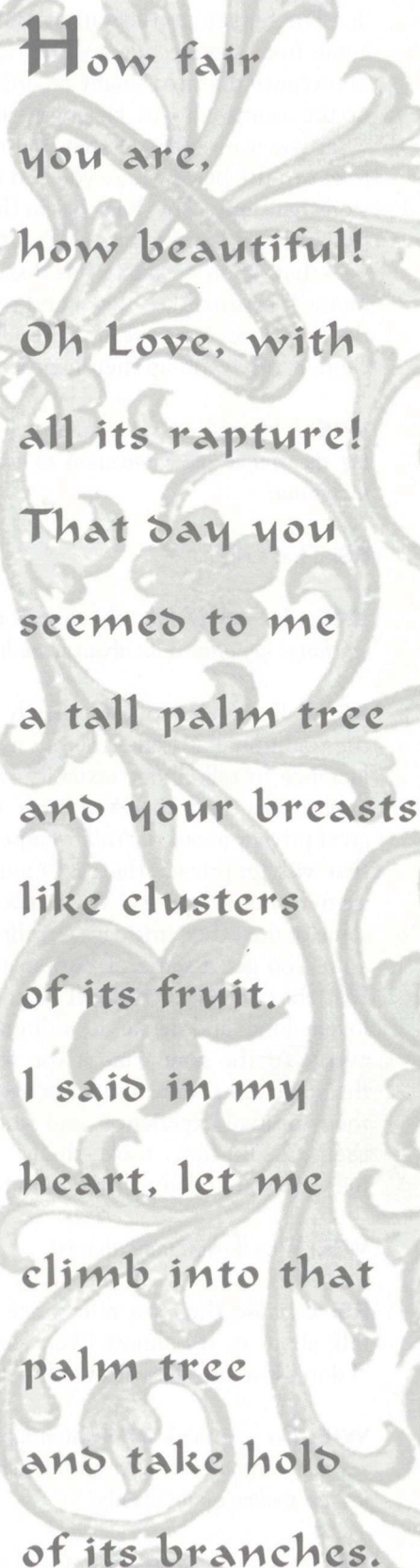
WIE: Why do you think it is so important in Judaism to make the issue of consent and mutual respect clear?

RS: Do you remember that in the Bible it’s possible to have polygamy? So if a man wanted to marry another woman, the Torah says, the food, clothing and dwelling of the first wife shall not be diminished. Some rabbis say “dwelling” means that she isn’t to be thrown out of her tent, as it were. But other rabbis say no, by “dwelling” it means that if he used to make love with her twice a week, he has to continue to make love with her twice a week. He must not do less now that he has taken another. You see, she is entitled by law to marital congress.

You have another statement from the Talmud [commentary on the Torah] that says, “A person has to honor the wife more than himself.” Or if the wife is of low stature and the husband is tall, it says, “Then bend down to whisper to her. Don’t speak parentally to her.”

WIE: Do you think that these rules are to address the human element in sexual relationships, or do they concern an observant Jew’s relationship with God?

RS: Well, what’s the guarantee that I will do the human thing? In *halacha* [the application of the Torah to everyday living], there is always the



How fair
you are,
how beautiful!
Oh Love, with
all its rapture!
That day you
seemed to me
a tall palm tree
and your breasts
like clusters
of its fruit.
I said in my
heart, let me
climb into that
palm tree
and take hold
of its branches.

question, Why do we do anything? Because this is what God wants us to do. The human considerations don't come from a mere human situation. Sometimes the man might be angry, or the woman might be angry, and what you want to do at that point is to get to the place where you can restore harmony. The Baal Shem Tov [Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, 1700-1760] says that when a couple has disharmony, they should sit down and read the marriage contract together because it will warm up their hearts.

WIE: *It brings God back into view, giving the couple the motivation to work things out?*

RS: That's right.

WIE: *It sounds like the traditional teachings say quite a bit about sexuality.*

RS: Well, there's a split. Generally, in the traditional attitudes there is a reluctance to talk about sexuality in a public way, and there's a wish for great privacy about it. And because of that wish for privacy, there isn't much written. But if you read *Yellow Silk* or some of the other erotic Eastern literature you get a sense of how in the East they relish every level of their lovemaking and make it a literary event. At the same time if you read the yogic texts, they also write about their spiritual experiences and where their meditation took them. In Judaism, you find very little of that.

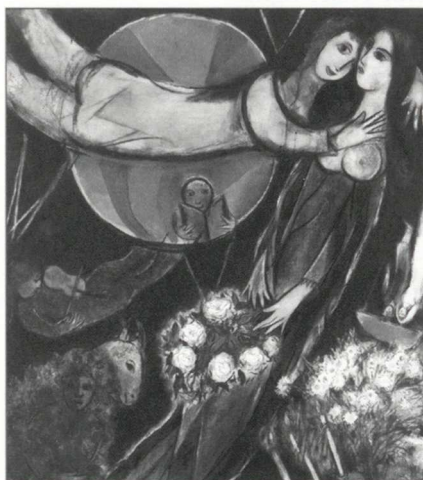
WIE: *Why do you think that is?*

RS: Because there's a reluctance to talk about it. It's almost like saying, "I don't kiss and tell with God."

WIE: *Do you think the relationship to sexuality becomes more confusing when it's not spoken about openly?*

RS: Yes, especially in our day and age

when everything else is put on the table so clearly. I wish that we would have more ecstatic outpourings of the spiritual experiences that people have. And I wish that there were also more outpourings from loving couples sharing with the next generation. You can't show your child what you're doing. I can teach my children how to put on *tefillin* [prayer phylacteries], to wear the *tallis* [prayer shawl]. But this basic commandment concerning sexuality, I can't teach them.



WIE: *Even though not much is written about ecstatic prayer or about sexuality in Judaism, Jews are a very expressive and sensuous people.*

RS: Correct. So this doesn't mean that you don't have some kind of a tradition going on despite the fact that the tradition isn't literary.

WIE: *Some spiritual traditions teach that sex is a bad, dirty or evil force. And some traditions teach that it is good, clean and natural, or even more than that, that it is the quickest way to enlightened realization. It seems that Judaism falls into neither category, neither glorifying sexuality nor insisting that it's a bad thing. Would you say that sexuality is simply an ordinary aspect of life that can be made holy by the way we approach it?*

RS: Well, that's a generalization, and

you've just got to make sure that you recognize it is a generalization. Because once you start talking about being natural, *not being divinely commanded*, you're in a different ballpark. In each religion you will find some people who will be proponents of a holy sexuality, and you will also find proponents of the idea that the whole thing is wrong, it's bad. It's not either/or. Also, it depends on what age in history you're talking about.

WIE: *Are there any specific teachings or rabbinic commentaries that help either the man or the woman to better understand the primal nature of sexual desire, the influence it can have over us, and the confusion it can bring?*

RS: Well, let's first begin with the primal question. Of all the 613 *mitzvahs* in the Torah, the very first one is to be fruitful and multiply. It says, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and cleave unto his wife, that they become one flesh." This *mitzvah* is primary to any other *mitzvah*. Now, about your question about confusion—the rabbis say most people have to watch very carefully that they handle their financial situations impeccably because most people run into trouble with that, and only a minority run into trouble with matters of sexuality.

WIE: *In the Jewish day schools, or yeshivas, do they teach about the force of sexual desire?*

RS: There is no question about that, that's what they're obsessed by. Here are people without any outlet during the most active years of their lives. They just don't go out. They don't hang out. They don't stay in the same room behind a closed door with a woman. There are a number of social mores that keep people from excesses. But wherever there is that urge and the will, there sometimes is a way, you know?

WIE: Can you say more about what is studied in the yeshivah?

RS: When I was about twelve years old, I was studying Talmud, and there were questions that had to do with whether a sexual act was consummated or not. This was part of what we were studying in the Talmud, so we dealt with it. We didn't cover up this material, but on the other hand, we weren't allowed to do anything about it, you know what I mean? For example, there's a very clear orthodox teaching that, because of circumcision, the penis is considered to be holy and not to be touched until marriage.

WIE: Because it has been consecrated to God?

RS: That was the basic situation. Because the sign of the covenant has been engraved on it. And traditionally, clearly nothing is supposed to happen before marriage, and masturbation was considered to be a sin.

WIE: Is consecrating the penis with circumcision what makes it a holy object? It seems that this is in accord with the Jewish view that sexuality in and of itself isn't sacred; the way it becomes sacred is by sanctifying it through prayer.

RS: Correct.

WIE: I know that in the yeshivah there is strong support and encouragement for the boys to devote themselves to prayers and study with great intensity and fervor.

RS: That's right. And so there is the possibility of either sublimation or early marriage.

WIE: Could another possibility be devotion to an ascetic life?

RS: Well, in some yeshivahs that is

the case. When I first studied at the Lubavitch [Hasidic sect founded in the eighteenth century] Yeshivah, a man once came in and said, "Good appetite, boys!" One of us said, "God forbid!" We wanted to eat only for health. There was one guy who would put the salt that the soup needed on the peaches. "I need the salt, but who said it has to come just like my desire is?"

WIE: Were there ever any celibate rabbis?

RS: There were some, and they were looked down on.

WIE: Were there any who were followed in spite of being celibate?

RS: No, we didn't have that many people in this situation. They were sort of suspect. There was one rabbi way back in the days of the Talmud who, when he studied Torah, was surrounded by fire; they said it was like the angels were around him. His name was Ben Azzai. Ben Azzai said, "I don't want to be married because my soul yearns for the Torah," meaning I haven't got room for a relationship. But by and large, this was very much frowned on. For instance, if someone wanted to be a teacher of children, it was generally understood that unless he was married, you don't let him do that.

WIE: Why?

RS: Because the way in which they put it, the mothers of the children would come and bring the children, and this was a guy who didn't haven't any bread in his basket—I'm giving you the traditional language—so if someone doesn't have bread in his basket, it wouldn't be okay.

WIE: Is that because they wouldn't be fulfilling the laws of the Torah that say one should be fruitful and multiply?

My beloved
is mine and
I am his.

He feasts in
a field of lilies.

Before day
breathes,

before the
shadows of
night are gone,
run away,

my love!

Be like a gazelle,
a wild stag on the
jagged mountains.

from The Song of Songs

RS: Yes, and also there was the understanding that the urge is so strong that if you don't have a kosher outlet, then it's going to drive you to use nonkosher outlets.

WIE: *It's probably true in a lot of cases. Yet, in many of the other spiritual traditions, for example, in Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism, there is a strong celibate tradition.*

RS: Yes. And the notion behind many of the Eastern traditions is that semen that is spilled robs you of your *kundalini* [fundamental vital energy]. This is different in Christianity, in which the notion came from Jesus who said, "Those of you who make yourselves eunuchs for my sake will enter into the kingdom." During those years all over the Near East, there was a sense that celibacy was a greater way. It is written in the Dead Sea Scrolls that there was a Jewish sect separate from the other sects where they practiced celibacy and only reproduced, as it were, by adopting children. You can read about them in Philo and Josephus.

WIE: *What happened to them?*

RS: We really don't know what happened because they had to flee, but one of the things that is very clear is that the early Church Fathers who lived in the desert were an

outgrowth of that Jewish group of monastics and hermits. They would have the name of "Abba," or father. If you read the Desert Fathers, you will see that they are called Abba Peomen, Abba Ephraim and Abba so-and-so. And the women, the great mothers of those times were called "Ima," or mother.

WIE: *That's fascinating. There was actually an entire ascetic, celibate sect of Jews?*

RS: Yes.

WIE: *What led them to be celibate?*

RS: The notion was that the more life that was brought into the world, the longer it would take for us to clean up the mess of this planet. Remember, even in Judaism there was some idea of original sin because Chapter Three in Genesis is in our Torah. In those years, the thinking was that as much as you can deny the body, the closer you get to God. That was a definition of sainthood that lasted until this century—people would fast and deny themselves.

WIE: *Is there within Jewish mysticism any equivalent of sexual tantra?*

RS: That's a situation that I would talk about with some of my male students. A lot of this has to do with intention and with prayer. But the thing that could be said, and that I don't have to hide, is the attitude of prayer with which people would make love. There was a prayerful attitude in their making love, and they wouldn't talk but would pray for the next generation that they wanted to bring down. They would pray for each other's health. So they were in a deep act of prayer.

WIE: *Some Western tantric traditions use the time of sexual union to visualize or to pray for something, and in some of the Tibetan practices, one is actually visualizing, during sexual union, ultimate dissolution into emptiness.*

RS: In Judaism you have statements like that too. She is supposed to keep in mind the divine name dealing with the *Shechina* [female principle of God], and he is to keep in mind the divine name of the Holy One, blessed be He. So it's the male and the female principles. And at the time of their orgasm, they have to just tune into that name.

WIE: *Is it supposed to bring you into a meditative realization?*

RS: Well, it's a flip. It doesn't bring you as you are into the meditative state. It *changes* you. ■

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CELL

In putting together this issue, we were intrigued to discover that celibacy is a more taboo subject than is tantric sexuality. The more we looked, the more apparent it became that, generally speaking, the subject of celibacy does not often arise for the spiritually inclined. In fact, in the postmodern spiritual marketplace, talk of renunciation of any kind is rarely heard. Considering that there is an ever growing interest in Buddhism, which has a 2500-year monastic tradition; that the hallowed name of the modern Indian saint and legendary renunciate Ramana Maharshi evokes awe in the hearts and minds of an ever greater number of seekers; that Jesus himself is believed to have lived a chaste life; and that the Dalai Lama, a celibate monk, is universally recognized to be a living embodiment of purity and

BACCY

compassion; it is peculiar that so few modern seekers even *think* about the role of celibacy in spiritual life.

What is the role of celibacy on the spiritual path? We asked three extraordinary individuals who have dedicated themselves completely to the spiritual life to speak candidly about their own experience of the significance of celibacy. We purposely chose to speak with those rare individuals who are not only living examples of success on the spiritual path, but who are also lifelong celibates, because we felt that they alone would truly be able to shed some light on this rarely discussed and often misunderstood subject. What they had to say is challenging to the ultimate degree to anyone who sincerely endeavors to embark on the spiritual path.

Father Thomas Keating, Trappist monk, former abbot and cofounder of the centering prayer movement, who has been celibate for over fifty years, movingly explains: "*Chastity enhances and extends the power to love. It enables us to perceive the sacredness of everything that is, especially of other people. But to reach that, one has to go through a process away from the experience of conventional intimacy with others and toward another kind of intimacy, which . . . loves them not for any physical purpose of one's own. And as a consequence of that, one respects the*

dignity of other persons and couldn't possibly use them for sexual or emotional fulfillment."

The greatly revered **Swami Chidananda**, successor of the late Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh, cautions: "*The spiritual life starts with your recognition that as long as you keep going headlong in the pursuit of sense satisfaction and pleasure, you are not going to move one step. You will not have even started. The beginning stage itself of the spiritual life is a turning away from sense experience and sense indulgence, and starting to move in the opposite direction.*"

And finally, seventy-year-old Buddhist abbot and scholar **Bhante Henepola Gunaratana**, who has been celibate since he was twelve, unequivocally states: "*The Buddha taught that as long as one is engaged in sexual activity, then one would not be interested in practicing spiritual life; these two just don't go together.*"

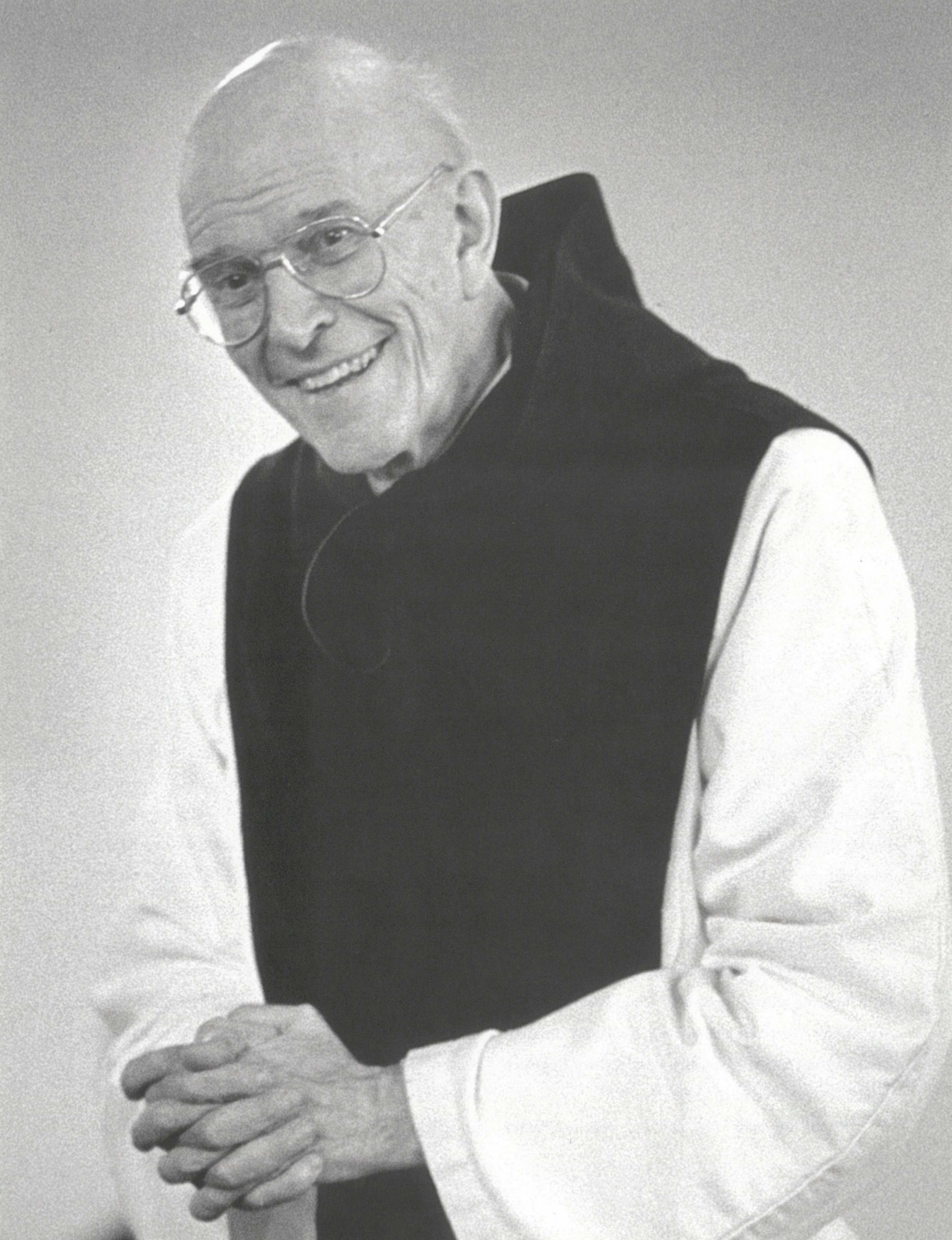
With an ancient legacy of celibacy left by many of the world's greatest realizers to back them up, the words of these contemporary celibates certainly deserve our consideration. But is the practice of celibacy essential to ultimate success for all those who long for spiritual liberation in this birth? We must admit we have some doubts, but one thing's for sure—we've all got a lot to think about. ■


THE HEART OF THE MATTER

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN
FATHER THOMAS KEATING
AND ANDREW COHEN

I
N EVERY ISSUE OF *WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?*
we aspire to introduce our readers to sincere and passionate individuals who care profoundly about their fellow human beings and who dare to accept, as their own burden, the deepest spiritual aspirations of the race. Such encounters are always a privilege, but it sometimes happens, as it did with Father Thomas Keating, that the warmth, love, decency and sheer humanity that we experience in their presence exceed our expectations, and we can only wonder at the good fortune of being able to include their insights, ideas—and their spirit—in our ongoing inquiry into the nature and significance of enlightenment.

Introduction by Simeon Alev





INTRODUCTION continued

Father Keating, who spent twenty years as the abbot of St. Joseph's Abbey, a Trappist monastery in Spencer, Massachusetts, is now, at seventy-four, the leading figure in an interdenominational movement to revitalize the Christian contemplative practice known as "centering prayer." He is the cofounder of Contemplative Outreach, an organization devoted to introducing Christian contemplative practices to laypeople of all faiths, and the author of several books, including *Open Mind*, *Open Heart* and *Intimacy with God*, both of which describe the process of spiritual development that such practices are intended to catalyze.

Since the beginning of his Outreach activities, Father

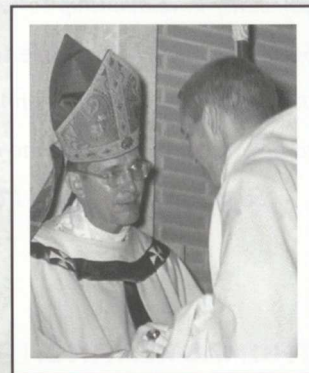
Keating has shared responsibility for the development of contemplative workshops and retreats with several of his colleagues. Yet for many of the growing number of people who have benefited from their work, it is Keating himself, because of his extraordinary warmth and humility, who exemplifies and embodies the transformative potential of centering prayer. As a result, he is in constant demand as a lecturer and workshop leader and maintains, despite frail health, a taxing schedule that takes him to several cities each year. Keating is also known for his avid and unusually open-minded interest in the contemplative and meditative practices of other religious traditions. He has met and

studied with spiritual teachers from a variety of Hindu and Buddhist lineages and helped to create, fifteen years ago, the Snowmass Interreligious Conference, at which teachers from different traditions meet regularly to compare views and ideas, and to evaluate objectively the benefits and drawbacks of their respective practices.

In the midst of all this activity, one might well suppose that Father Keating's celibacy is, as he says it was in his years as a novice, a given, something to be considered only in the context of so many other pressing concerns. But in the course of his fifty-three years as a celibate monk—several of them spent guiding others in the practice—Father Keating has clearly given much thought to the significant role celibacy can play in the lives of sincere spiritual aspirants, and it is a testament to his open-mindedness that, among the highly respected advocates of celibacy we interviewed for this

issue, he is uniquely outspoken in his insistence that the celibate state must never be regarded as inherently superior, nor as essential to the attainment of any ultimate spiritual goal. The goal of celibacy, Father Keating asserts passionately, is “ever greater humility and purity of heart . . . a letting go of pride and the false self so that God can be God in us.” Fundamental to his approach is the recognition that it is only through the cultivation of these attributes—humility and purity—and only through a process of “inner purification” rather than “external observance,” that the potential of any spiritual practice to bring about authentic and lasting transformation can be realized.

Father Keating shared his views with spiritual teacher Andrew Cohen, the founder of *What Is Enlightenment?*, by telephone from his mountain hermitage at St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado, last October.



Father Keating (left) at his ordination as Abbot of St. Joseph's Abbey, 1961

ANDREW COHEN: *I thought that a good way to get started would be to give you a little background about why we're interested in discussing the subject of celibacy with you for this issue of our magazine. I'm a spiritual teacher with a community of students, and I put a lot of emphasis on renunciation and the role that it plays in helping human beings come closer to truth. There was a period in my own life when I practiced celibacy consciously for about three years, and it helped me enormously to realize a degree of objectivity in relationship to sexuality, which is a most challenging area of human life. So at this point, I encourage some of my own students to devote a period of time—usually it's between three and five years—to a very formal practice of celibacy, in order to help them also to become clearer about this aspect of their own human experience.*

So to begin with, could I ask when you first took your vow of chastity?

THOMAS KEATING: Let's see, that must have been in 1946, after my novitiate. I had already taken vows, though, for the two years of the novitiate, when I first entered the Trappist monastery.

AC: *What kind of vows were those?*

TK: Those were temporary vows like the ones your students take, a temporary commitment intended to give the candidates a chance to experience the challenges and benefits of the practice of perfect chastity. I might add that I had already been practicing outside the monastery for two or three years while I was going to school; but it's quite different to practice celibacy—or chastity, if you want to use that word—without the support of a spiritual community. So I'm glad to hear that the men and women who come to you for teaching are able to support each other in this endeavor; that's a great idea. And as I'm sure you know, the commitment to celibacy as a state of life isn't the only feature of monastic life, but it's one of several commitments, all of which are considered to be equally supportive and essential to the transformative process. For example, there's a commitment to poverty, and its tendency to induce a nonpossessive attitude toward material things—just as chastity tends to induce a nonpossessive attitude toward the body and sex—and obedience, which is meant to instill a nonpossessive attitude toward our own will and judgment through submission to a teacher or to the community as a whole if the community has a Rule of Life.

AC: *Did you have any expectations about what the practice of celibacy would be like? Would you say, for example, that it*

represented, in your own mind and heart, a kind of sweetness—sweetness as in simplicity?

TK: Well, to tell you the truth, monastic life is extremely austere and hard—at least it was in the monastery that I entered. And so one kind of took celibacy more or less for granted, and one's concrete attention was often devoted to the various other practices—like getting up at one or two in the morning and praying in the early hours of the dawn, fasting and abstinence, and along with all that, working very, very hard. So you really felt less involved with the concerns associated with the practice of celibacy than with, you know, having sufficient health and determination just to get through the daily schedule. That's my best recollection. You know, you're asking me about my life over fifty years ago, and my best recollection is how hard the physical life was and how searching was the exterior silence. We spoke only to the Superior and the Novice Master most of the time, and it was silence, the *experience* of silence, that was most pervasive. So it would be hard for me to say that I experienced celibacy in any other way than as part of the context in which these other very concrete issues were turning up every single day. When you get up at one in the morning, for example, all you're really thinking about is getting down to the church on time.

AC: *How has your experience of celibacy changed or deepened over the years?*

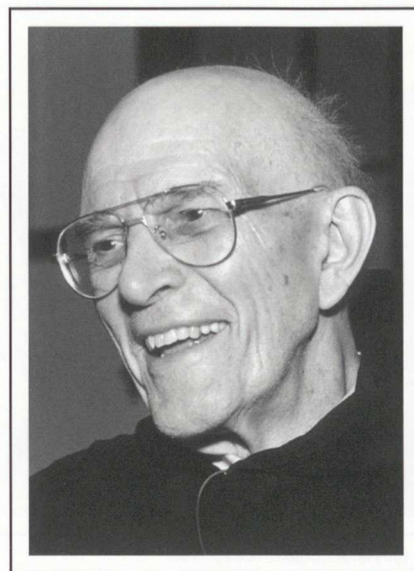
TK: It has only become clearer that it's a gift of God and that the practice of it is entirely dependent on God's power and mercy. In other words, you learn about your

weaknesses in a way that only strong temptation and perhaps a few other things can teach you. So all I can say is, "So far, so good"—but I never claim that I'll make it to the end. In fact, I remember a dear old brother who, at eighty-five, used to come to speak to the Superior, and when he left he'd always say, "Pray for my perseverance!" Because he was worried, you know, that he might hit the road to town before he managed to get himself back to his room!

But another thing that comes to mind is that as one matures in a lifelong commitment to celibacy, there's a whole set of attitudes toward God that begin to emerge as a result of this movement from formal commitment to direct experience, from friendship with God to union with God—attitudes that open one to ever deeper possibilities of union with ultimate reality, ever greater humility and purity of heart, which are what were identified by the Desert Fathers and Mothers as the *goal* of celibacy. And I think that that would be what characterizes my own experience more than anything else—the ever increasing desire for humility and purity of heart. Of course, physical success in observing celibacy can also lead, in some cases, to a certain sense of achievement or pride, and in fact there's a recorded instance of that; it's the famous case of some Jansenist nuns in sixteenth or seventeenth century France who were described as "pure as angels but proud as devils"—so evidently something was not working in their celibate commitment! And that's why I feel so strongly that celibacy needs to be presented not in isolation but as part of a larger package, and especially with the interior purpose or intention of getting closer to God. Because the renunciation is sometimes very, very intense, and one needs the motivation of knowing that this really is moving somewhere that's more important than physical attraction, or comfort, or sexual relief or whatever—of knowing that this is the love of God coming to fulfillment in oneself, all at once in a number of different ways, all leading to a letting go of pride and the false self so that God can be God in us.

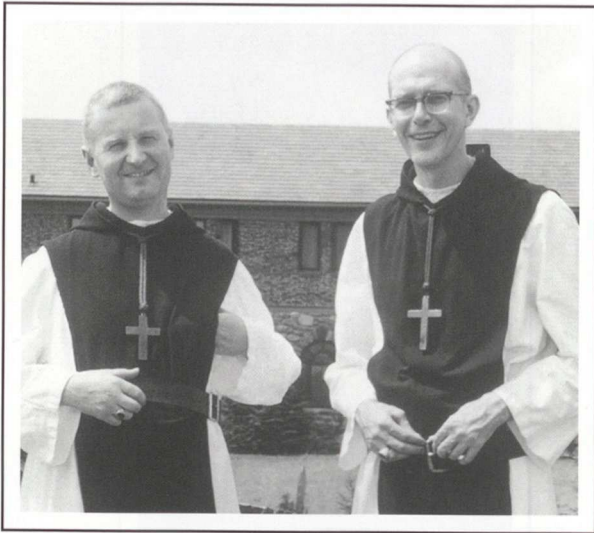
AC: *Especially in light of what you've just spoken about so beautifully, I'd like to ask you about the common view that the celibate state represents an inherently higher or purer condition than the noncelibate. I'm sure you're aware that there's a lot of debate going on around questions like this these days.*

TK: Yes. My reaction to that discussion—and it's only mine—is that it's not celibacy *itself* that is a higher state but the nonpossessive attitude of true humility or purity of heart that under ideal circumstances is associated with it; that's what true virginity or celibacy really is when it's understood in its full spiritual meaning. The goal, as I



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Father Keating (right) at St. Joseph's Abbey, 1966

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EXTRAORDINARY LOVE.”

said, is purity of heart, or what the Desert Fathers and Mothers describe as that humility that is the acceptance of all reality about ourselves and God, and acceptance also of our own weakness and helplessness. One of the things that is most striking about this way of understanding celibacy is how much it, as a gift of God, has to be supported over time by the grace of God in order for the practitioner to persevere with, and not to abandon, his or her commitment.

And if you look at celibacy as a lifestyle, a long-range commitment, it has the same goal as marriage, actually. What that means is that it’s supposed to be transformational; it’s a way to union with God. Now obviously, there’s no reason why someone who’s married can’t attain that state, and if you accept the idea of marriage being a sacrament, then I suppose it could be a higher state than celibacy, which is not as holy a state as one that has been blessed in such a special way by God and the Church. Certainly from the Church’s point of view, marriage is a particular state of grace in which the partners are empowered, through their life together, to be purified. But the important point here is that this happens, whether it is in marriage or in the celibate commitment, only when we become faithful to love. In marriage this means the forgiveness and forbearance of the depths of each other’s faults, but in either case, it’s only then that we begin to enter into what St. John of the Cross calls the “period of purification,” in which the Holy Spirit reaches deeper into our hearts than we can go by any asceticism or discipline of our own making. The Spirit invites us to look at the dark side of our personality, as Jung would call it, and also to sift through the unconscious motivations that we’re not normally aware of in daily life. It’s that conscious purification that prepares us for unselfish love, for spiritual friendship and for a union with God in which we’re not looking for satisfaction or enlightenment for our own sake but are simply trying to love God, to please God, and to do His will by living ordinary life with extraordinary love.

So in celibacy as in marriage, *love* is the name of the game—otherwise I wouldn’t recommend it—and the challenge is to see if you can keep it going. And the heart of the matter, you might say, is that just as a husband and wife, through the sacrament of marriage, are supposed to make God visible to each other and minister the unconditional love of God to each other not just in their conjugal life together but in every detail—the way they pour their coffee in the morning, the way they handle the problems with their children, the way they go to work, how they say hello and goodbye—so the celibate commitment is not just about chastity. It’s about being more and more present to others, in service to others, and trying to bring a quality to the details of daily life that man-

ifests, in everything we do, the unconditional love of God and even the *tenderness* of God. And so it's very important, it seems to me, to distinguish sexuality from genitality, or genital activity. Sexuality is not something that's given up in the celibate commitment; on the contrary, because human sexuality includes genital activity but is not identical with it, we remain women and men not only physically but also emotionally and sensually down to the very roots of our being.

AC: *Could you say more about this distinction between sexuality and genitality?*

TK: In celibacy, the sexual energy—which should never be repressed—is directed by the practice of chastity toward the right use of that energy according to our state of life, which for celibates is to help build human relationships and communities through service, friendship, understanding, cooperation and other similar virtues. The sexual energy is transmuted in this way into an ever greater energy in service to others and in the search for God. Otherwise, celibacy can become simply a physical achievement and hence a source of pride. It's not an end in itself, in other words, but a way of life that has to make God's love visible in the community or wherever one decides to live the celibate life.

AC: *Judging from your description, the celibate's sphere of interest seems almost implicitly broader than that of a married individual. Yet you've also said that neither married life nor celibate monastic life is inherently superior, and that in either case what's really most important is one's motivation.*

TK: Exactly. And not only one's motivation but the perseverance in that motivation through the purification of the dark side so that—

AC: *The dark side?*

TK: Purification of one's innermost being rather than just biologically or physically because, without that inner purification, celibacy is an external observance rather than an interior practice that supports authentic transformation.

AC: *It sounds as if one who was fully committed to undergoing this process of transformation would in a sense be married to God. Wouldn't one's attention therefore be liberated in such a way that one could have no special friendships or intimate relationships but would rather love all selflessly?*

TK: Yes, chastity enhances and extends the power to love; it enables us to perceive the sacredness of everything

that is, especially other people. But to reach that one has to go through a process away from the experience of conventional intimacy with others and toward another kind of intimacy which, while it respects everyone's uniqueness, loves them not for any physical purpose of one's own. And as a consequence of that, one respects the dignity of other persons and couldn't possibly use them for sexual or emotional fulfillment. Now this doesn't exclude friendship, which is very important in supporting a celibate commitment, but it does imply a discipline that filters out of that growing intimacy with another the genital attraction that may be there, and which is perfectly normal if it is there. But one ought not to conclude from this that a genuinely spiritual friendship must exclude all warmth or emotion; it is only those excessive marks of affection that lead to deep sensuality or acting out that have to be sacrificed, not friendship itself. In fact one *needs* friends to support one's commitment to celibacy; otherwise one may fall into loneliness or some kind of self-seeking that is almost narcissistic. This is one of the hazards in the celibate commitment.

AC: *What are some of the other hazards?*

TK: Celibacy is not a commitment one should take lightly, and there are different temptations along the way. Sexual attraction is one thing in adolescence and another thing altogether in adulthood, where procreation becomes important. Then, in the midlife crisis, a whole new aspect of our sexuality emerges that has to do with the temptation to return to the unfinished relationships of one's youth or regrets about not having experienced certain things before one became celibate. As a result the temptation to depart from one's commitment is also very strong at that time. And even in old age, one finds that that loneliness is still present. So because the sexual energy lasts all our lives, a lifetime commitment to celibacy is bound to include periods that are extremely difficult, and the important question is: To what degree has this energy been transmuted and transformed by discipline, service to others and devotion to God, so that in those moments when the attraction of sexual satisfaction is extremely strong, there's enough inner strength to resist it?

In the Christian tradition, especially in those denominations that emphasize the love of God or specifically the love of Jesus Christ, "friendship" is the model for a relationship with God that moves from the superficiality of mere acquaintance to a degree of friendliness, based on years of hanging out together, that at a certain point demands a true commitment. This kind of commitment is characteristic of any friendship whether it's human or

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divine, and it’s in that moment that one begins to consider whether one’s devotion to celibacy is truly a lifetime commitment to God or only a temporary one. And one should have plenty of time to think this decision through because of its deep psychological, social and spiritual consequences. There’s a whole mystique, you might say, to a lifelong commitment. It’s very different from a temporary commitment, even though that’s an extremely useful one for someone to pass through, as you evidently teach in your community. It’s a wonderful way of getting a clear idea of what sexuality is and whether you want to renounce it for life; and as I said, it would be a great mistake to make that decision lightly or without a good period of time to practice it first on a temporary basis.

AC: *There have certainly been too many people, I think, who have taken that decision too lightly and then lived to regret it.*

TK: Yes. And I would think that nobody really has the power to do this without the grace of God; whether you think of it as grace or some other kind of force, it’s like the twelve steps of AA—the second step, isn’t it?—“We found out that we were absolutely powerless of ourselves.” And that’s one of the great benefits of the celibate commitment: You find out fairly soon that it’s not going to be easy. There is a higher power—we call it God in the Christian tradition—and His grace doesn’t come in the abstract but in the form of a community and a model of commitment to encourage us in difficult times, a special opportunity for spiritual retreat or study or sometimes even psychological instruction. But even so, not everybody is humanly equipped for a celibate commitment. Certainly I would never recommend it for someone who has a serious personality disorder or a long history of promiscuity or some other kind of neurotic problem; such things should certainly be treated before one makes a commitment as serious as this one.

AC: *I agree with you that, through the practice of celibacy, one gets an experience of how extremely powerful the sexual force is—an experience that’s very different than if one were never to undergo a period of prolonged abstinence.*

TK: Absolutely, and it’s for that reason that I think it would be an enormously valuable experience for both women and men, especially at an earlier learning period in their young adulthood, because really most young people are no more ready for a marriage commitment than they are for a monastic commitment.

AC: *You’re right about that.*

TK: It really takes some life experience to be able to handle the responsibilities that that commitment requires. And a celibacy commitment, similarly, has its own set of responsibilities that need to be practiced and tested humbly.

AC: What would you say is the greatest joy of the practice?

TK: Loving God! And hoping always that that love will increase and enable us to surrender ourselves more and more completely, body, mind and spirit—totally: conscious, unconscious, every level of our being. This is my view of what celibacy is all about. Its fulfillment is certainly going to take some time, and there are going to be some rough spots, and not everybody's going to make it; there are going to be some failures. Anybody who's been through those dark nights will not judge anybody's failures because he or she knows how difficult that commitment is. In the "dark night" of St. John of the Cross, who is one of the great teachers in Catholic mysticism, there are described three great trials or temptations, one of which he called the "spirit of fornication," in which there are enormous and continual temptations to sexual activity or to leaving the celibate commitment. And it's in that intense struggle that the virtue of chastity is tested; the renunciate is pounded by temptation to the depths

of his soul until he becomes really stable in the face of all temptation.

AC: The beautiful way you're speaking makes me curious to know if you ever come together with your brother monks just to share your experience of the practice, for the purposes of support and investigation, as we are doing here.

TK: No, not very often. Very rarely, in fact. They do that in the first few years of monastic life, along with studying the various other commitments that are also involved. But later on, to tell you the truth, you don't see much of that—and I think it would be a good idea.

AC: I've always found this question very interesting because over the years that I've been teaching, often my celibate students—if we've been in India, for example—would want to get together with other monks and nuns from, say, the Buddhist or Hindu traditions, just to speak together about the practice of celibacy and its relationship to the pursuit of liberation or, as you would say, a pure heart. And it's been fascinating to discover that very few practitioners have had much to say or have even been particularly interested in talking because quite often, it seems, the practice of celibacy is not accompanied by any kind of active investigation or inquiry.

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TK: You're right. It's kind of taken for granted. And as I said in the beginning, one of the things that you have rightly observed and, I gather, integrated into the life of your community is that celibacy is a very important commitment with enormous possibilities, and that as such it should be fully studied and understood by neophytes, and that their experiences of its difficulties should be shared within the group. And I'd bet that the reason this doesn't happen more often is in large part because almost all the religious traditions, and society in general, have been most unwilling, until thirty or forty years ago, to speak about sexual energy or sexual matters at all. Lots of people even arrived at marriage without having heard anything about—what are they?—the birds and the—

AC: The bees.

TK: Shows you how much I know!

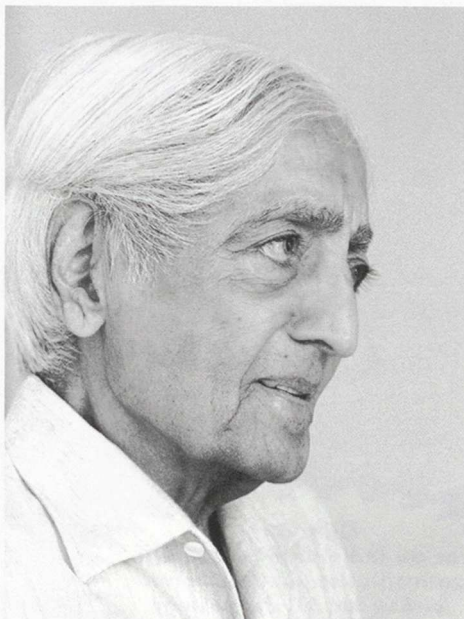
AC: I've also noticed, even with my own students, that some one can practice celibacy for a couple of years and never really begin. It might take a few years before the individual really begins to find some energetic, enthusiastic, inspired interest. And then of course the practice comes alive and its liberating power is experienced and appreciated.

TK: That's the full experience.

AC: Yes, and then, of course, it's so fruitful. And it's interesting that in our community—this might sound strange to you, but the men and women who are celibate live together in separate houses from those who are not celibate—they report that their relationships with each other are tangibly different because of the vow they've taken, and that they experience a much greater freedom and intimacy in their association with each other than they do with other members of the community, who one would suppose are equally committed to liberation and purity and honesty and truth. Yet simply because they've taken this vow—and because they take it very seriously—they experience a much greater freedom of being when they're together with each other, principally because they all know that they don't want anything from each other. They were speaking with me about this a week or so ago, and it was very moving.

TK: That's wonderful, that experience of freedom. It makes all the other aspects of community life more accessible and valuable, this interior freedom that the celibate commitment makes possible. You told me that you've asked them to make a temporary vow, is that correct?

AC: Yes.



"Perhaps you may come upon that mystery which nobody can reveal to you and nothing can destroy."

J. Krishnamurti in "Freedom From the Known"

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TK: So everybody knows that everybody else is committed to this, and immediately there's a great freedom from all the subtle ways that young people—and not-so-young people—interact for reasons of sensuality, flirtation, and that kind of thing. All of that falls away, and this allows people to be themselves: honest and straightforward and loving, without seeking any kind of return or reward, especially of a physical nature.

AC: *Physical or even just emotional—wanting to be seen as special, this kind of thing. Because I've noticed, just in observing my own experience, that inherent in sexual desire is a kind of psychological and emotional compulsion to want to be seen in a certain way and also to want to have and to consume. Standing back from it, one recognizes this to be the very force or power of the ego itself.*

TK: Yes, I think that's extremely right and true. It's always looking for its own satisfaction. Whereas the true Self is not engaged in that kind of melodrama.

AC: *When I was teaching the other day I said: It's the ego that experiences the thrill of wanting, but the true Self experiences that very thrill as suffering.*

TK: Yes, beautiful.

AC: *Another thing I wanted to ask you about is the fact that many—or perhaps even most—of the greatest spiritual figures throughout history have chosen to lead a celibate life. Why do you think that is?*


TK: Well, I think there's enough evidence from psychology today for us to be able to recognize that sexual energy is not only in the body, but it also has something to do with the unconscious. And the scope, extent and power of this energy are enormous and have to be respected. And when it's channeled, through devotion to God and service to others, this energy begins to emerge, especially during meditative practices, in a different form. Instead of just sort of blowing you away, it's channeled by the solid preparation of faith in God and love for other people; it's transformed or transmuted into higher possibilities of energy for use in seeking God's presence, which isn't an easy path. Cultivation of the ability to face up to that energy directly becomes a support for our pursuit of the highest and most difficult good, and especially the ultimate goal of surrendering absolutely to God. The great spiritual figures you mention no doubt understood that implicitly, but I think it's extremely important that those of us who are

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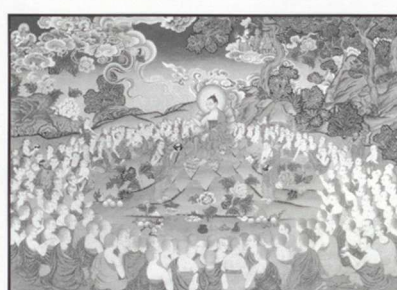
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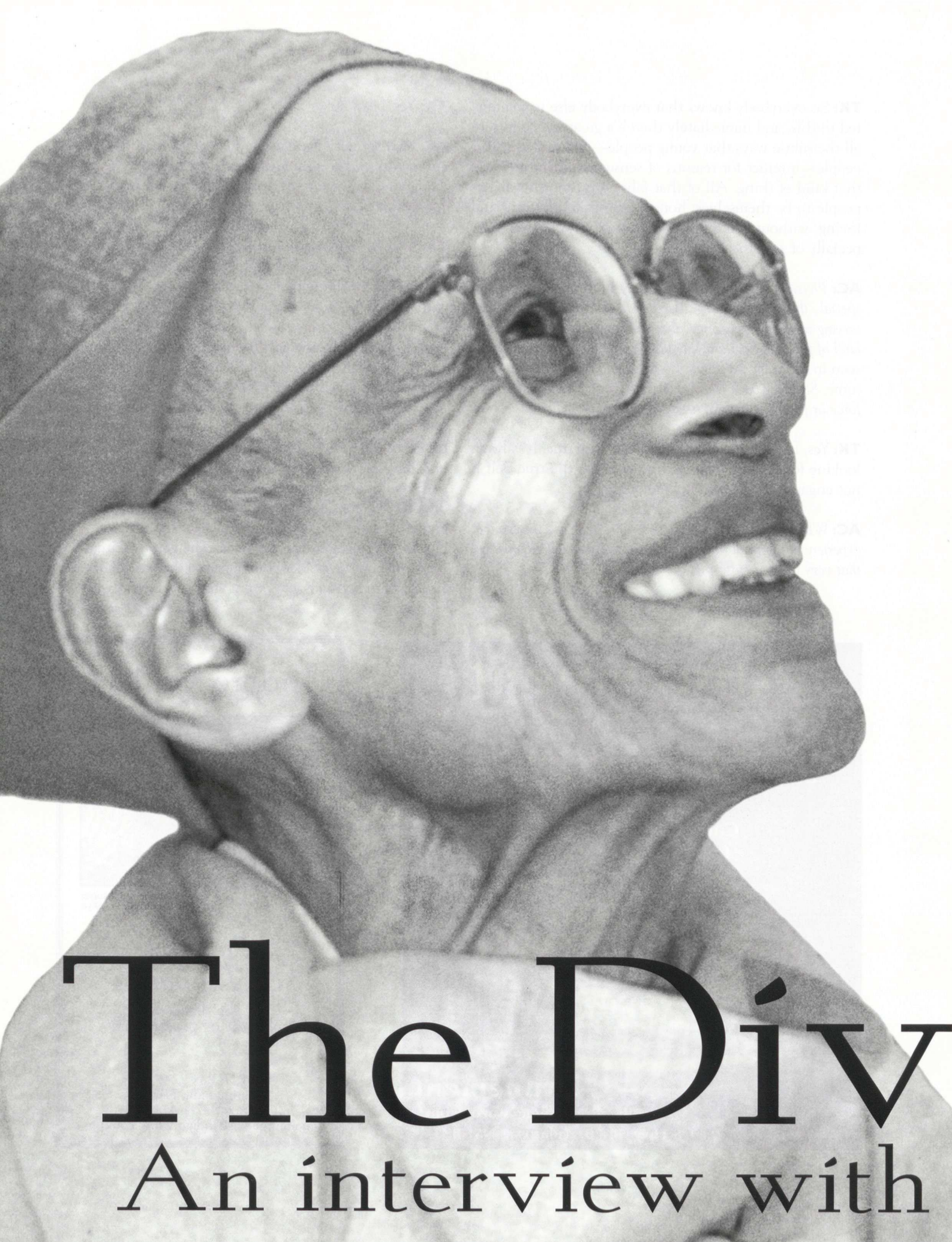
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The Div

An interview with

We counted ourselves truly blessed when we heard that Swamí Chidananda, revered Vedantic teacher and spiritual heir to the great Swamí Sivananda, had agreed to be interviewed for this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* by Bill Eilers and his daughter Susan, two of his closest Western students. Recognized throughout the contemporary Hindu world as a living saint, Swamí Chidananda is an extraordinary being whose embodiment of purity, simplicity and goodness of heart gives inspiring testimony to the transformative power of the path of renunciation.

ine Life

Swamí Chidananda



INTRODUCTION

by Bill Eilers and Susan Eilers

BORN IN SOUTH INDIA IN 1916, the eldest son of an orthodox Brahmin family, Swami Chidananda was inspired at an early age by devotional songs and stories from the Hindu scriptures. During his college years, the lives and teachings of modern saints such as Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda, Ramana Maharshi and Swami Ramdas awakened in him a fiery aspiration for spiritual life. In 1943 he joined the ashram of the world-renowned saint and sage Swami Sivananda, the founder of the Divine Life Society, whose passionate spiritual writings had long attracted him. Sivananda ashram, which then consisted of only a few buildings, was located on the banks of the Ganges River in the foothills of the Himalayas near Rishikesh, India. During this period of his life, Swami Chidananda, among other activities, gave lectures, attended to ashram guests, and served the sick, expressing what would become a lifelong concern for the welfare of the lepers. Late in 1959 he was sent on a two-year world teaching tour by Swami Sivananda and eventually succeeded him as president of the Divine Life Society after Swami Sivananda passed away in 1963. Swami Chidananda's life since has been one of almost continuous travel, both in India and abroad, in the cause of the central objective of the Divine Life Society: the dissemination of spiritual knowledge.

When Andrew Cohen phoned from Australia and asked us if we could interview Swami Chidananda on the role of celibacy in the spiritual life, our first reaction was: "How will Swamiji ever find the time?" But our second reaction was that if there was anyone in the world who had

a practical understanding of celibacy, it was Swamiji, and therefore we should make the request.

So when Swamiji returned to the ashram a few days later for the five days of the *Navaratri* worship, our written request was given to him. That night, after *satsang* [a gathering with a spiritual teacher], he turned to me and said that while it would not be possible to find time during the next few days, if we didn't mind a little inconvenience, we could join him in a couple of weeks near Delhi. The location was a new country home that he had been requested to officially open and bless, and where we would then spend a few days resting. We readily agreed, and so toward the end of October, over four full days, we not only had some informal time with him, but we also managed to record five hours of dialogue relating to the subject of this issue of *What Is Enlightenment?*

Our interview was supposed to start late morning of the first day, but Swamiji was exhausted, and so the first we saw of him was when he joined us for a walk at dusk. As we were slowly walking along the country road we came upon a watchman guarding a gate. Swamiji stopped and carried on a fifteen-minute conversation. We didn't understand most of the Hindi, but we knew he was inquiring about the man's family and where he lived. As we moved on, we saw that another life had been touched by one who still remains at heart a simple monk, whose aim in life is to do as much good as possible for as many people as possible.

When we returned from the walk and were climbing the steps, Swamiji turned to us and said, "The subject

of *brahmacharya*, or celibacy or self-restraint, does not necessarily have, in Hindu society, any connection at all with the spiritual life, or *sadhana* [spiritual practice], or with Self-realization. It is not normally discussed or recommended *only* with a view to promote spiritual life." After we had climbed the stairs and joined him in his room, Swamiji continued, describing traditional Hindu social life and how it relates to the subject of *brahmacharya* and sexual life, so that we would understand the broader context in which *brahmacharya* is viewed in the Hindu tradition.

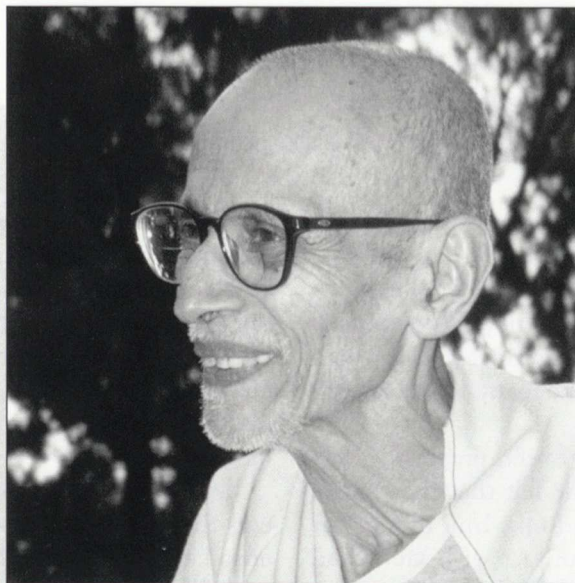
In ancient India, he explained, a person's life was reckoned as one hundred years, divided into four stages. The first stage was the student stage, or *brahmacharya* stage, where young people were expected to study hard, build a good physique, and in all ways prepare themselves for their adult lives to come. During this stage they were expected to observe strict celibacy.

The second stage was the householder stage, where the exercise of the sexual faculty was taken for granted and recognized as a legitimate part of human life; it was regarded as a fundamental duty of a family to offer progeny to form the next generation. Swamiji continued: "Of course, its exercise was not meant to be unrestrained; otherwise it would be degrading. But it was given the full sanction of society.

"The third stage of life was the retired stage, when the couple turned the burdens of earning a living over to the children and turned their minds to higher things," Swamiji explained. Here again they begin to practice *brahmacharya* as part of their *sadhana*.

"Then, during the fourth stage, one's entire life was to be devoted to God. One became a *sannyasin*, or monk, and then, of course, celibacy was automatic. So you see, the concept of *brahmacharya* was part and parcel of the Indian-Hindu social tradition. In its narrowest sense *brahmacharya* meant complete celibacy, but in its broader sense, as it could be applied to the life of a householder, it meant self-restraint, not abusing the sex function and strict fidelity to one's partner."

Our conversation then turned to the role of spiritual practices and how they help to lift the consciousness by



fostering the higher tendencies within us. "The vast, vast majority of human beings are human animals only," Swamiji said. "They are totally rooted in body consciousness. They have no idea of being something else, something other. Even their mental function is instinctive. It's all a reaction to whatever happens to them, not a purposeful independent exercise of their mental faculty. They have no time for it. From the moment they get

up, they are absorbed by their daily activities.

"And the whole of the spiritual life," he continued, "is a gradual elimination, eradication, of the animal within, and the refinement or purification and education of the entire human nature so that it loses its movement in all other directions and starts taking on an ascending vertical direction. Once the human nature is given an upward turn, one simultaneously starts awakening the sleeping Divinity with the help of all one's spiritual practices. If one knows that the spiritual process, the spiritual life, is the elimination of the animal, the refining and directing upward of the human, and the awakening and unfoldment of the Divine, then all spiritual practices, including the role that *brahmacharya* plays, fall into their right place."

Swamiji seemed to have enjoyed our first conversation. He smiled and said, "So we must thank Andrew Cohen for this, for ultimately he is at the back of it, the root of it. Tomorrow we will start discussing the questions one by one."

Our dialogues over the next few days revealed a side of Swamiji that is not often visible. Normally one sees in him what one would expect of a saint—holiness, sweetness, joy, constant consideration for others, beauty of movement, and a presence that makes itself subtly felt in the hearts of those who cross his path. The following interview shows the stuff a saint is really made of. It helps to complete the picture.

Canadian-born Bill Eilers and Susan Eilers (Swami Atmaswarupananda and Swami Amritarupananda) are both longtime residents of Sivananda Ashram and both have taken lifelong monastic vows. Among other activities, they work together as a team to prepare Swami Chidananda's teachings for publication.

QUESTION: *Celibacy or brahmacharya has always been given a prominent place in the spiritual life, and we know that both Swami Sivananda and yourself have subscribed to its importance. Why is celibacy important and what is its role in the spiritual life?*

SWAMI CHIDANANDA: One of the reasons for its importance is that we have received from our spiritual heritage the view of celibacy being a basic requirement, a prerequisite, of spiritual life. And this view has continued to be recognized over many, many centuries during which time Indian society has changed, and many other old concepts have been discarded.

The normal Hindu has always been progressive. He has never hesitated to change if he felt that the change would enhance his knowledge and take him in a better direction. And in coming into contact with views and knowledge from other societies, there has been an ongoing reappraisal of our ancient concepts and views. In spite of this, we find that the concept of *brahmacharya* and its having an important role to play in the spiritual life has continued. It has stood the test of time; it has become time-honored. Had it not been something of enduring value, it would also have changed. But it has not. As it used to be regarded thousands of years ago, so it is regarded even today amongst spiritual teachers, gurus and yogis—with the same attitude of its being a necessary and important thing.

Another reason I have always been an advocate of celibacy is that the towering spiritual personalities who have been a molding influence in my life ever since I can remember—personalities like Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo Ghosh, as well as Gurudev Swami Sivananda himself—were all people who swore by celibacy. They were people who said that it is most important, indispensable. So naturally, when these people who were the source of my inspiration in the spiritual life were so forthright and absolutely clear—they didn't seem to have any doubt about it—I said, well, this is it! So that decided the matter for me in my approach to the spiritual life.

Brahmacharya, or celibacy, is a rational process of preserving and conserving precious energy so that it can be utilized in other very essential and indispensable functions. And if it is preserved like this, it can be converted, just as tangible, gross water is converted into subtle steam. Then it can do wonders. A river may not have much power in it by itself. You may be able to easily row or swim across it. But if it is dammed up and its waters conserved, then it has the power, when properly channeled, to turn huge turbines. And the hot sun, even in summer, won't normally cause a fire, but if you concentrate its rays

through a lens, those rays will immediately burn whatever they are focused on. That is what celibacy actually is.

Now, the interesting question is: What is the origin, the source, of this energy? After years and years of theory and discovery, modern physicists have arrived at the conclusion that what exists in nature is not palpable or solid matter as such. It is energy, energy that fills the entire cosmos, all space.

And our ancients have said that it is this cosmic energy that holds the heavenly bodies in their course. They are all kept moving by this mysterious, inexplicable, indescribable, unimaginable energy. And they regarded that energy as something divine, something that has neither a beginning nor an end. It is eternal and pervades everywhere. There is nowhere that it is not. And it is this energy that is present in living beings as the sex force. So Hindus regarded this energy as sacred, something that is worthy of being worshipped, not frittered away. They said that this energy is none other than the manifestation of the Divine Mother, the cosmic energy; therefore, it should be regarded with reverence.

This cosmic force manifests in our own system as *prana* [vital energy, life force]. And *prana* is the precious reserve of the seeker. Any sense activity or sense experience consumes a lot of *prana*. And the activity that consumes the greatest amount of *prana* is the sex act. The highest of all goals in human life, spiritual attainment, requires the maximum available *pranic* energy on all levels: mental, intellectual and emotional. *Prana* is required for spiritual reflection and discrimination. The thinking must be sharp and the intellect penetrating. To understand the inner implications of a guru's instructions requires a special type of intelligence. You may be a very intellectual person, and you may immediately grasp the language meaning of something the guru is telling you, but if the guru is speaking of an abstruse subject not within the normal range of your ordinary human experience, you require a special type of understanding. And that understanding develops through *brahmacharya*. So as I said, all these various practices require the use of *prana*, and celibacy ensures that an abundance of *pranic* reserve is available to the seeker. So viewed from this angle, it is a rational and very positive process.

This is the rationale behind celibacy. If you conserve this vital energy and divert it to the spiritual process of contemplation, philosophical study and reflection, and

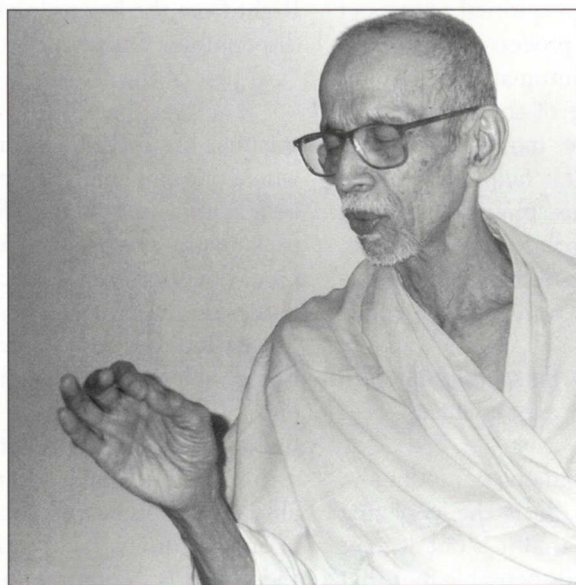
“Sex is a process

that directs your entire attention upon that part of your physical nature that you share with the entire animal kingdom. Is this going to be in any way helpful for attaining cosmic consciousness?”

meditation, it becomes successful, because you have concentrated your force and you are able to direct the concentrated force by focusing it upon your spiritual practices. If it is preserved, concentrated and diverted into a specific channel, it works wonders.

There is another reason why *brahmacharya* is important. I am not now talking about exceptional persons who have a sudden illumination and then they are once and for all lifted from the gross physical plane of body consciousness into another, never to return back. In one moment of illumination, Ramana Maharshi became established in “I am neither mind nor body, Immortal Self am I. I have neither time nor space, I was never born.” In one split second—one moment he was just an ordinary student, and then suddenly he knows that he is what the Bhagavad Gita describes as “Fire cannot burn you; water cannot wet you; weapons cannot injure you; wind cannot dry you. You are unborn, permanent, eternal, beyond time. Death is nothing to you”—he became established once and for all in that experience, and he never budged from that state. All his life, no matter what was going on around him, it did not touch him. It did not affect him. But I am not talking about such people.

Vedanta long ago probed into this subject of the human situation, and the sages saw clearly that 9,999 out of every 10,000 were completely caught up in a state of “I



am this body.” They knew of their identity only as a physical entity, a being with hands and feet and ears and eyes, eating, drinking, sleeping, talking, doing things. So they are totally body-bound. Their consciousness is held upon the level of the physical body. This is the situation. But the goal of the spiritual seeker is cosmic consciousness, which is their inner reality beyond time, space, name and form. So when

you juxtapose their present state of consciousness and the experience they wish to attain, you can just imagine how impossible this would be if they go on perpetuating this total identification with the physical body and all its processes.

Among all these bodily processes, most have become mechanical. Most people are not intensely aware of eating, drinking, sleeping, voiding. All these things have become automatic. But the one process that most of them purposefully engage in, with great desire for it—wanting it, thinking about it, planning for it and going after it—is sex enjoyment, which means that this is a process that concentrates their entire consciousness, entire mind, entire attention upon the physical, their physical identity. From one angle, the sex act is the acme of physicality or animality. It is a process that perforce directs your entire attention upon the physical, and even more, the full focusing of your desire and intention upon that part of your physical nature that you share in common with the entire

animal kingdom. Is this going to be in any way helpful for attaining cosmic consciousness?

So here is a human being, the crown and glory of God's creation, high above all the rest of the living species, going down to the gross, physical, material animal level and giving oneself totally to it: seeking it, wanting it, going after it, doing everything one can in order to obtain it, indulging in it, and wanting to have it always available. That means that one is voluntarily binding oneself down to a level of physical consciousness.

If you are a spiritual seeker, can you not see that you are working against yourself? You have to liberate your consciousness from the lesser levels and go on lifting it to progressively higher and higher levels of finer and more refined states. For if the whole of the spiritual process of illumination and enlightenment is a process of rising into a higher state of consciousness, it automatically implies liberating yourself from a lower state of consciousness. If you want to move northward, it means moving away from the south. And one of the things that helps you to free yourself from being caught in this physical level is celibacy. Cosmic consciousness, Absolute consciousness, is a far cry if you don't recognize the necessity of liberating yourself from your total identification with the body.

Question: *Are there particular stages in the spiritual life when celibacy becomes especially important or even essential?*

Swami Chidananda: Yes and no. From one point of view, celibacy forms the very foundation. It is the very first stage, the ABC stage. So we may say that it is not at *some* stage that it becomes important or indispensable, but that it is essential right from the very beginning.

If your aspiration is to be authentic and genuine, and if the aspiration is to take the form of an all-out commitment toward the spiritual experience and an all-out effort to move in that direction, then you must keep moving only in that direction. You cannot run after two things. Because then it will be taking one step forward and one step backward, and you will never really progress.

The spiritual life starts with your recognition that as long as you keep going headlong in the pursuit of sense satisfaction and pleasure, you are not going to move one step. So all will be academic and theoretical. Our aspiration, our wanting spiritual life will only be in theory—a fancy and a feeling. You have not started. So the beginning stage itself of the spiritual life is a turning away from sense experience and sense indulgence and starting to move in the opposite direction.

Swami Sivananda used to say: "*Brahmacharya* is the basis of immortality." And in many places in the Upanishads it says: "Wisdom experience cannot come to

one who has not his senses under restraint and who has not controlled the vagaries of his wandering mind." So I believe that it is not at *some* stage, but it is the *all* of the spiritual life. Because spiritual life is a transcendence of your human nature, human consciousness, And if it is a transcendence, you have to leave behind all that constitutes your human nature, your physicality. You will have to commence with it and keep on with it. You view celibacy in a positive manner, not as something antinature. You do not at all feel that you are doing any violence to yourself.

Finally, from a purely scientific and technical point of view, one of the yogas where celibacy is absolutely essential and indispensable is *kundalini yoga* [the practice of arousing vital energy]. There is no compromise with that. Right from the beginning it is absolutely essential and indispensable. Otherwise it can be dangerous. That's the "no" part of the answer.

The "yes" part is to state that in the total context of spiritual life in India, there are certain stages and states where one can be highly spiritual and yet at the same time be leading a normal sex life. That is true especially in the *bhakti* path—people who are following the path of love of God, devotion, prayer and worship, chanting the divine name, singing His glories. This path does not make any distinction between a celibate *brahmachari*, a married householder, and a retired couple living a spiritually oriented life after they have finished their duties as householders. The path of devotion seems to be a dimension of spiritual life in India where total celibacy in its sense of absolute abstinence is not insisted upon. It is not looked upon with disfavor, but it is not insisted upon. But because the sexual act consumes a great amount of *pranic* energy, naturally self-restraint is also important. And promiscuous sex was never countenanced, never looked upon with favor. So a sort of restraint in the form of self-control and fidelity in your sexual relationship with your recognized legal partner can also be regarded as *brahmacharya*.

And this has been the case with ever so many devotees, lovers of God, and spiritual India lacks no example of them. Throughout India we have seen the phenomenon of large communities of ecstatic devotees of God, many or most of whom have been married people, living a normal sex life, but nevertheless absorbed in divine love of God. So this is the "yes" portion. In this stage sexuality seems not in any way forbidden or incompatible with spiritual life.

Question: *I presume that Vedantic inquiry, the more intellectual approach to the spiritual life, would also not be incompatible with normal married life.*

Swami Chidananda: Yes, yes. But in the Vedantic type of life, gradually, unconsciously, without even intending it on

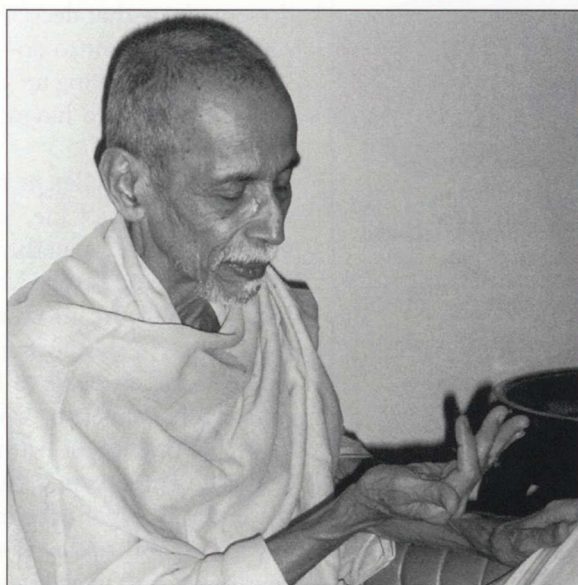
“Brahmacharya is

not outmoded; it is not at all old-fashioned, and it is not repressive or life-denying. On the contrary, it is used as a plank for everlasting life, endless life. When you come to have a little glimpse or idea of what real life is, then you will just stand amazed. This life is a means to that great, glorious, grand end aim of human existence, which is to enter into a life that is the life of God.”

purpose, in the course of time the person would graduate to that level of consciousness where sex would begin to seem superfluous. Because it contradicts the very basic thesis of Vedanta: “I am not this body. I am not the five elements. I am not the limiting adjuncts. I am something quite distinct and different.”

And for that different, distinct *something*, sex has no meaning. For it is not within the realm of physical consciousness and physical functioning.

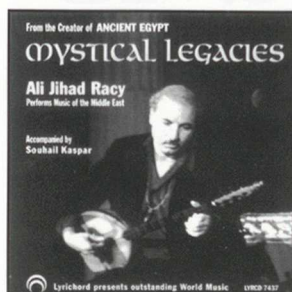
Question: Celibacy is often seen in the modern West as an outmoded, old-fashioned practice. It is often viewed as repressive, life-denying—even antithetical to what spiritual practice is ultimately all about. Many spiritual authorities in the West are now teaching that to realize our full potential as human beings, we must embrace, rather than in any way avoid or repress, our sexuality. These views stand in stark contrast to what the great traditions have always taught. What do you think about this?



Swami Chidananda: I don't agree with the general attitude that has just been expressed. They have failed to grasp the place of *brahmacharya* in the spiritual life. It is not outmoded; it is not at all old-fashioned, and it is not repressive or life-denying. On the contrary, it is used as a plank for everlasting life, endless life. Their view of life seems to be a very, very limited and narrow

view of life. This is not the only life there is. When you come to have a little glimpse or idea of what real life is, then you will just stand amazed. This present life is meaningless. It is a petty trifle, a nothing if not understood in terms of its being a takeoff runway for catapulting into that greater life. This life is a means to that great, glorious, grand end and aim of human existence, which is to enter into a life that is the life of God, that is one with God's life, the kingdom of Heaven. That is the whole purpose of human existence. Human life has been given to us as a passageway to divinity, as a passageway to everlasting life.

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So *brahmacharya* is neither repressing sexuality nor avoiding sexuality. It is just bypassing sexuality—making use of this sexual potential for something ten times, a hundred times greater. Therefore the question of repression and suppression is a misnomer. It is due to a lack of proper understanding of what the real spiritual quest is. If it is understood, then these terms will not be used. We are not just human beings; we are more than human beings. Our human status is only a pale reflection of what we really are. The only reason our human status acquires some meaning and significance is because if it is properly utilized, it can raise us up and take us into that which is our own, bring us into the kingdom—for which we have a birthright.

However, in one way, the idea in the West that *brahmacharya* is suppression is not entirely off the mark. If one represses or suppresses some natural faculty it can bring about undesirable changes in the personality. If *brahmacharya* is forced upon an individual against the individual's inclination and will, abnormal conditions naturally may result, because the person is being compelled to do something that deep within himself or herself the person does not want to do—compelled by others, by social restraint or by taking up vows that he or she ought not to have taken before having well considered exactly what was implied.

But if an intelligent person, having deeply pondered the whole basis of life, says: "When I want to achieve something great, something mighty, I cannot afford to deplete the energies that I have. The more I conserve, the more I can divert into that achievement and the greater the chance of succeeding." So thinking and having understood the rationale of it and fully appreciating the ultimate achievement it would lead to, if he or she voluntarily, willingly and with great enthusiasm undertakes celibacy, where comes the question of suppression? On the contrary, what appears to be a sort of denial is actually giving full self-expression to a higher dimension of your being into which you have now placed yourself. So, far from denying self-expression, it is giving full expression to yourself because you are no longer identified with the lesser aspect of your total personality. You are identified with the higher aspect. It is a sort of liberation and evolution to a higher level. It is something positive, creative, and not anything negative. It is not a denial but an actual expression of yourself.

When it constitutes such a process, then Freud and the others are off the mark. They have never visualized such a situation, such a possibility. But it is not only a possibility, it is a tradition of centuries, of millennia—someone being prepared to do anything, give anything, pay any price for the attainment of the highest.

Question: *Why do you think that even the idea of celibacy often makes people in the West today respond with anger or outrage?*

Swami Chidananda: I should say that Andrew Cohen would be in a better position and more competent to answer this question than myself, for whom this question is an academic and theoretical question, whereas for him, it is an experiential situation. Perhaps this concept is unacceptable to them because it would deny them the pleasure pursuit, the hedonistic approach they have in their life. It is something that the ordinary person in the West doesn't want to hear. It gets in the way of their way of life. If they are made to feel that they are doing something foolish, they will feel guilty. Then they become very uncomfortable, and naturally they become very angry. I am sure that there are others too who feel that celibacy is against the biblical commandment to go and multiply. So if you talk about *brahmacharya* in its extreme sense, then you seem to be preaching against God's commandment.

Question: *Tantra, or the practice of "sacred sexuality," is becoming very popular in the West today. Do you think these teachings offer an authentic spiritual path?*

Swami Chidananda: No, I do not think that these teachings offer an authentic spiritual path. Why? Because of

human frailty, human weakness. The human mind is so made that it always takes the path of least resistance. It always wants the easy way.

Tantra is an approach to God through all types of sense enjoyment. Everything is offered to God and so everything becomes sanctified; nothing is profane. One enjoys sense satisfaction and sees it also as part of God's bliss. There is a view, and it has something to it, that while in all human experiences duality persists—there is an "I am enjoying this object" feeling—that in the ultimate sexual experience between a truly loving male, intensely in love with the female and fully reciprocated by the female, there is no consciousness of one's individuality. There is a total fusion of the separatist consciousness in each one, and there is only the awareness of experience. There is no experiencer. They say this is a possibility when it is done to its perfection. The two cease to be and there is only one, nondual experience, experience Absolute, *brahmic*-consciousness. So they say that the human body is an instrument that, if properly made use of, can bring about a rising above body consciousness.

For one in a million it may click.

The pursuit of pleasure is part of the Western view of life—not the denial of pleasure. And one teacher in ten may be an authentic teacher genuinely offering something suited to the Western temperament. But nine of



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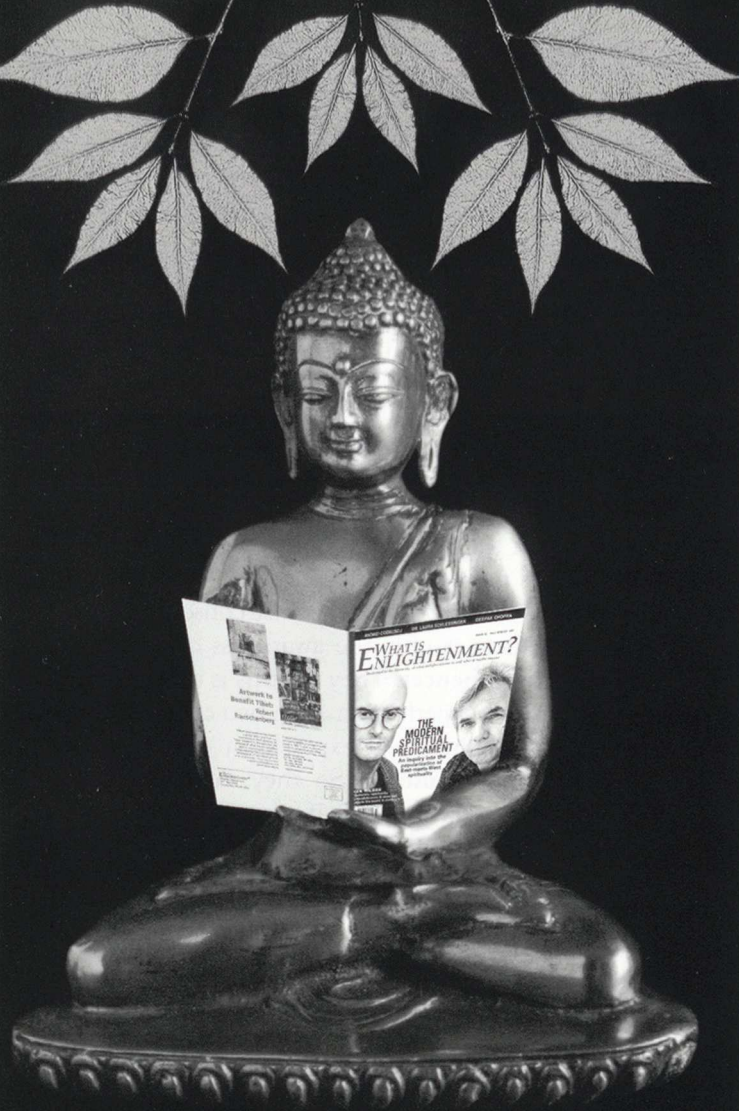
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BACK ISSUES. . .

WIE 12 The Modern Spiritual Predicament

Is America's growing fascination with Eastern mysticism the harbinger of a true spiritual revolution in the West? Or are the great Eastern teachings being watered down in order to appeal to our Western consumerist mentality? Includes an original article by Ken Wilber and interviews with Georg Feuerstein, talk-radio host Dr. Laura Schlessinger, Deepak Chopra and social critic, poet and NPR contributor Andrei Codrescu.

WIE 11 Can Science Enlighten Us?

Can scientific inquiry lead us to the same transcendent knowledge that the world's spiritual traditions speak of? A revolutionary investigation into an age-old question. Includes interviews with Huston Smith, Rupert Sheldrake and F. David Peat, as well as articles by E. F. Schumacher and Fritjof Capra.

WIE 10 Women, Enlightenment and the Divine Mother

An in-depth look at women's spirituality in its many forms, this issue explores the question: Do women have an inherent advantage in the pursuit of spiritual awakening? Interviews with J. Krishnamurti's successor, Vimala Thakar; founder of the feminist spirituality movement, Z. Budapest; and feminist psychologist Elizabeth Debold. Other articles include Georg Feuerstein on Mother Meera and Arnaud Desjardins on Anandamayi Ma.

WIE 9 Is the Guru Dead?

The fact that many spiritual teachers have fallen into financial and sexual scandal raises important questions. What are the causes of corruption? What is true purity? How can it be attained? Includes interviews with *The Guru Papers* authors Joel Kramer and Diana Alstad, and Brother David Steindl-Rast. Also articles by Andrew Cohen and Georg Feuerstein.

WIE 8 A Revolutionary Change of Perspective

WIE 7 Beyond the Boundaries of Tradition

WIE 6 Come Together... Who Has the Courage to Stand Alone/Together in the Truth?

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WIE 1 A Passion for Death

them are very shrewd people. They know there is a market for this, and they are wise to it. The approach is: You can have your cake and eat it too.

Mind you, this was an authentic path that did once upon a time exist in India, especially in the Eastern part. Even now it exists. But it became grossly perverted. People became enmeshed in it. They said they were practicing tantra, but it was only wining, dining and sex pleasure. It took them nowhere, but I suppose it took them where they wanted to go. So it was dubbed by enlightened people of that time as the "perverted path." Two paths then came into existence: the authentic path which was called the "right-hand path," and the perverted path which was only after enjoyment. That was called the "left-hand path."

There is an episode in the life of the great Sri Ramakrishna, the guru of Swami Vivekananda. He practiced all the yogic paths as well as Christianity, Islam and others, and he discovered that they all led to the same ultimate God-experience. And during one period of his spiritual life he practiced tantra also. A woman tantric approached him and said, "I have been sent here by God to initiate you into the tantric way of attaining God." Day after day she expounded the tantric way. But when it came to the final stage, Sri Ramakrishna, who swore by *brahmacharya*, replied that through this body it is impossible. So she said, "Then I'll have the whole thing enacted before you." So she got a tantric male and a tantric female to enact the ultimate consummation of the practice before him. As he was observing it stage by stage she went on describing it to him: "Observe carefully. Now you see how they are in ecstasy; they are ecstatic. They are losing their own consciousness." And at that stage, suddenly Ramakrishna lost all consciousness. He went into deep *samadhi* [a blissful state of nondual consciousness]. So he vicariously proved to himself that that ultimate sexual experience can lift one up into that state beyond all duality.

And so the science as such exists, but there are very few authentic gurus, and it has to be strictly followed under the personal supervision of a true guru. I am likely to be accused of being uncharitable, but I believe that most purveyors of modern sacred sexuality are interested in making a profit out of it for themselves.

As I told you, the sex force is sacred; sex is sacred. It is one of the most sacred of all things. But sacred sexuality is a misnomer. Once you get enmeshed in sexuality, the sacredness is given the bye-bye. That is due to man's weakness, frailty. Therefore, I am not going to be an advocate of it.

Question: *Considering the number of lapses and aberrations in those who have taken a lifelong vow of celibacy both in the*

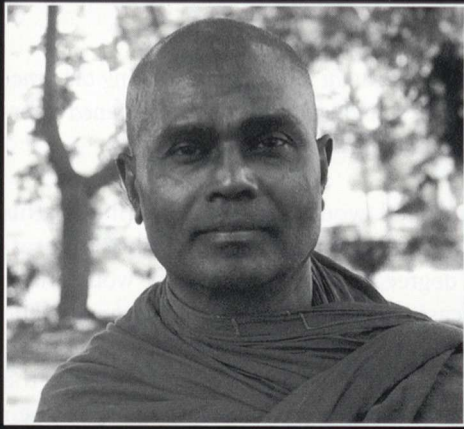
West and East, do you feel that perhaps undertaking the practice should be restricted to individuals who have attained a certain degree of spiritual maturity first?

Swami Chidananda: I wouldn't fully subscribe to this view because, first and foremost, people who have attained a certain degree of spiritual maturity would have reached that at least partially through *brahmacharya*. The very fact that they have reached a certain degree of spiritual maturity indicates that *brahmacharya*, at least in the broader sense of the term, must have been part of their makeup or part of the way by which they ascended to that degree of maturity. And I have no hesitation in saying that the lapses and aberrations you refer to cannot lessen the validity of the concept and the tradition of *brahmacharya* in any way. They are solely due to the imperfection of the persons.

On the other hand, before one takes a lifelong vow of celibacy one has to make sure one has a real vocation; there has to be an inner call to the life and to embrace celibacy. It cannot be a decision based on sentiment and emotional euphoria, rather it is a judgment through a rational, logical appraisal of the life. I also insist that one should not take the vow of monasticism until one is old enough to understand one's own biology and has had some experience of what one has within oneself, what one has to deal with. One has to face this squarely. I would also suggest that a person be allowed to take the vow of lifelong celibacy only after they have been kept under observation and tutelage for some time. For example, the Ramakrishna Mission keeps a person as a preprobationer for one full year. Then he goes through a probationary period for a minimum of eight years. Only then is he eligible to request to be a full monastic swami. So this type of taking in, sifting and observing would perhaps obviate many of these lapses and aberrations. You only allow a person to undertake that vow after a certain period in the spiritual life. However, even when all the conditions I have mentioned are fulfilled, extreme caution must be exercised until a stage is reached where *brahmacharya* is one's normal and natural condition.

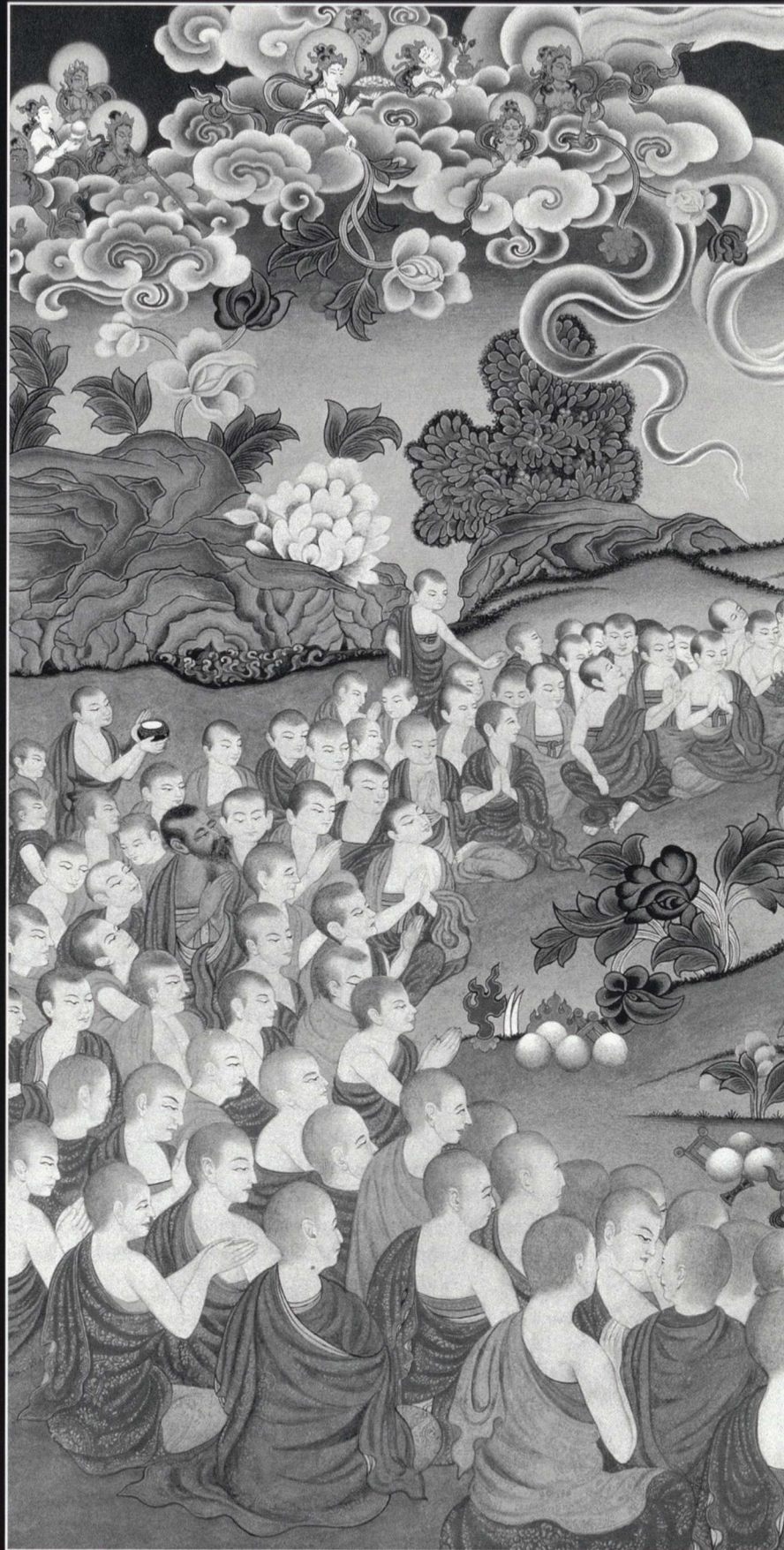
Brahman, the Absolute, is the highest *brahmachari* because He is One without a second, and if you are established in *brahman*, you are in that same state—where there is no second, where there is no other. There is a stage where one becomes totally devoid or free from the sex idea. There is no sex or man or woman or this or that because one's view has changed. Quite apart from whatever is around—the world in which one is living—one is totally changed. One's consciousness is no longer kept upon that level where these things have any meaning or relevance. When consciousness is in another place, all

continued on page 156



An interview with
**Bhante
Henepola
Gunaratana**
by Simeon Alev

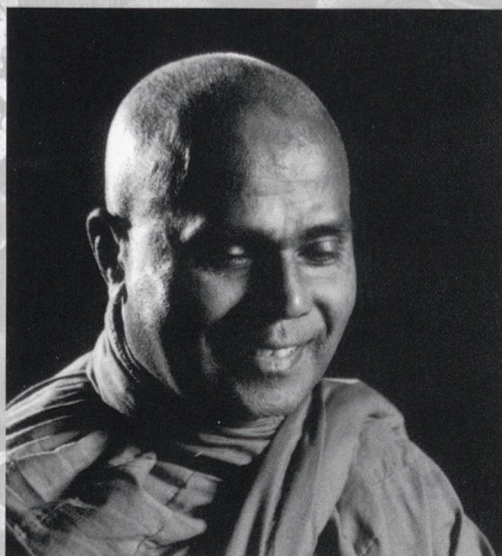
IN A PERFECT WORLD, the opening line of this introduction would have read: "This issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* would not be complete without the following interview with the Buddha." This is not a perfect world, of course, but *What Is Enlightenment?* always strives for perfection, and we felt certain that, as one of history's most illustrious celibates, the Buddha would have had more than a few enlightening things to



WHAT THE BU



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INTRODUCTION continued

tell us about the relationship between sexuality and spirituality, and no shortage of comments on the decline of celibacy and the increasing popularity of tantra in the modern spiritual world. How, we wondered, would our issue ever be complete without him?

But when we spoke with Bhante Henepola Gunaratana—or “Bhanteji,” as he is affectionately called by his students—he put our minds at ease. Ordained a celibate Buddhist monk at the age of twelve in Sri Lanka, the country of his birth, Bhante Gunaratana is today, at seventy, a renowned Buddhist scholar and author and the spiritual leader of the Bhavana Society, a monastic retreat center in West Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley. According to the Bhante, our interview with the Buddha would have yielded no real surprises because where spirituality and sex are concerned, things haven’t really changed that much since the Buddha’s time. In our time there are still, relatively speaking, just a few monks, still many householders, and still—as the Bhante feels there always will be—more than a few adventurous souls who are convinced that sex, not renunciation, is going to lead them to the highest peaks of human consciousness. And the Buddha, in the course of his life, gave teachings, precepts and admonitions to address the spiritual needs of individuals in all three of these categories.

What, then, were the Buddha’s views on spirituality and sex? Steeped in the *dharma* [spiritual teaching] since his youth, Bhante Gunaratana answered all of our questions with a conviction that was utterly doubtless and a gentle and infectious humor that made it an unqualified pleasure to speak with him. And as the hour he had reserved for us drew to a close, he described his own lifelong experience of celibacy—its challenges and rewards—with a sweetness and enthusiasm born of the certainty that in a life of absolute renunciation there is absolutely nothing missing.

WIE: *In the course of planning for this interview we were joking that if we could actually interview the Buddha himself that would be ideal, but that speaking with you about what the Buddha taught would be the next best thing.*

BHANTE GUNARATANA: I wish we all could meet Buddha and ask him these questions!

WIE: *One fact that most everyone who is interested in Buddhism these days is aware of is that the Buddha was a monk who founded a monastic tradition; and of course it is this very tradition that you yourself have devoted so much time and energy to bringing to the West. Why did the Buddha put so much emphasis on celibacy? Why did he feel it was so important?*

BG: Because those who want to attain liberation from *dukkha*, from suffering, have to observe certain principles. In fact, for those who want to live a monastic life, celibacy is mandatory. Because if they are engaged in all kinds of sexual activities, then they are no different from laypeople, who are engrossed in various types of problems related to sex. Also, those who are interested in monastic life want to live a very *simple* life—which is what all monastic traditions are set up for—because in the final analysis, it is only when we get rid of our greed, lust and craving that we can liberate ourselves from suffering. You see, if our intention is to get rid of suffering, then we have to get rid of the *cause* of suffering, and lust is defi-

nately the cause of suffering. So those who want to live the monastic life have to get rid of that so that they can live a life that does not nourish the root of craving.

WIE: *Would it be fair to say then that if someone was not living a monastic life, if they were a layperson, it would be much more difficult, or perhaps even impossible, for them to do that?*

BG: Even laypeople have to live a disciplined life; they have to exercise a certain restraint. And that's why for laypeople there are the precepts to observe; but ordinary laypeople are not supposed to observe celibacy. Laypeople can attain certain stages of enlightenment—what we call “stream-enterer” and “once-returner”—before they have realized for themselves that there are inherent difficulties and problems involved in sexual activities. And laypeople can attain even the third stage of sainthood, which is called the “never-returner” stage. But soon after they attain that stage they themselves will decide from their own experience, from their own understanding, that involvement in sexuality is going to block the progress of their spiritual practice, and when they realize this they will voluntarily give up sexual

activities. So you see, celibacy is not something that can be imposed upon us by force or command.

WIE: *Could you go into a little more detail about why it is that sex itself has to be transcended in order for one to progress on the spiritual path?*

BG: Because as long as you are in it, your mind will be cluttered, clouded and confused and you will get involved in jealousy, fear, hatred, tension and so forth—all the worries that arise from lust. Therefore if you want to be liberated from all of that, you first have to get rid of lust.

Actually, some people don't like the phrase “get rid of”; some people prefer words like “transcending” or “transforming.” “Surely,” they say, “we can transform ‘lust’ into ‘nonlust’!”

WIE: *What is the distinction between “transcending” and “getting rid of”?*

BG: Some terms are a little closer to the real meaning, and others are what you call euphemistic terms, rather than very strong negative terms. These people like to say “transcending” or “transforming” rather than “getting rid of” because they need sugarcoated words that make them feel better.



“The Buddha taught that as long as one is engaged in sexual activity one would not be interested in practicing spiritual life; these two just don’t go together.”

WIE: *But what we’re actually talking about is getting rid of lust?*

BG: Right. But when you say, “Get rid of it,” it’s so strong, so negative, that people wonder, “How can I get rid of anything?” So if you say, “Let us transform it into something else,” then they can relate to it.

WIE: *In the Buddha’s teachings on sexuality, was sex considered inherently negative?*

BG: Buddha taught that as long as one is engaged in sexual activity, one would not be interested in practicing spiritual life; these two just don’t go together. But when he gave his gradual enlightenment teaching, he also said that the sensation of lust, of sexuality, has *pleasure*. He did not *deny* the pleasure. It *has* pleasure. But then, you see, that very pleasure turns into displeasure, and gradually, slowly, as the initial fever of lust wears out, people begin to fight. Because out of lust arises fear; out of lust arises greed; out of lust arises jealousy, anger, hatred, confusion and fighting; all these negative things arise from lust. And therefore these negative things are inherent in lust. And if we want to see this, you know, we don’t have to look any further than our own society. Just open your eyes and look around. How many millions of people are fighting? And it is only based on their lust and greed—husbands, wives; boyfriends, girlfriends; boyfriends, boyfriends; girlfriends, girlfriends—and so on, you see? Whether you are heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, it doesn’t matter. As long as you are in it, it is inevitable that you will have these problems—fighting, disappointment, anger, hatred, killing—all these are involved.

Therefore, because he saw the inherent problem in sexuality, Buddha said that it is better to control

and discipline our senses in order to have a calm and peaceful life. But one has to do this gradually, slowly, only through understanding and not abruptly. It cannot be forced. It has to be done gradually and with deep understanding. If people do not understand this and try to stop it all of a sudden, they will get more frustration, more fear and so forth. And therefore in his gradual teaching, he said that first there is the pleasure in sexual activities, and *then* there are the disadvantages, *then* there are the problems. And only when you *see* the problems, only then do you begin to realize that these disadvantages, this negativity, are inherent in sexuality—they are intrinsic. These troubles, these problems, are *intrinsic* to lust.

WIE: *Especially nowadays, that would be considered a very radical view.*

BG: Oh, surely. But you know, it is only when people turn away from these things, it is only when they stay away from this kind of teaching and are gone in time and space a million miles away, that when they turn back and look at the root of their problem it appears to be radical. They have turned their backs for so long, gone so far away in time and space, that when they look back they think, “Oh boy, how can I get rid of this now? I’ve gone so far and I’m so deeply involved in it.” Therefore this appears to them to be radical. Surely it is radical!

WIE: *I found myself thinking, as you were speaking, that because you spent very little time on the pleasure of sex and so much more on all the disadvantages, many people—*

BG: Yes! For that little pleasure, a lot of pain, right?

WIE: *Definitely.*

BG: But you're right. People don't want to think about that. People always want to hear what they like to hear. But we don't want to say that! Whether the people like it or not, we want to tell the truth. And we shouldn't be afraid of telling the truth. Whether the world will accept it or not . . . now that's a different issue. What can we do?

WIE: *When we were looking for a quote from the Buddha about his feelings with regard to sexuality, we came across this passage, from The Life of the Buddha: "Misguided man, it were better for you (as one gone forth) that your member should enter the mouth of a hideous, venomous viper or cobra than that it should enter a woman. It were better for you that your member should enter a pit of coals burning, blazing and glowing than that it should enter a woman. Why is that? For the former reason you would risk death or deadly suffering, but you would not, on the dissolution of the body after death, reappear in a state of privation, in an unhappy destination, in perdition, even in hell."*

Now I think one gets a pretty clear impression from this how the Buddha felt about sex. But as you know, in the West today there are many variations of Buddhism being taught and practiced, and many Western Buddhist practitioners seem to disagree with the Buddha's assertion that lust—which as you said earlier he viewed as a manifestation of craving—must by definition be transcended in order to achieve enlightenment. In addition, the liberal climate in contemporary American society as a whole tends to regard sexuality as a very good, a very healthy, and a very natural expression of our humanity—and not only our humanity, but our spirituality. What do you think the Buddha would have to say about this?

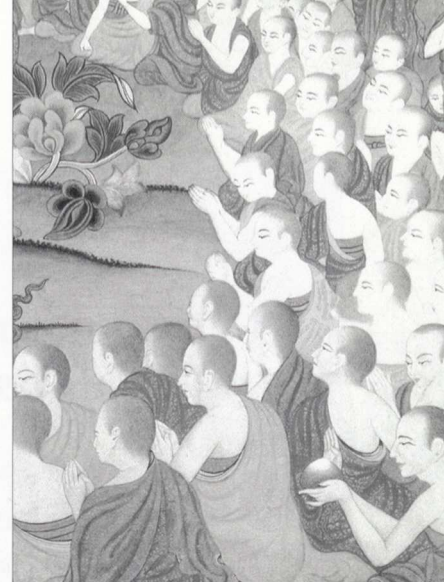
BG: Before I say anything I want to add a little footnote to that translation. You know that when Buddha

talked about celibacy he was not talking only about the celibacy of a man, but the celibacy of a woman also. So when he said, for example, that it is better to swallow a red-hot iron ball than to engage in sexual activity, that goes for women, too. We have to make that clear; otherwise women will get upset. They might think that Buddha hated women and that that is why he wanted to keep men away from women and asked men to observe celibacy. But if a woman wants to observe celibacy, then by the same token she should keep away from men. That's the first point I want to make clear.

The second point is that living a household life, having a spouse and so forth—Buddha did not condemn that; a healthy sexual family life is permitted for laypeople, even though, as I said, this can never lead to full enlightenment.

But to answer your question: Not only in contemporary society, but also in Buddha's time, there were people who believed that sexuality is something holy, something noble, something sacred, something miraculous. So this is not only a modern, twentieth century social phenomenon. The mentality of people has always been the same from time immemorial, up to now, and into the future. There are always some people who think that through sexuality they can attain liberation, and that is what we call a distorted perception, distorted thinking.

WIE: This "distorted perception," as you call it, seems to be particularly prevalent nowadays, perennial though it may be. I'm referring to the increasingly popular notion that sexuality in and of itself, if it's pursued to the end, would be the very expression of enlightenment—and that because sexuality is the road to liberation, if you avoid it in any way, then you don't really have any hope of reaching the final goal. If possible I'd



“Out
of lust
arises fear; out of
lust arises greed;
out of lust arises
jealousy, anger,
hatred, confusion,
and fighting;
all of these
negative things
arise from lust.
And therefore,
these negative
things are
inherent in lust.”



The Bhikkhus' Code of Discipline

A *bhikkhu* [monk] who commits these offenses severs himself irrevocably from the life of the *sangha* [spiritual community] and is no longer considered a *bhikkhu*. However, the first offender for each rule is exempted for the one time he acted in such a way as to provoke the Buddha into formulating the rule.

If a *bhikkhu* is approached by a woman who fondles his body, even to the point where he emits semen, and he consents mentally to what she is doing, he incurs a penalty if he says something or makes a physical move to indicate his consent, but no penalty if he remains perfectly still.

If a *bhikkhu* engages in voluntary sexual intercourse—genital, anal or oral—with a human being, a nonhuman being or a common animal, whether female, male or hermaphrodite, he has committed an offense.

If a *bhikkhu* performs the sexual act with a dead body—even a decapitated head—if the remains are intact enough for the act to be accomplished, he has committed an offense.

from "Parajika," *The Patimokkha Training Rules*

like to get a very clear indication of how the Buddha would have responded to that point of view.

BG: I am quite familiar with that. He said—and I am translating from Pali: "No matter what you may do or attain—you may live in a cave, in a solitary place, and you may have learned entire sutras; you may be a very erudite speaker; you may even practice morality and so forth and so on—no matter what else you do, until you get rid of your lust, your hatred, your ignorance, you will never attain enlightenment." This is the Buddha's teaching.

So the more you engage in sexual activities the deeper you go in your lust, the deeper you get in your confusion, and the deeper you get in your jealousy. When a person, whether male or female, wants to get involved in sexual activities with so many different persons at the same time, then by the same token there are so many different ways that that person will suffer: from jealousy, fear, tension, worry. This is a very unhealthy, *very* unhealthy life. If somebody thinks of having sexual activities with all kinds of people in all different manners all the time, then that person would be dead very soon as a result of such unhealthy behavior. Now of course you have to understand at the same time that moderate, wise, healthy sexual activity is permissible. But all attaining *enlightenment* through sexuality means is: you go and engage in sexual activities until you die! And you *will* be dead before you reach *that* enlightenment!

WIE: How does all this play out then in the context of actual spiritual practice, for example in tantric Buddhism?

BG: I'm a Theravada Buddhist—you know that, right?

WIE: Yes, I do.

BG: Now, I'm sometimes sorry to say these things, but Theravada Buddhists don't consider tantra to be Buddhism. Nowhere in the original Buddhist literature can you find "tantric Buddhism." Tantra is a later development. There is no such thing as tantric Buddhism in original Buddhism. There's *never* been such a thing as tantric Buddhism. Tantra is tantra, Buddhism is Buddhism, and these two will never go together. But some people who were so engrossed in sex and so distorted in their perception wanted to glorify sex by adding Buddhism to that. And that is why they combined tantra with Buddhism. People may hate me for saying this, but still I had to say it.

WIE: We've noticed in the course of our research not only that the notion of sacred sexuality has been increasing in popularity, but also that celibacy is often viewed with a great deal of



What the Buddha Taught

Misguided man,
it were better for you (as one gone forth)
that your member should enter the mouth
of a hideous venomous viper
than that it should enter a woman.

It were better for you
that your member should enter a pit of coals
burning, blazing and glowing
than that it should enter a woman.

Why is that?
For the former reason you would risk death
or deadly suffering,
but you would not,
on the dissolution of the body after death,
reappear in a state of privation,
in an unhappy destination,
in perdition, even in hell.
But for the latter reason
you would do so.

from *The Life of the Buddha*

fear and suspicion by people in Western culture. Why do you think that might be?

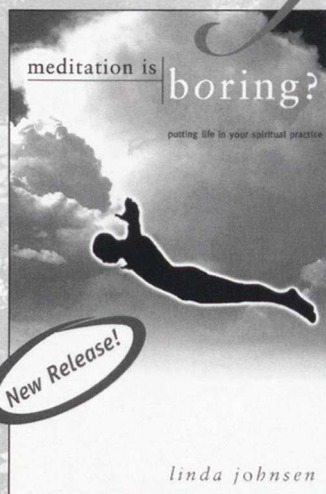
BG: If celibacy is strictly observed, that is good only for the person observing it. You cannot open an institute of celibacy. Celibacy is not something that can be institutionalized. It cannot be organized. We cannot have a celibate society. It is a totally personal, individual practice. And therefore if people object to it, they may be objecting to the organization of celibacy.

WIE: It seems, though, that any monastic discipline would have to be organized to some extent. In fact, we were fascinated and even shocked to discover, as we were reading the Patimokkha Training Rules for Monks, that the Buddha apparently had to make a whole series of rules that prohibited his monks from engaging in sexual contact with—just to give you a few examples which I'm sure you're aware of anyway—skulls, dead bodies, animals . . . that kind of thing. Now as far as we know, this type of behavior doesn't go on today—although that isn't necessarily true, I suppose!—so we were just wondering: Was the Buddha, by making these rules, responding to things that people were actually doing?—even his own students and followers?

BG: Right. When Buddha introduced one rule, the monks in those days soon found another way of doing the same thing. They wanted to commit sexual activities in one way or another. So when Buddha introduced one rule, they did not break that rule, but they found out some other way to commit sexual activity. And then Buddha had to introduce another rule to stop them. It's just like the police and the criminals—when there is a law, criminals will find a way to go around it and commit the crime, and then we have to introduce another law. This is what happened in the time of Buddha. When more and more people got into the Order, they started doing all sorts of things, and for all these things he had to make a rule. That is why these rules are there. It was not in anticipation of the future that he introduced these rules.

WIE: And now here we are, in the future, and because you have gone out of your way to bring the Buddha's monastic tradition to the West, I'm curious to know what your experience has been of the Westerners who come to you for teaching. How do modern Westerners take to monastic life? Do you find that they have more difficulty with it, for example, than people from your own culture?

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BG: You know, that's a good question. We really screen people before we accept them into monastic life. We put them under a sort of a probation for two years to find out whether or not they are really sincerely serious about getting involved. Because sometimes people come just for the fun of it, and because our place is very quiet and peaceful and so forth, they think that they might like to stay here and become monks. But then later on they will change their minds. And therefore we don't want to play some sort of game; we want to know whether they are really sincerely serious. If they are serious, we accept them. But these are only a few. Many come here, many write letters to us—and these days they even send us e-mails!—asking us to allow them to become monks and live here in the monastery. But we don't accept all of them because we know that later on they will lose interest.

Still, there are some very sincere people who really do want to become monks and nuns. And this is not some new phenomenon. Even in the olden days, out of millions of people, only a very few entered the monasteries. Even today in Buddhist countries not everybody goes to the monastery. In some countries, like Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and so forth, they have in their tradition a custom: they enter the monastery for a short

period of time. But of those who enter the monastery for a short period of time, most of them disrobe and go back. Only a handful of people actually stay there. In the Western countries, where there is no such tradition, those who come to the monasteries are even fewer. And of those, still fewer will actually remain in monastic life. But that is more or less true all over the world, and has been in all times.

In the West, you know, more and more people are tired of society pressing in upon them—really, really tired—and so they want to get away. But only a very few of them will stay, and most will go back again to the society. But we established our Center with this understanding because this has always been the same everywhere.

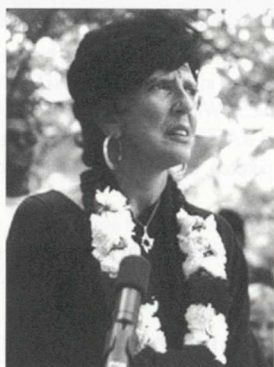
WIE: I'd like to know, if possible, a little more about you and your own life as a monk. For example, how has being celibate affected your spiritual development?

BG: My friend, it gives me *tremendous* peace. And I'm speaking honestly, you see? Because I can live with all human beings without any problem. Not one particular woman or one particular girl, one particular boy, one par-

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ticular man, because my celibacy helps me to accept all other human beings equally. And that helps me to have a peaceful mind. And I think this is what the Buddha *wanted* us to have—a friendly, peaceful relationship with all beings. So it affects my life so positively.

WIE: *You've been a monk, I understand, since you were—*

BG: Twelve. And now I am seventy. Fifty-eight years I have been in this robe!

WIE: *If you were advising someone who was considering a commitment to celibacy as a spiritual practice, what would you tell them?*

BG: I'd tell them, "If you honestly, sincerely want to live a peaceful life, a mindful life, a life free of trouble, a life devoted to the service of others without discrimination, then a celibate life is a very good life because when you are celibate you can really practice true loving-kindness, true compassion. You can appreciate whatever is in front of you. You can have an equanimous, unbiased state of

mind. But when you are bound by one person or another, you cannot have all this. And therefore, if you are a person who honestly, sincerely wants to practice these things, then you have to think seriously about becoming celibate."

But they should never accept it on faith or because somebody forces it upon them. One has to have serious understanding and think very carefully about celibacy before one gets involved in it.

WIE: *You have to go in with your eyes open.*

BG: Exactly.

WIE: *And should the individual also expect to experience many challenges?*

BG: Sure, sure. When you practice celibacy you are always facing challenges. There are so many who would like to get involved with you, so many others who would like to get close to you and break your celibacy. Because others know that you are not corrupt. You are not doing all

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sorts of hanky-panky things, you are not getting involved in wrong things and getting all kinds of diseases and so forth. People understand that you are a very decent person, a neat person. And some people like to be with a very neat individual, and that is a challenge. You've got to face it.

WIE: You've been practicing celibacy, as you said, for fifty-eight years. How has your experience of the practice changed or deepened over time?

BG: You know, at first it was very difficult, very difficult, especially when I was young, as a teenager and up until my late twenties. It was a real challenge. But because of the training that I received, I developed a sense of responsibility for my duties, my work, my commitment to the *dharma* and, moreover, respect for my teachers and parents. Teachers and parents, we love them very much, and we don't want to be disloyal to them, disrespectful to them. So that went on for many years until I really fully matured. And then I began to understand for myself the true meaning of celibacy. ■

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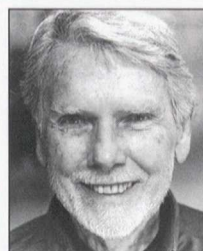
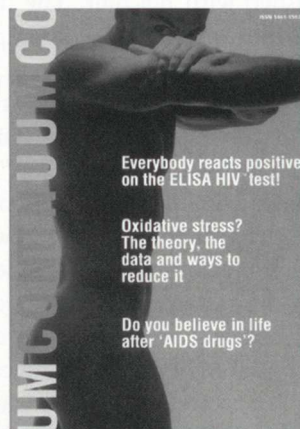
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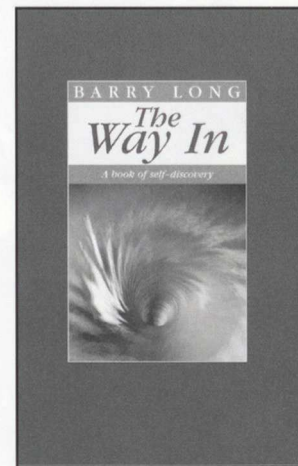
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how attractive we feel, how much
affirmation we get for that, and
how often and intensely we are
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Here's

In the following intimate account, a contemporary celibate describes her decision to renounce sexuality for a period of several years and her discovery of a liberating new perspective on the potential for real intimacy between men and women.

TWO YEARS AGO I BECAME CELIBATE. Finally the time had come. It was something I had very much wished for and which I entered into with great passion. It was the end of the world—the end of my history and identity as an attractive woman. There was only one thing now: *freedom*. Amazingly beautiful, enormous infinity. It was intoxicating. No romance, no tempestuous or tender relationship, not the warm security in the arms of a man . . . *nothing* was comparable to the experience of this step. It was exactly what I had dreaded and wished for most in my life: I was alone. I shaved my head and committed myself to a life without sexual activity. Renunciation. No man would turn his head after me. The illusion that there would be a future knight in shining armor was also gone. The journey I had begun was leading into unknown territory, and I wasn't going to come back. I didn't exist anymore in the world of the beautiful, the rich and the famous. My ticket to that world had vanished with my hair. The decision for celibacy had come after thinking and contemplating for a long time. It was a conscious choice.

Recently, looking out the window at two nuns in black habits, an unsuspecting colleague said, "Look, nuns! That's a thing of the past." He didn't notice anything; in a way, my celibacy is inconspicuous, even though regularly with the full and new moon my hair is shaved and any reemerging signs of identity or something like "good looks" disappear. It happens quietly, serenely, and increasingly as a matter of course. At work I wear a hat, something covering my head. Of course that makes people curious, but after their initial shock they hardly notice

Looking at You

by Carin Jungmann

and don't seem that interested. Sometimes there's an ironic grin; often people just shake their heads or don't know what to say at all. Occasionally there is a timid question about the reasons. Sometimes there's a conversation, mostly with women who see parallels in themselves, who feel attracted and repulsed at the same time. Is it possible that one of us could withdraw so absolutely from the value system for women in our society? Withdraw in a way that is unmistakable and that demands great conviction on a personal level? As a woman, to be bald in our society is a big challenge. After all, this world is made of ideas about sexual power—or is it?

"Don't you have any physical desire? I could never do without it!" That's the comment I'm offered most often. It seems difficult for modern men and women to imagine a life without sexual activity. Our self-confidence depends on how attractive we feel, how much affirmation we get for that, and how often and intensely we are able to satisfy our sexual desire. Sexuality is a modern God. Even today, the notion that we can find true fulfillment in romantic and sexual relationships is still the most powerful temptation and the biggest illusion.

My life was also driven and marked by this longing to find profound unity, overwhelming trust and absolute surrender in romantic and sexual adventures. And no matter how much, as a teenager, I doubted deep down that this was possible, I still couldn't wait to be an adult, to have a boyfriend, to be someone, to feel life bubbling inside with the electricity of romantic and sexual feelings.

Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman in *Casablanca* are timeless and dramatic icons of a promise of eternal, ecstatic bliss that will never be fulfilled. Their faces wet with rain in the good-bye scene, she doesn't know that he's already decided to sacrifice their love for a bigger purpose. She's in love, weightless rapture. That's all she seems to know or wants to know. Finally, the lovers have found each other, and the world is in balance, despite all the chaos she's experiencing. She will leave Victor Laszlo and go into an uncertain but intoxicating future together with Rick. When I saw this scene for the first time, I could

hardly bear the pain she suffers when Rick tells her that she will get on the plane with Victor and he'll stay back. The two men understand each other. The French policeman understands. All three men seem untouched by the enormous emotional blow which is mirrored in Ingrid Bergman's eyes so hauntingly. *Here's looking at you, kid.* The world of a woman is the love of a man. Without him, she is nothing, no matter how liberated we believe ourselves to be today. Why else would we work so hard to improve our attractiveness? The power and security that come from that, which bring us the love of a man, are enormously important to us. We suffer deep agony and doubt should we be deprived of them or if they are questioned. Men and women seem to have agreed on a code that makes them the prisoners and the guards of the prison at the same time. Men leave. Baby, please don't go!

After the third big love affair of my life failed, I started to pay attention. Wilhelm Reich says that human beings mate according to a biological, hormonal program. For a period of four years, certain hormones are produced that guarantee sexual attraction between a man and woman. After that, it stops. It's about the period of time necessary to raise children to a less vulnerable age. Procreation must be guaranteed, then one moves on. That was my experience as well. After about four years I grew disinterested in my sexual partner. Often, at that point, I fell in love with someone else. Sometimes I was just bored. Usually I was so angry about the personal tics of my former knight that separating was the most reasonable thing to do. Everybody could see that; I got all the support. The men usually felt the same.

For a while, when I was a student, I followed my insight that true love was an illusion and had several exclusively sexual relationships. Sexual liberation had passed its pinnacle and begun its destructive phase. The time of the courageous experiments of the communes was over. More and more I could feel a cynical and aggressive tone. It seemed that nobody really wanted to give themselves anymore. "We are together, but we are not committing to anything." Too big was the fear that once again we would

be left standing in the rain, wet and cold, not understanding why the promise of eternal, all-healing love—which would answer all questions, which would make *my life* okay—had not been fulfilled. No more Ingrid Bergman, no more *Casablanca*.

I took my rage about my disillusionment to women's rights groups. There we were, unified in knowing who the real enemy was: men, patriarchy. Women had the raw end of the deal in every area of life. Professionally we were underprivileged, where love was concerned we were the fools, and if there were kids they remained our responsibility in any case. Our meetings were full of anger and helplessness; we felt we were victims of a great injustice. There was no forgiving. Now, fifteen years later, this group no longer exists and most of the women are in "committed" relationships with a man or a woman. Mostly with men. What happened to the revolution? What happened to our insights? One of my friends back then said, "We don't despair when the war in Vietnam doesn't stop or the nuclear plant is built after all; we despair when our relationships don't work out." Love relationships still seem to be the most important thing in our lives, despite mind expansion, despite all the hard-won progress in women's rights and despite all of our realizations from various types of meditation.

The sexual side of human experience is very confusing. Lust or sexual desire can flood our perception in an instant and cause us to act in a way we might regret only a short time later. My own life is full of examples of the destructive consequences such un-thought-out behavior can have. I thought about it for a long time before I decided to be celibate. The decision came after I realized that I didn't trust the man I desired most. Because of this, a sexual relationship was out of the question. I didn't want to repeat my past and be involved in an endless struggle for power.

That I lacked trust shocked me very much. But it opened up an investigation for me in which, for the first time, I could meet the fundamental questions of my life



"We don't despair when the war in Vietnam doesn't stop or the nuclear plant is built after all; we despair when our relationships don't work out."

with real interest: What is love? What is sexual attraction? Why am I afraid to be alone, alone and independent? Who am I really if I renounce my own sexual attractiveness, renounce the sexual arena of life in general? What does it really mean to go beyond these powerful impulses? What does it mean to be responsible? Again and again I had compromised for sexual attraction, for romantic ideas that had promised me paradise on earth. Life is so huge, so incomprehensible in its mystery—but I couldn't disentangle myself from my worries about my love and sex life. A man was always at the center of my universe. Right at my side. There we were, and everything above, below, to the right or left of us was barely visible. There was hardly anything else I recognized. I had always chosen the security of the conventional. At the same time,

there was a longing in me that could never be fulfilled by this set-up.

When I considered becoming celibate, what most attracted me were the intimations of a rare peace. No temptation, no matter how strong, would be able to pull me away from my intention to give everything for freedom. No bargaining, no secrets, no drama. Only clarity of intention. In all my relationships, I had always wished that I would have the courage to be alone. Now I was, and I was free to question all my ideas, to examine all of my experience and to find out if it is possible to see it in a very different way, a way that would allow for a true understanding of human life.

Renouncing sexual desire has given me a perspective on sexual feelings that reveals how impersonal, mechanical and meaningless they are. Sexuality is something that seems to have its own rhythm. It's up to us to respond to it or not. Not reacting means that nothing happens; no karma is created, no consequences. Even though a roaring hurricane of sexual feelings nearly swallowed me whole a minute ago, I am still free. Feelings that in the past I was convinced would tear me apart appear and disappear. Nothing happens. Sexual feelings—contrary to what I hoped and believed earlier in my life—have nothing to do with freedom. As ecstatic as they may be and as far as they

may have carried me beyond the mind, in the long run they don't last, and they don't reveal true liberation. They are part of human experience—the part that relentlessly, and with all its tricks and sweet temptations, is always demanding procreation. And renouncing that part has strengthened my conviction that it is possible to be free in this life. This means, more and more, a real and living perspective beyond thought, beyond feeling and beyond time. The courage to be an expression of this perspective I have to find alone. In this courage to be alone there lies the possibility of profound trust in life itself.

My practice of celibacy is planned to last for three years. Initially this seemed like an eternity, but today I wouldn't want a different life. There's nothing in me rushing to end the practice. The peace in me grows; the prospect of a sexual relationship becomes less and less attractive. The deep desire to put my head on a man's shoulder and feel safe is vanishing, and with it, my self-imposed dependency on the illusion that there is any safety in this life. Celibacy is a precious opportunity for me to discover and investigate true independence, undistracted and with great devotion. The more I let go of my romantic helplessness and angry blaming, the more I see men as the human beings they are. They are no longer the arch-enemy a woman has to conquer in order to survive. It is possible to trust them. It is possible, first, to be a human being among human beings.

I can't help but imagine a new *Casablanca*. . . . Bogey is standing there in the rain, his face serious and wet. He seems a little surprised but very relieved when Ingrid steps on the plane without blinking an eye, without shedding a tear, and calls out to him, "I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship!" ■

Carin Jungmann is a student of Andrew Cohen and lives in his spiritual community in Cologne, Germany.

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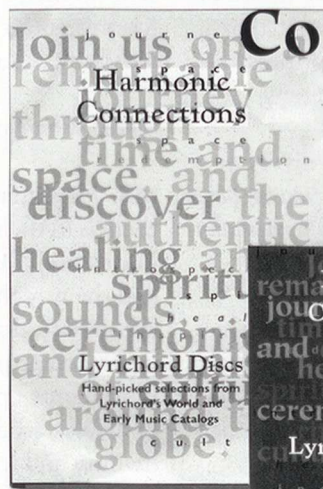
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do not understand emptiness, you cannot deconstruct your emotions, and that is essential to tantric practice. What do you do with fear when it arises, or anger or intense desire or lust? How do you deconstruct that if you don't understand emptiness? As you said, it's not psychotherapy.

WIE: *I understand that it's also a tantric practice to imagine you're performing sexual yoga without actually having a physical partner.*

MS: This is for monks, because they don't want to give up their vows of celibacy. They consider it preparation for that time when they can practice with a consort in future lives.

WIE: *When they're doing that visualization practice, is it actually something that they're engaged in on every level, so to speak? Do they provoke arousal in themselves?*

MS: They're supposed to.

WIE: *They're supposed to get sexually aroused and do this visualization? Even in the monastery they're doing that?*

MS: Some of them. That's the impression one gets. They learn to channel that energy on their own. They're not taking it to a point of release, but arousing it and controlling it.

WIE: *In addition to your study of the tantric texts, you also did two and a half years of field research in Asia. You mentioned that you met a number of yogis and yoginis. How many did you meet whom you felt were true tantric masters?*

MS: More than a dozen. They weren't all teachers of it, but they were all serious practitioners and adept masters. I met some inauthentic ones, too.

WIE: *What convinced you that they were true masters?*

MS: I talked to them about the practices and I also looked at the level or intensity of their awareness, their capacity to be totally aware in the present moment. One also gets a feeling for the purity of the yogic body of a person to whom one is talking.

WIE: *What do you mean by that?*

MS: How much presence or absence there is in their system of egoic residue. You can tell that by the way they move and the way they comport themselves, the gravity, dignity and total mindfulness of their presence. Whether their movements appear to be the gestures of a deity, whether they communicate divinity and total impeccability. It was the quality of their embodiment and presence that I looked at. But I didn't stop there. If I thought I had found someone, I would question them. It's a very subtle process.

WIE: *In your book you mention Lama Jorphen, who was in some sense a teacher to you. Did you have other teachers as well or was he the only one?*

MS: I met many impressive people, but he was the one with whom I worked most closely for the longest period. He really became involved in the project and took an interest in guiding me personally as well as intellectually. As a tantric teacher, he would not be interested simply in providing information about tantra or spiritual development. His whole purpose as a teacher of course is to guide and to transform people. Shortly after we met, very early in our interaction together, he asked me if I had a meditation practice. At that time, I did not. He told me that if I were to work with him, I would need to do 100,000 prostrations, starting today. And 100,000 purification mantras as well. I just said, "All right." I mean, how could I presume to ask for tantric teachings and not be willing to do any practice?

WIE: *In your book, you also describe the way he worked with you ongoingly by spontaneously responding to your different emotional and mental states.*

MS: He's a person whom I would characterize as having total awareness of the present moment and the capacity to devise a teaching or a lesson on the spot that mirrors the state of mind of the student and reveals whatever aspect of ego or illusion that may be operative in them at that time. It was an extraordinary kind of interaction. I had never experienced such accuracy of feedback from any Western therapist or counselor. I realized that that was because he was bringing no ego needs or projections to the situation whatsoever and therefore he had the capacity to mirror it in a very clear way.

WIE: *Did you also undergo some of the more advanced tantric trainings? It wasn't clear to me whether you yourself engaged in the tantric yoga practices we've been speaking about.*

MS: Tantric practice is secret. You can't talk about it. You can't say, "I did this." You can't say, "I did that." It's absolutely forbidden.

WIE: *People only speak about it in the abstract?*

MS: You can speak about it with the people you're doing it with.

I talk about things in the abstract that I know to be true. That's all I can say. I wrote about very little from a purely theoretical perspective. I either ascertained it or talked to someone who had experienced it.

WIE: *Lama Jorphen obviously imparted a lot to you during your time with him. Can you speak about what's changed for you as a result of all this?*

MS: I changed profoundly on every

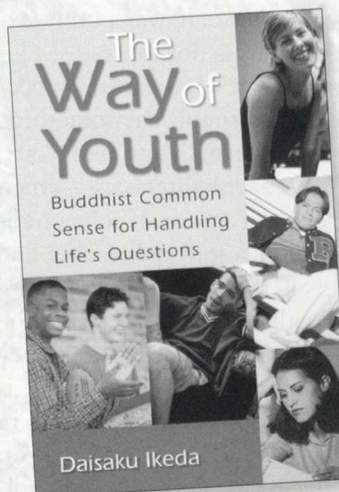
level from my research and study, even on a cellular level. I was completely transformed physically. People who knew me before I started my research and then saw me towards the end of that period did not recognize me.

Also, my understanding of men totally changed. I discovered that men were capable of decency, total refinement, and in fact, enlightenment. That it's possible for men to be supportive of women in a profoundly spiritual way, not simply emotionally. I discovered a whole form of male celebration of women that I did not know existed. I was also surrounded by images of divinity in female form, and seeing the unclothed female body in a religious context rather than in a commercial, secular context as it is in the West was profoundly affirming for me as a woman. My understanding of what is possible in male/female relationships changed and my understanding of myself as a woman completely changed. I had internalized a lot of the shame-based attitudes of the West, not only the general attitudes of the culture at large but also specific forms of shaming that had been inflicted upon me in my own personal trajectory from which I was able finally to be healed.

I would really say that I encountered the power and full sacredness of being female, because the tantric teaching is that women are pure and sacred in the essence of their being. You're talking about your very cells, your energy, not simply something that you can attain, but an ontological fact. That changes the orientation of your journey.

WIE: *There have been so many abuses of power by spiritual authorities over the past twenty years, and in particular, many reported cases of sexual abuse by teachers in the Buddhist tradition claiming to be practicing tantra. Often it*

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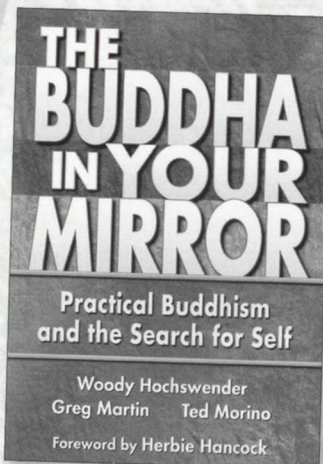
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seems that the word "tantra" is used to justify what usually turns out to be nothing more than the pursuit of personal sexual gratification, often at the disciple's expense. Even the great Kalu Rinpoche, revered as one of the greatest Buddhist masters of the modern era, often referred to as the Milarepa of the twentieth century and considered by many to have been a living Buddha, is now known to have been maintaining a secret sexual relationship with his young Western female translator, June Campbell, who claims with considerable support that she was intimidated into keeping the relationship secret.

MS: I have no doubt that it happened. She was emotionally coerced into a sexually abusive and exploitative relationship. Unfortunately, the word "tantra" does provide a shield behind which sexual predation can hide. But when you actually inquire into such sexual situations, you find

out that tantric practice was not the intent of the relationship. The way, for example, that June Campbell describes their relationship, there was nothing even remotely tantric about it. It was not for their mutual pursuit of enlightenment. It was purely exploitative. This is not tantra.

I have been approached by people who would simply say something like, "Have sex with me and you'll become more enlightened!"—which of course is not tantra. If someone is approached by a spiritual teacher and is told, as it was told to June Campbell and others, that this is for the benefit of the teacher, then they should know automatically that it is not tantra. Because in tantra, you're not allowed to use the other person on any level. It has to be totally voluntary. Any form of coercion is disallowed in tantra. I think the tantrics foresaw this kind of abuse because they made a rule that the man may not directly approach or request a woman to enter into a tantric relationship. He has to approach her and offer himself subtly, indirectly through body language, through signs and a certain secret language they use.

We need this kind of clarity in the West, because women's lives, their peace of mind and even their spiritual practice are being destroyed by ordinary predation. This is simply sexual abuse in Eastern garb. I hope that work like mine, interviews like yours and this issue of your magazine will help to clarify what tantra is so that people cannot hide behind that label.

WIE: In looking at this whole issue, though, it seems to me that something else is also revealed by the fact that so many great masters have failed to demonstrate an enlightened relationship to sexuality. We're not just speaking about charlatans. Everybody I know who met Kalu Rinpoche said he was an incredibly beautiful human being, a truly rare example of purity and humanity.

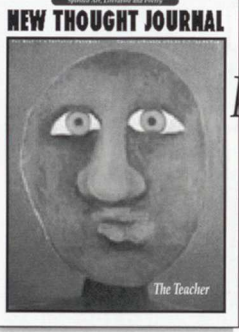
MS: He was unbelievable.

WIE: So my question is: If even a man like that, who has attained such a high level of practice, in a tradition where there is such an elaborate teaching around sexuality, is unable to live with integrity and decency in the face of the sexual impulse, then how wise is it for anyone to recommend that people take up sexual practice as a path to enlightenment?

MS: These abuses and distortions actually justify the original insight and intent of tantra, which was that if you do not work directly with your sexuality, if you simply repress it or try to ignore it without mastering it, then you cannot become fully enlightened. It's not going to take care of itself. And it's not going to go away by itself if you have a lifetime of celibacy. What we see happening, even in the case of the great master, is that if sexuality is neglected, and at the same time, other sides of the personality, such as lust for power or accumulation, are also developing, then the sexual energies are simply going to be there to be claimed by the uncultivated and even possibly corrupt dimensions of the personality. This is the entire point of tantra: Enlighten your sexuality along with everything else!

WIE: Because if it's not looked into, if it's not reckoned with, then it's bound to resurface somewhere?

MS: Yes, it will surface as part of the unenlightened dimension of your character and emerge in a way that causes you suffering and inflicts suffering on others. The purpose of the path to enlightenment is to cease to suffer and to cease to cause others to suffer. Cases like this simply demonstrate that no matter how enlightened you may be, you must also pay attention to your sexuality. ■



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one who connects the earth to the sky and the sky to the earth. So I would agree to a certain extent, but I would say that the deeper levels of the spiritual/mystical experience are just as powerful and as great as having a sexual orgasm—if not more so.

WIE: *I'm curious to know what you think about the practice of celibacy—especially given that many of the greatest spiritual masters throughout history have been celibates or have advocated celibacy.*

MA: On the tantric path, you discover the sacred marriage between your inner man and your inner woman. Then you don't need to have sex with another human being because it's happening within yourself. When this happened to me, I was perfectly satisfied, and I became abstinent. But the problem was, there was always a man who seduced me out of my abstinence, so I basically ended up succumbing to the temptation. But I did experience what it could be. It was to dwell in a space where there is no more desire, where there is no more "I have to have this" or "I have to have that." It was very special, I would say.

Celibacy, well . . . I think that it should not be something that is forced. I think the attitude of the Church about celibacy is a big mistake, as are teachings that say you have to be celibate if you want to go on a spiritual path. I think if it happens as the outcome of the fruit being ripe and falling off the tree, then it's the right way because the person has left behind them a full life of having really understood this, and therefore can help other people. But the people who repress sexuality because they are on the spiritual path—that's very dangerous. Osho often mentioned the example of Gandhi who, until the end of his life, was obsessed with sexual thoughts and dreams. He finally tried to sleep between two vir-

gins because he thought that, with their presence behind and in front of him, maybe it would somehow remove the obsession. If sexuality just falls away from you in total contentment and in a total "Yes" from your deepest inner being that this is the right thing for you to do, then abstinence or celibacy is okay. But if not, if it's a forced thing because some outer authority or religious teaching told you that this is the way to go, forget it. You're never going to get rid of sexuality. It's always going to be somehow or other knocking at your door.

But also I do see that there is a great advantage to celibacy because you can remove yourself from the preoccupation with all the mundane things that have to do with sex and that tend to keep you attached, needy, jealous and so on. If you, once and for all, don't bother with it and remove yourself from it, you probably have a much better chance to focus your energies on spiritual matters. So I see that as a great possibility, but as I said, it has to happen at the right time, with maturity.

WIE: *Osho taught that the moment of sexual orgasm is an "energy event" that can be equated with mystical experience. And a number of traditions equate or relate sexual ecstasy with spiritual bliss. But another way of looking at it is that this is a false parallel, and that equating these two conditions is, on the one hand, a sanctification of something that is actually a physical, biochemical experience, and on the other, a materialization and reduction of something that really is ineffable. From this point of view, there may be a danger, on both counts, of not seeing these experiences clearly for what they are. When you try to bring them together and say they're the same thing—*

MA: I agree . . . well, I would say it's a matter of degree. The level of sexual enlightenment that a person is going to experience is no different

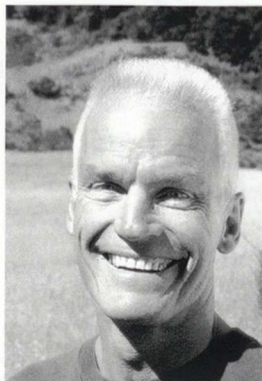
from the level of their personal evolution, their spiritual evolution, you know. It's always all linked. Nothing is separate. For instance, if a person is a first *chakra* person, they're concerned with survival, with how much money they're going to earn and all that kind of stuff, and they're going to have a kind of sexuality that is going to reflect that. They're going to have a sexuality where they're just going to take and not give. There are as many orgasms as there are stars in the sky!

The keys are, one, clear the wounds and the shame and the difficulties around sexuality. Two, learn the skills of blissful loving, which I explain in depth, and learn how to communicate about your sensations clearly and objectively without shame or guilt. This in itself is a tremendous learning in intimate sharing. So I can have my legs spread open and my partner looking at me and learning how to touch exactly the right part of my clitoris under my own loving guidance until he does it as well to me as I do it to myself. So I can have complete trust and let myself go in his hands for an hour or two hours; it becomes a total meditation and I'm completely relaxed and yet I'm completely aroused at the same time. This is just such a wonderful way of sharing love. What better can we give each other?

So this is already a skill in itself, but we're not yet at the spiritual level. We're approaching. We've learned how to clear the wounds. We've learned the skills of love. In the process we've learned how to become deeply intimate, more deeply loving with each other. We've learned how to prolong orgasms. The next step would be to begin the lovemaking process as a ritual, as a prayer in which you meditate and honor the Divine in your partner. You project the divinity in your partner and you dedicate your moment of bliss together to the divinity in whatever



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form, whatever shape—to the healing of the planet, for instance. In sexual tantric practice, as I said earlier, you can dedicate your orgasm to the enlightenment of all beings or to the healing of a person who is sick. It's your contribution to the transformation of the planet because we're all interlinked. And as more people have orgasms and are cleared sexually, we will reach at some point a critical mass where more and more people are doing it. And every time one person is doing it, they heal themselves, and they contribute to the healing of the whole planet.

So in a sense, when lovers are doing the higher sexual practices and joining the physical with the spiritual, they eventually end up in *shunyata*, which is where emptiness and form are merged into each other. To achieve that experience with your beloved, when you join in the physical sense and circulate the orgasmic pleasure up the spine, you transcend ego, you transcend personality, you transcend male/female, you transcend everything. You're exactly in the same place together as you would be when you are in the deepest meditation on your own. So that's it.

WIE: *I've been thinking about the common idea in tantra that sexual longing and sexual ecstasy are fundamentally the same as spiritual longing and spiritual ecstasy. My colleagues and I began to question whether these two experiences are really the same thing. What is it that happens in the moment of sexual release that could lead one to the conclusion that it is identical to a spiritual experience? There's bliss, peace, release; there is a quieting of the nagging mind. Then we realized that these experiences occur in both cases—but for completely different reasons. In spiritual experience, the ego is in abeyance; it is silent because it is in submission. But in sexual experience, the ego is temporarily satisfied; the force of "I want" that is the ego*

temporarily ceases because it has been satiated. Is it possible that these two experiences have been confused—that superficially they may seem similar, but that in fact they are not at all the same?

MA: Well, there's a misunderstanding in the question, and I'd like to talk about it. You see, they're not different, and I would like to say why. Because you can have a sexual experience that is exactly this—just the satiation of your ego. However, if it lasts long enough, you will go beyond that. In other words, you're not going to be in the same state in your connection to God when you've had a fulfilling lovemaking session that lasted five hours in which you've had nine orgasms as you would be if someone ejaculated in you after ten minutes. I mean, let's face it. There are many, many different levels. Just like there are many levels of realization in someone's spiritual practice. They can be blabbering a mantra all their lives, and you could say they're just using a crutch to stay asleep. This is not waking up.

So it's the same thing with sex. It can be used as a crutch, or it can be used as an awakening. The misunderstanding is in the level at which you place the sexual experience. For me, ultimately, if the sexual experience is allowed to move away from the sex, if the energy is allowed to travel through the fluidity of the movement of the bodies, through the empowerment of the sun energy radiating through both beings, through the deep merging, letting go and compassionate melting of two beings who fully see and understand each other at the moment of this orgasmic circulation—and beyond that moment, to the expression of their own truth, to the sound and music of that truth, to seeing their energy as colors and in visions and patterns that actually enlighten their brains, and then through releasing the whole thing to the

Divine and receiving the blessings of the Divine in that moment of the tantric practice—then, even though they might be joined sexually, it becomes something else. They have moved beyond sex, in a sense. The genitals themselves are just tools that open the door to other dimensions—just as any other practice or recitation of a mantra or hatha yoga is a tool to open the door to other dimensions. It's just that at that level, it's a very skillful tool that requires the partners to have already mastered hatha yoga, to have already mastered in fact my entire book before they can get there. So it's not a simple tool. Lovemaking can indeed remain something that is just a fulfillment of the egoic personality, but it can be something else.

WIE: *You're saying that it can be, but that it isn't necessarily.*

MA: It can be if the people have reached the necessary level of understanding, of work, of dedication, of practice. They have to be already in harmony at all these levels so that they can allow the energy to flow through without its being blocked by certain knots that have to be undone first, so that they don't freak out or all of a sudden have a quarrel. I mean, there are zillions of things you have to go through before you can achieve the state of the perfect dimension, the form and the formless merging with each other. I mean, this is like a high practice!

WIE: *The way you're speaking about it now, it certainly sounds like a very serious practice.*

MA: It is, but I'll tell you sincerely that I don't find the possibility of doing that so often myself. And of the many partners I've had, there have only been certain times, in certain moments, with most of them

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where we have reached that level. I would say that being able to reach that on a constant basis, in the *kali yuga* [dark age] that we're going through, is almost impossible. Because it would require two partners who are in a commitment to each other that this is a spiritual path that they walk together, who believe they're doing God's will, and who can integrate their tantric practice and not be very bothered by the demands of the Western world today. I find the idea that you could possibly be so involved in the world of work and run a business and be an active teacher extremely difficult. To be able to fulfill all these multidimensional areas is a tremendous challenge nowadays. It's very difficult to create continuity in the tantric practice at the level that I'm talking about—very difficult. Look around; you won't see many so-called tantric teachers who are able to actually maintain it to a level where they're able to create a kind of stable, rounded, ongoing harmony in the couple life. The harmonization of the tantric practice at the depth of which I speak, with involvement in the world of everyday life is, in this day and age, not supported at all. You would practically have to retire to a monastery to be able to do that. Which is what I do periodically when I'm practicing tantra in my apartment.

WIE: *It's interesting to explore this. We're talking about crossing the line between a therapeutic approach and a serious spiritual practice.*

MA: The therapy itself works on the level of the ego, on the wounds and the suffering and the difficulties, until you can create a certain level of insertion of the person into normal life. That's how psychology and therapy are understood today. When you get to that place, that's when the spirituality begins.

WIE: Or it can.

MA: It can.

WIE: *But the goal of spiritual practice really means something. It means—*

MA: It means a lot of letting go, a lot of giving things up. For a person who is dedicated to the high tantric practice at the level I'm talking about, they would have to give up, for instance, concern with money, concern with success, concern with having a lot of possessions, concern with spending their entire time in survival.

WIE: *The way you're speaking now makes tantra sound like a renunciate path.*

MA: Yeah. I mean, in a way, it is.

WIE: *You've been a therapist for many years, and now you also have a role as a spiritual teacher. Do you see a distinction between these two roles?*

MA: Well, you see, I've never been a person who likes to repeat herself. I've been a very creative person who always moves into new areas, new cultures, new domains and new explorations. And what the public, the industry, the establishment tends to want is that once you've been successful in one area, you're labeled and people always want you to deliver the same thing. But what I'm trying to do is to move ahead in my own personal evolution. I had a very deep experience last January where everything turned around 180 degrees, and what seemed to be so important to me before all of a sudden took on much lesser importance.

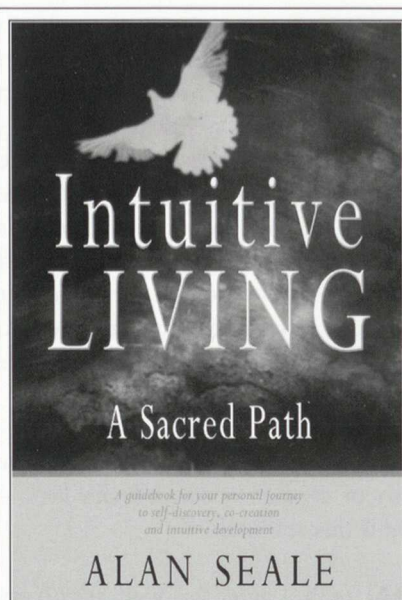
WIE: *Can you say more about that?*

MA: I can't really, because I'm in the process and it's going to take a little while longer. But I'm moving toward

a mystical dimension right now, which is a mystery to me. I have these cycles periodically where something new is born. But I'm not there yet—it's just percolating. There is still a great desire for me to transmit what I've created so far to other people and for other people to teach my work, but I am not considering this work to be the basis of my livelihood from now until the day I die. In my organization now, I'm teaching people to function without me. I'm just a consultant, and I go teach once in a while. I'm the spiritual mother. I'm not attached to all this. I want this work to happen more and more through other people and less and less through me, so that I can be occupied with other levels that have more to do with ecstatic states of consciousness, enlightenment, mysticism. I'm kind of moving with the times. There's a lot of that happening actually.

But that's not to say that I don't have anything to do with sexuality. It's not true. I just spent four months with my boyfriend in the most insane sexual practices that lasted up to five hours every other day if not the whole night. We definitely were totally with God and in God and with the Goddess, and it was the most delightful thing. It was totally empowering. But now, there's peace and quiet. He's gone to Nepal, and I'm happy to be on my own! It's like there is a certain detachment, so if that happens, great. If that doesn't happen, great. I'm not depending on it. I am very, very attracted by the mystical dimension right now.

WIE: *There are a lot of therapeutic tools in your books that are very healing and empowering for the individual. And there is also an emphasis, particularly in The Art of Sexual Magic, on the idea that it is our birthright to feel ecstatic and to have everything we want—the house, the car, the boat—we deserve it.*



I asked

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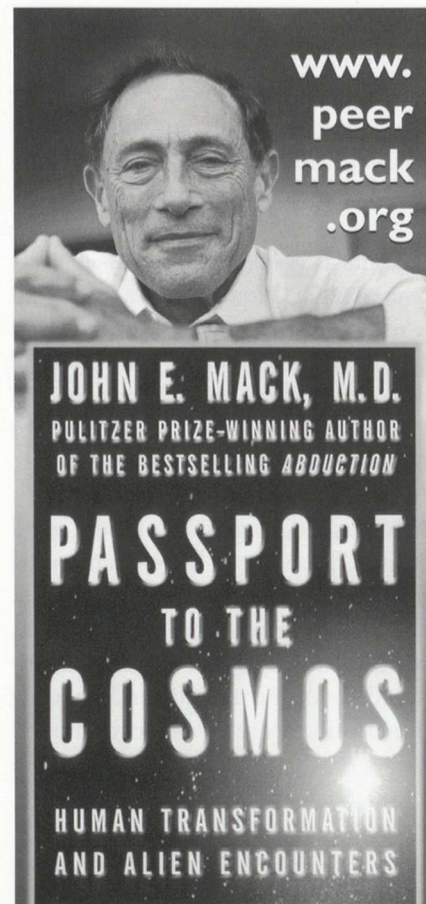
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Yet I can't help feeling that this is basically a materialistic and narcissistic approach that many people are embracing now and calling a spiritual path. My question is: Isn't there a distinction between this kind of popular-spiritual-therapeutic approach and authentic spiritual practice—in which one is sincerely interested in surrendering to God, in which one seeks to come to the point where one can genuinely say, "Thy will be done"? Where it's not about me and what I want and how I'm going to get what I want?

MA: I agree, I agree. It's a very good point. These books have been a mirror of my own personal evolution. The first one was the fruit of many, many years of research around the world, teaching in India and building this organization. In the second one I came to the realization that when

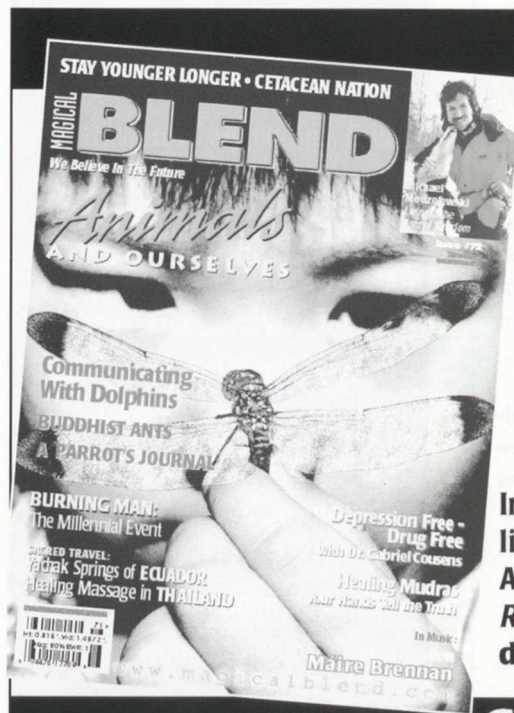
you are in an ecstatic space, you're in the perfect space into which you can plant the seed of a new manifestation or new vision. Deepak Chopra talks about this too. He says you just have to plant a seed when you're in the "gap." At that moment the seed is planted, and then the universe will take care of the details. And the fact is, you attract certain energies to yourself then. But the question is: Is this spiritual?

WIE: Exactly. We all do this in one way or another in our ordinary lives—but is that spiritual?

MA: Yeah, I agree . . . well, it's a very delicate matter. I would say that "Thy will be done" is definitely the next level after that. I say that it all has to do with your degree of personal and spiritual evolution at any given mo-

ment. Everything that you were interested in before is going to be in your picture—it's just that you're going to choose and discriminate differently. You're going to be more attracted to "Thy will be done" than to "Won't you send me a Cadillac?" or "I'll have a big orgasm so I can get more money." It's just like all of a sudden your values shift and things that have been important before are not so important anymore; your focus and your attention are on the deeper mysteries, which are what I'm finding myself into right now.

WIE: *Profound spiritual experiences are supposed to diminish, or burn, the ego. The significance of a spiritual experience would be determined after the experience subsides and you see what has happened to your pride, your aggression, your selfishness. That's the point. So my ques-*



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tion is, *Do you believe that the experience of sexual ecstasy produces the same effects? Do experiences of sexual bliss really serve the same function?*

MA: Yes and no, yes and no. You can't just say that through sexual ecstasy you're going to reach all these levels. But if you do sexual tantric practice in the context of other spiritual practice—for instance, if you do it in a way that includes the body but also includes the heart, the understanding, the spirit—then you make it complete, you integrate it into a complete practice, and then I would say yes. Because it quickens the whole thing, you know.

WIE: *So you're saying that other spiritual practice has to be included, and then it can work. But if it doesn't—*

MA: Yes. Yes, if it doesn't, you just get addicted to having great orgasms and you probably become a very radiant and happy person, but it doesn't necessarily take you further.

WIE: *This is an emphasis that isn't very clear in your books.*

MA: It becomes clear in the practice. I had to find a way of translating what I brought back from India, which was something that was way beyond the understanding that anybody had. When I arrived here from my mountaintop, if it hadn't been for Jeremy Tarcher, who became a kind of publisher-cum-mentor and helped me to translate all that in ways that could reach the American public, I probably would have given up or not found a way to make it accessible for the public, which is, of course, what every publisher wants you to do. And at the same time, to stay clear with it all.

WIE: *So you've said that if one is going to take tantra seriously as a spiritual*



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path, and not just as a form of therapy or a kind of recreation, then it is a very serious matter. My feeling is that there's nothing wrong with presenting modern tantra or sexual magic as a kind of therapy. But when you present it as a spiritual path, that is something else. That requires enormous dedication, commitment and sincerity. But the fact is, not very many people are interested in that. So I keep wanting to clarify what we're really talking about here.

MA: Well, wait. I want to stop you. Because this is one thing that you bring forth a lot, and I would say no. There are moments in your life when you have to go through that—sacrifice, celibacy, etcetera. And there are mo-

ments when you have to go through the opposite, and one is not better than the other. That's so important to recognize. If you're pursuing your own enlightenment, your own spiritual growth, then you have to go in all the areas. You have to go into the hell of darkness. You have to f__ your brains out. You have to play the dandy. You have to get clothes from Christian Dior. You have to taste the best foods. You have to go into the cave and meditate. You have to do it all. If you do it to wake up, all of it is good. . . . It is possible to be a mystic in celebrative garb. And it's possible to be a fool who seems to be jumping around and doing silly things and yet be a profound spiritual teacher.

Epilogue:

AFTER MORE THAN THREE HOURS OF IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION, we concluded the interview, thanking each other amiably. I walked out into the warm sunshine, my head still spinning from my kaleidoscopic encounter with the mother of modern tantra. I had been bowled over by Anand's passionate enthusiasm, eager friendliness and endearing honesty. And as she had spoken about the many facets of her work, I was often touched by the positive impact her teaching has clearly had on the lives of many people. She is deeply committed to liberation from the repressive and neurotic relationship to sexuality that is still ingrained in our culture, and much of her work potently addresses the fear and shame about our bodies and our sexual nature that constrain so many—both in and out of the bedroom.

Yet I remained perplexed about how to reconcile her statements about "claiming one's birthright of unlimited pleasure" on the one hand with "surrendering to the ultimate source of Being" on the other. I had tried to follow her sweeping peregrinations: from loving oneself to loving God; from self-seeking to selflessness; from personal fulfillment to religious life. But I could never quite dispel the gnawing sense of cognitive dissonance I experienced every time she would, in one moment, talk about channeling sexual energy to obtain personal desires and, in the next, speak about dissolution of the separate sense of self.

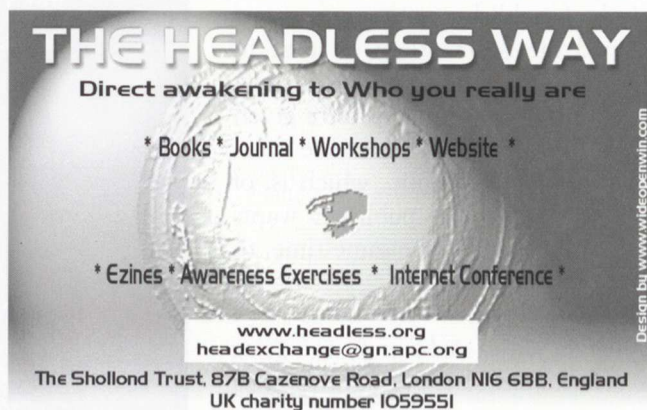
I walked along Magnolia Avenue and ordered a low-fat latte to go from another café. It was a perfect day. Fragrance of jasmine wafting in the faint breeze. Vibrant green still pulsing in the trees, even in October. Two exquisite rainbow-colored kites twirling in the cloudless sky. I asked myself, Could Margot be right? Can sex really be the fast path to enlightenment? And furthermore, is sex the means by which I can obtain my every desire? . . .

But then I remembered . . . Ah, no. I'm just in California. ■



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they have lived this they will never be fooled by man again. They know what man's sexuality is and they also know what it is to be loved *without* sex, *without* excitement. And as I say, these women are in the world now, and they are doing what they were meant to do, and that is to be honest with men as much as that's possible and to bring more love to men.

AC: Are they teaching?

BL: No, they don't teach. Woman's job is not to teach; a woman's job is to love, for God's sake! She can do anything with her love. She can impart, communicate, transmit everything through her love because that's the power of her. Her love is the power of God in her. She doesn't get up and declare herself to be enlightened and make speeches. She doesn't do that. She's the receptive one. She's the one behind the scenes. But

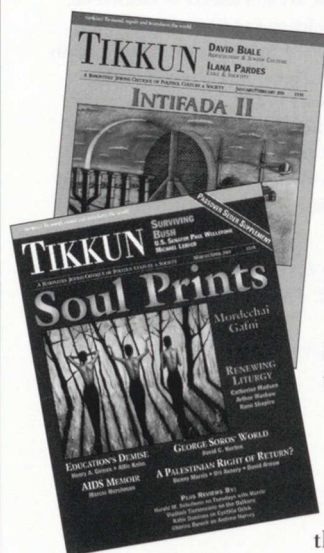
she is restless in making man be honest to love. She is man's missing piece, and that's why he thinks about her all the time.

AC: Could you speak a little bit about the attitude that man must embrace in order to be able to truly adore woman, and also the attitude that woman must embrace in order to truly be able to love man? Because from what I've understood, it is this attitude that a man or a woman has to embrace if they are going to utterly transcend the kind of neurotic self-fixations that you were describing earlier.

BL: Yes, well, as I said, I always like to deal with the practical because if I don't make it practical it's not going to work. And the practical reality for every man is that every five minutes or so, when he's not doing anything else, he will think about woman. And woman will think about man.

That's the fundamental reality of our existence as men and women. But it doesn't seem to have occurred to many people in recent times that this fact must contain the very means of our reaching reality—that this fundamental attraction must contain something that is holy and that is a real beginning, because when you come into existence you can only come in as a man and she can only come in as a woman. That's the first appearance of God in existence: God in a male or female form. And that's how God separates so that love might be known, so that God might be known, because a woman is God in form, and a man is God in form.

Now to me, every man should realize what he loves most in existence. What he loves most, of course, is God—and God *in* existence is love and God *out* of existence is truth. There is no love without existence;



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AM31

SPIRIT MATTERS



MICHAEL LERNER

author of *The Politics of Meaning*

all love is in existence, okay? But we get it all mixed up. The spiritual commentators and teachers don't get it right. There's God *out* of existence, which everybody can realize in their own body without the assistance of any other body. To realize God in this way is a most rare, wonderful and glorious thing, no doubt, but that's God *out* of existence, which you realize within yourself.

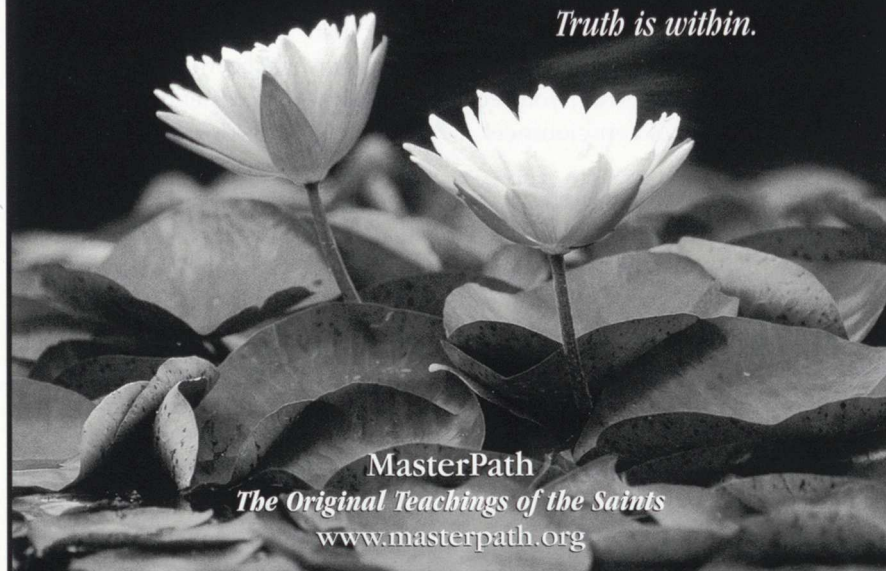
But when it comes to God *in* existence, then it can only be done through men facing what they most love in this existence. Well, man's got his boats, his golf, his hunting and this and that to do, but these are distractions his mind has invented to keep him away from the fundamental thing that his life keeps proving to him, which is: "I love woman." Now, his mind will try to make that some personal, some individual woman. But in truth, he has to get beyond that to face the simple fact: "I love woman." When he does that and really sees that, he is loving the *principle* of woman, the *unknown* in woman, the *essence* of woman, the God that is nothing to speak of in woman. Then he can come down to the personal, where he has an individual woman's body that he's related to or in some way or other associated with. He then has to endeavor to see this God, this thing he loves most, in this woman. And then when he makes love to her, he's got to make love to her not for himself, for orgasm or for his own self-satisfaction, but for the pure pleasure of making love with her. But if he personalizes it in any way, if he's got *himself* in it, if he's looking to get something back, then it turns into sex and he's lost it; he's lost that impersonal beauty.

So first you must face the fact, What do I love most in existence? No good saying, "God" because God's not in existence. Where is God in existence? Aha! It's in the

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thing that I think about most in my life—it's in woman! Now it can't be this woman or that woman because there are so many. So what is it, then? It's the *principle* of woman that I love. Of course! It's that essence, that thing that's *behind* every woman. And once man knows that, you see, it's a different state of consciousness.

AC: *But why is it that man loves woman? Why is it, beyond the biological imperative, that man loves woman in the way you're describing?*

BL: The biological imperative is in everybody, Andrew, and that, in the first instance, is to ensure the reproduction of the race. And to reproduce existence is a terrible thing, really. It's an ignorance that brings about great unhappiness because everyone born is going to experience unhappiness, while everybody who's dead or in deep dreamless sleep experiences nothing of it—nothing. And that's beautiful.

You see, we are animals, and we forget that we're animals. But we're also what we'll call "spirit," and this spirit has entered into this animal and is now enmeshed with the very flesh of it, enmeshed with our animalistic propensities. It's just as if you were to bring self-consciousness into an animal, like a cow, for example—you would suddenly get a mind going on and on with all sorts of sexual thoughts. But animals don't have a mind, only their instincts, so they don't have any sexual thoughts—thank God! But when you put self-consciousness into a human animal you get precisely the troubles we've been speaking about.

So we've got to separate the animal from the spirit because the animal instincts are what we call the ego or the self, the small self. And that's done through the spiritual life, through giving up myself, isn't it?—giving up my self-indulgence, giving

up my distractions and facing the truth of what I love most. Because what I love most is always God, and God is love and God is truth and God is the unknown—that's what every man and every woman loves most, but it's been covered up by teachers and words and opinions instead of getting down to the nitty-gritty of it. If you want to realize God out of existence—which is only inside yourself, inside your body—then you certainly will have to go through renunciation, self-denial and self-dissolution. It's yourself who is stopping the natural realization of God which is the great truth out of existence. But nobody seems to worry or be concerned about how to realize God in existence. And I say that to love a woman is the way to realize God in existence because that is God. It's very simple.

AC: *You're saying that beyond the biological urge, the reason that man loves woman most is—*

BL: Because woman is God.

AC: *But is woman God? Or does man recognize woman as God because he still recognizes himself fundamentally as being man?*

BL: That is so. But this is because she really is his missing part. He recognizes, "There is my missing love."

AC: *By "missing love" do you mean that unless he's united with woman in the world, or in existence, a man would still experience himself as being only half, or not whole?*

BL: Yes, he would not be whole; despite all his realizations of God out of existence, he's not going to be really whole. Because the whole thing is to be able to bring God out of existence into existence. Then you have the whole totality.

AC: *And that, in your teaching, is the fulfillment of God-realization.*

BL: Yes.

AC: *It's very powerful. And as I was telling you when we began, when we sat down to read your book I was in an expanded state, so when we started reading it, it went right in. I suddenly got it, and I said to everybody, "I think I really get it." And as I began explaining my understanding, the others were all drawn into this same experience and they began to understand it too.*

BL: Well, you definitely did get it because your questions show that you're right there. And then, as with any teaching, all one has to do is live it, as you know. But one must also bear in mind that this is a hard and difficult thing, first of all even to grasp, and then to actually live.

AC: *In your view, Barry, is it true that a God-realized man or woman who did not practice adoring man or adoring woman in the world would be—*

BL: Incomplete?

AC: *Yes, incomplete, or in some sense denying their duty to fulfill their realization in existence. Is that what you believe?*

BL: Well, I trust that in our talking together it has become quite obvious that this is so. It's not something that I invented.

AC: *Then what do you feel the reason would be that a realized man or woman wouldn't do that? Because obviously many realized men and women have not done that.*

BL: The one thing we've got to remember is that any God-realized person could say, "It doesn't matter—this existence doesn't matter." Or he could say that while it certainly matters, it's

not ultimately important. Matter is what we are, so this existence certainly matters all the time. But a God-realized man could say, "Well, look, it doesn't matter. I've realized God. Existence is just a passing thing, and that's the end of it." Now that would be fair enough, but then I am in the world, I am in existence, and because of my discrimination, which is the discrimination of every spiritual man, I see that most of the unhappiness in existence is between man and woman. And I am moved, as every spiritual man is, to remove the ignorance of the people, which is the cause of their unhappiness. That which I see, I address.

But otherwise it doesn't matter; it's not important, really, in terms of the immortal, of the eternal. But I am here for some reason by the look of it—each of us is—and we know the value of harmony, goodness or rightness, which is God. So I pre-

sume that we will all endeavor to find that. So to me it's pretty self-evident that this is the right way for us even though we don't know that much here.

AC: Still, in some of the Western traditions and many of the Eastern traditions, there has always been a great emphasis on absolute renunciation and/or transcendence of the sexual function as a means or a vehicle to become absolutely focused and one-pointed on the pursuit of God-realization.

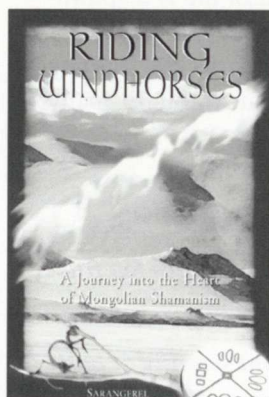
BL: That might be so. And you might realize God out of existence. But then what are you going to do in existence? Once you've realized God out of existence, and you're all pure and holy, what are you going to do with the unhappiness that's all around you?

AC: But, for example, Catholic priests

sometimes say that their vow of celibacy makes them available to love all beings equally and to love nobody specially; their chastity allows them to be fully available to give themselves completely to redressing the suffering of all of God's children.

BL: Well, they're priests, and I only speak to masters. I only listen to the master—the original one. Otherwise, you get priests who invent things, spiritual commentators. You know, they write books, they give lectures, they do everything, but you can't believe a word they say because they're not inspired by God-realization, and you can hear it.

AC: I recall having heard something about chivalry in your teaching. What are some of your ideas about what it really means to be a man and what it really means to be a woman? What do you see, for example, as the correct way for men to behave toward women?



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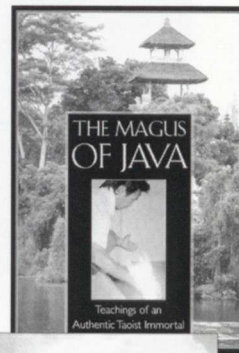
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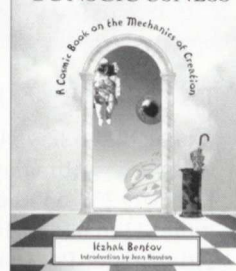
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BL: The correct way is, as much as possible, not to swear in her company because that is a denigration of what's between them, and this should not happen. Of course it *will* happen in our modern society, something that will be an expletive will come out, but generally it is as simple a thing as not to swear in each other's company. Now, a couple of nights ago, we saw a video of a woman and a man who really loved each other, but every second word she was saying was, "Well, what the fuck's going on?" That's going to our children, you know, who are going to have to love people, and you can't love people when you're saying things like that habitually because it's an expletive. It's an action of force that comes between us and I will perpetuate my natural animal, forceful ego as a man by doing that. So that's one of the things we must not do. I must endeavor to do all I can to help you to be not only civil but to be loving in the way that you speak, as I am in speaking to you. Since we've got to speak to each other we might as well speak lovingly—by which I don't mean lovey-dovey. It's the spirit of God that comes out in the form of harmony between us, in our actions and behavior. God is harmony. And so it's little things like that, I would say.

You see, when two people are truly in love, when they make love as we've been talking about in this divine way, all they've really got to say is, "I love you. You are beautiful." She says it to him. He says it to her. They embrace. They kiss. They hold hands. No discussions about anything to do with the spiritual life—except Sara will say to me sometimes, "Are you sure I'm spiritual enough? Are you really sure I'm spiritual enough?" I myself don't seem to have any questions. Only, "I love you." Now this—having no questions—is, I think, the hardest thing

for anyone to grasp, to just be empty, to have nothing arising, simply to be able to live every moment in a state of—not even a state of love because love's not a feeling; love is a moment—in a state of absence of anything! This also happens to ordinary people; they get into a state where they don't know anything, but they get terrified. But that's the holy state! Ordinary people haven't been informed and are therefore unable to grasp that this is right, this is the holy state that the masters talk about, in which nothing is known. That's why they get all shaky when they feel they've lost the plot.

So woman doesn't know anything when she loves. She is the lover; she is God in woman's form, which is pure love, and she does what she does but she doesn't have force in her. We men have the physical projective thing, and our natural propensity is to deliver, while hers is to receive and to be. People say that men and women are equal, but I say they're not equal at all. They're utterly different, thank God! I know that she's God, and I love her because she's God; she loves me because I'm God, and that's down to basics. And I don't know whether I've answered your questions or not. ■

Barry Long was born in Sydney, Australia, in 1926. At the age of thirty-one an intense spiritual longing led him to abandon his career as a journalist to pursue spiritual realization. Soon after, his passionate love for a woman catalyzed a powerful spiritual transformation. Eventually he moved to London where he began his teaching. In 1986 he returned to Australia and established the Barry Long Foundation International. He has taught seminars around the world and published numerous books and audio teaching tapes, including The Origins of Man and Universe, Stillness Is the Way, The Myth of Life audio series, and the Making Love tapes.



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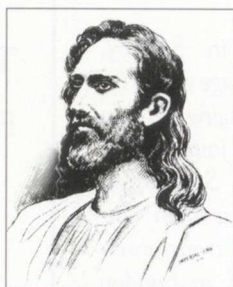
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Thomas Keating

continued from page 101

experiencing the growth or emergence of this energy within ourselves have the tools at hand to make use of it for good, because if one isn't well prepared for the emergence of the subtle energy of sexuality, then one can get blown away. As an example of what I'm talking about, I'm thinking of people a generation or two ago who wanted to experiment with psychedelic drugs and so on. What they didn't realize was that they were loosening things up in the psyche that they weren't ready to face—images or desires or fantasies that were emerging from that energy as it came to consciousness. There's a relation, it seems to me, between the growth of celibate consciousness, the fruits of which you've beautifully described as sweetness, and those dark forces in the psyche that can transform that very same energy into ego trips and sheer selfishness if it's released too soon, before the person is spiritually equipped to handle that kind of primal energy. Do you understand what I'm getting at?

AC: Yes, I do.

TK: And that's why I feel so strongly that celibacy should never be practiced in isolation from other practices that strengthen community relations, such as devotion, such as real friendship, and the kind of intimacy that seeks no reward but the happiness of the other person. And also I think that for many people, celibacy needs to be nourished by a more and more intimate relationship with God, so that the divine presence is experienced more and more as a vital force of one's own consciousness, and so that one is *consenting* to the presence and action of God both in one's meditation and in daily life.

AC: Everything you're saying is quite moving, and I deeply appreciate it. But of course in the process of exploring this issue very actively and in great depth, we've found that even in the spiritual world many people seem to view the practice of celibacy with fear and suspicion. Sometimes even just speaking about the practice makes people angry and upset.

TK: Yes, well, I think I know what you mean. And I think it's partly to do with their early education. Some religious groups have been so strict about sexual matters that many of the young people growing up in those traditions either became frightened to death of sex and developed repressive or neurotic symptoms of one kind or another, or they just turned their back on the whole idea of religion and ran headlong into experimentation and promiscuity. And so I suspect that this fear of celibacy is due to repression in early childhood and the obvious damage it has done to a lot of people. I've seen this happening to people in religious life whose motivation for entertaining celibacy

was simply to avoid sexuality because, early in life, they'd had experiences that were so traumatic that emotionally they hadn't developed sufficiently to be able to handle them. Child abuse, for instance, is an enormous obstacle to human growth, and one really needs psychological help with that, especially before entering into a celibate commitment.

AC: *But do you think part of this fear of celibacy might also be due to the fact that for many—or perhaps most—people in our society, the sexual force seems inherently to represent an imaginary promise of paradise, an illusory promise of completeness or wholeness? My own suspicion is that because most people have not discovered that the source of their true happiness really lies in a very different place, they're often too terrified even to question whether the one place they're convinced they'll find it can actually deliver.*

TK: Yes, I'm sure that you're right. And it's also true that philosophically our Western culture has been heavily influenced by the Greek view of the body and the fear of sexuality that come down to us from some sources in early Christianity as it was influenced by neoplatonic philosophy. Oddly enough, Christianity emerged out of the Hebrew tradition, in which the unity of body and soul is very strongly affirmed. But unfortunately, the early fathers of the Church were more influenced, partly because they had consciously separated from the Jewish religion, by Greek philosophy, which is wonderful in some respects but extremely defective in others, particularly when it's applied to the interpretation of the Old Testament and its moral code. So it's only recently that in the Catholic Church, for instance, marriage has come to be regarded as a way to holiness that is equal with the celibate commitment. This is an enormous step in the direction of liberation from mind-sets that I think have been harmful both to marriage and to celibacy.

AC: *In the process of looking very deeply into this subject, what has become apparent to me is that generally speaking, in religious or spiritual circles and also outside of them, human beings basically tend to have one of two fundamental views or value judgments with regard to the ultimate nature of sexuality. One of these views holds that sexuality is good, healthy and natural—and this is obviously a very popular belief in the time that we're living in, fueled, as you've said, by a certain rebelliousness against the repressive ideas and traditions of the recent past. And the other view, which many traditional religions seem to emphasize, is that sexuality is bad, dirty and evil—*

TK: Yes, that's the idea I was just describing myself,

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prominent in some early Christian circles and especially in the time of St. Augustine, who was very negative about sexuality. It sometimes happens among converts from promiscuity that they get carried away and go a little too far.

AC: Yes, precisely. But what began to occur to me, in the process of looking very deeply into my own experience in order to try to understand all this, was that obviously the sexual force itself could be neither good, healthy and natural nor bad, dirty and evil because it simply was what it was in and of itself. It wasn't inherently good or bad.

TK: Well, yes, I would definitely hesitate to say that it's bad. I think sexuality is best understood as the basic force between women and men, a force of human growth that needs to be cultivated, but in the right way, with discipline and with choices that are mature, so that it doesn't become a source of neurosis for some people. But as soon as you say there's something *wrong* with sexuality, then you're taking the side of those who don't believe that everything that God has made is good. What we *do* with sex may not be good, but that could never mean that the sexual force itself is not absolutely essential because it's

the growth of our sexuality, as male and female, that matures and opens us to other people. This is true whether the sexual energy is expressed through genital activity, marriage or in the celibate state. That force is to be not repressed but transmuted, transformed and integrated into the whole of our being; then you have a whole human being. Take, for instance, those who are in the service of others in ministry: If they repress *any* emotion, including sexual feeling, they're going to come across as "cold fish," as they say, and they're not going to impress anyone. It's sexuality that gives warmth to the whole personality; but in service—and also in marriage—sexuality can be expressed as affection and love without being a form of genitality, because as I said earlier, chastity is not the rejection of sexuality or even of genitality but the right *use* of it according to our state of life. So sexuality is a positive virtue, and it's a hazard in celibacy only if one denies it and then represses one's feelings instead of integrating them into the whole evolving development of one's faculties, including one's intuitive and spiritual faculties, which I think are especially fostered by a celibate commitment, but which are still just as available to anyone because they are *human* faculties. So do you see the distinction that I'm trying to make?

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AC: Yes, I certainly do. What you're saying makes perfect sense.

TK: It's not that I expect everybody to agree with me. But I think that if we don't take the view that sexuality is good, then immediately we've lost sight of it in relation to the power it has to unify and to mature the whole human psyche and body so that spirit can express itself through us.

AC: I agree with you two hundred percent. But I think I was making a slightly different point, and that is because the power of sexuality is so strong, we as human beings are always seeking for ways to feel comfortable in the face of its awesome and overwhelming power. And one strategy that human beings use in order to feel comfortable in the face of sexuality is to say, "Well, it's good, healthy and natural." And another, of course, is to reject it by saying that "it's bad, dirty and evil." And I basically feel that neither of these positions could ever accurately represent what it truly is.

TK: Yes, now I understand, and I fully agree with you.

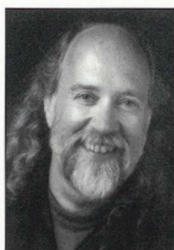
AC: So my point is that maybe sexuality itself, and the force of it, is ultimately neutral, because it simply is—it's the cre-

ative force or the creative power of life, of the universe in a state of becoming. But in terms of this materialistic relationship with it that the individual creates because it's so compelling, so frightening, so overwhelming and so enticing, taking a position of neutrality really forces one to scrutinize one's relationship to it in a way that I would say never "lets one off the hook," never gives one the security of feeling, "Well, yes, I know what that is"—you know, that it's either a wonderful thing or a terrible thing.

TK: Yes, well, like most things in life it's a matter of intention.

AC: Exactly right.

TK: And it's in this experience of intention that one moves to higher integration. But it's when we get stuck in whichever one of those extremes you just mentioned that human growth slows down—or comes to a screeching halt—until one finds the insight to transcend both of those views, neither of which is fully human. Negative or positive, they're just responses to instinct, and a human being is more than just instinct. A human being has all these other powers that instinct supports, and instinct is



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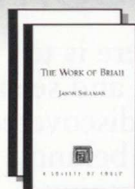
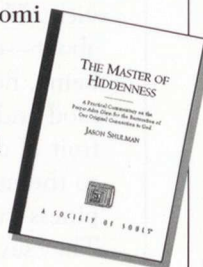
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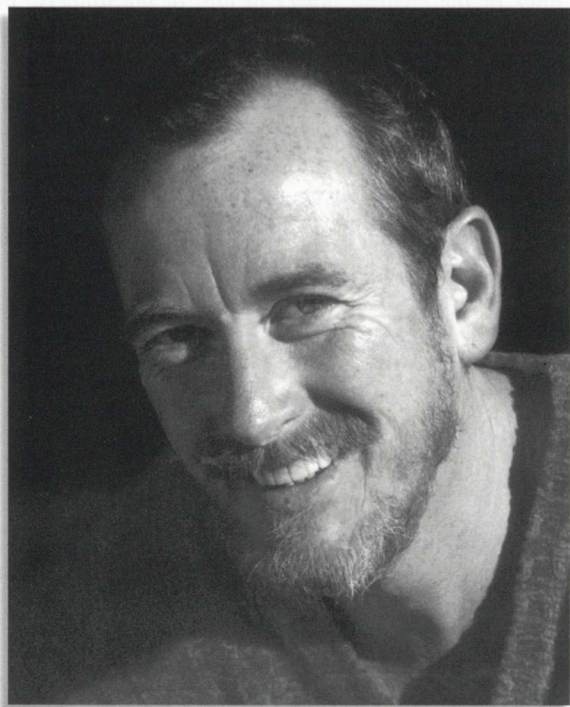
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fine as far as it goes, but it's incomplete as a motivating power for the whole of life. But that's the human predicament, you see. And of course the majority of people do respond to it by sexually acting out as if sex, as you say, were the only pleasure to be had in life.

AC: *Precisely.*

TK: I mean, there's no doubt about it: Some people really *do* seem to live only for that, and we even have an industry that supports this, along with sexual aberrations of all kinds. And it's waved in front of young people, I would guess, in most cities and towns nowadays, and of course in the media.

AC: *Yes, it's everywhere.*

TK: So needless to say, there's no real support for a commitment to celibacy in our culture anymore. Although it was always only a very small number who were interested anyway, at least in the past there was a profound respect for it in some communities, but now even among the Roman Catholics that respect has diminished. It's sad to consider that perhaps both marriage and celibacy are suffering in our time from what might be called an incapacity in most people who are growing up today, or who have grown up in the last generation or so, to commit themselves to something *for life*—whatever it might be—or even for a long period of time. Because there are no models for that anymore. So much divorce, so much moving, so much changing of jobs or professions, travel, lack of stability in families; there's no real experience of the larger family, of grandparents, for example, who have been together all their lives. So to start telling people that you've got to make a life commitment either to this person or to this God of yours—well, it sounds like nonsense to them, like somebody's just arrived from another planet!

There are very few experiences in our culture of the value of moderation, of balance, of the integration of human growth beyond instinctuality to a point where instinctual needs are sufficiently integrated and moderated that their energy can be used for the love of God's service. That to me is what the spiritual journey is all about—empowering ourselves to use all the forces of our being, not for our own satisfaction but in the service of God and other people and the planet. I think *that's* the fruit of celibacy, don't you? It's a capacity for sensitivity to the needs of all other creatures and for a certain happiness in belonging to this universe, and not just for sex! They say that babies have a sort of polymorphous sexuality in which the pleasures of the senses are experienced

throughout the body and not just fixated in the genital organs, and I think there's an analogy in that to spiritual life. In the spiritual journey the sexual urge, at least insofar as it wants to express itself genitally, is relativized by the experience of the beauty of the other pleasures of the senses, which obviously are not made ends in themselves either, but together open us up to the truth and the beauty and the goodness of all of creation. In this way, the Creator or the God we're seeking becomes present not only in our meditation or prayer, but comes to be recognized as the source of everything that exists, including events that are passing through our own thoughts and feelings, and soon *everything* begins to be seen as that unity, that oneness, that immense awareness. And then, it seems to me, human beings can begin to live in harmony and peace because they've learned to see each other not as objects but as subjects manifesting an immense subjectivity that embraces all in the most personal relationship one could ever imagine—father, mother, brother, sister, lover—all rolled into one as a sense of the ever-present unconditional love of God. Promiscuity or repression can only hinder the realization of that miracle, you see? And frankly I've seen far too much of both in the lives of people who have shared their spiritual journeys with me—both within the monastery and outside. ■

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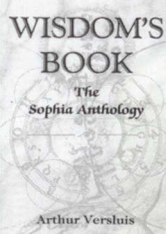
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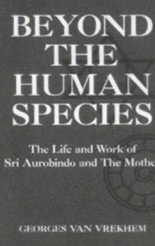
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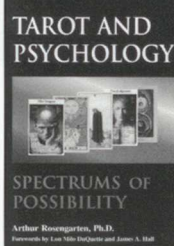
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Question: *What is the key to success in brahmacharya?*

Swami Chidananda: It is how you look at it!

First of all it is how you understand it. *Brahmacharya* is the diversion to a higher purpose and utiliza-

tion of the basic, quintessential energy potential of the universe located in the individual being. It is the individualized or microcosmic aspect of the illimitable, infinite, primordial cosmic power that is the macrocosmic aspect or the dynamic aspect of the one nondual reality. As you know, the static aspect is *brahman*, which is the transcendental, nondual reality. And the kinetic or the dynamic aspect is that same thing in manifestation or expression, in movement.

And the individualized aspect of this primordial power, located in all beings, is this potential for unbroken continuity of existence. This potential is practically everywhere. Just because you may be in a position to describe it and define it or explain it in terms of modern physics or chemistry doesn't in any way alter the actual metaphysical or philosophical fact of its real nature. Physically you may explain it in terms of pressure, etcetera,

but that is only an explanation of something that is already a transforming, ongoing process of continuously being and becoming, being and becoming. This creative potential, creative power, is present throughout the botanical and animal kingdoms. It is this alone that manifests as all the different forces in the individual human being—the power of acting, the power of thinking, the ability to see, hear, smell, taste, to digest, to breathe—everything. And it is this that is equally present in both sexes as the sex energy. Therefore, this being the key to life, one can imagine its importance, and one can also imagine its precious quality.

If one can understand it in this way—realize its real, sacred cosmic nature as the microcosmic aspect of the macrocosmic *shakti* or cosmic power—one takes a healthy attitude of reverence for it. It is not something to be just spat away like spittle. A person may spend away nickels

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and dimes, but if he has gold coins he will not so easily part with them. So reverence is a fruit of this understanding. Furthermore, the aspirant recognizes and sees clearly: "There is something very important that I have to do. I have a great goal to achieve, and I require all the energy at my disposal to put into my spiritual quest. I cannot afford to divert it into other channels in order to obtain a lesser achievement." As Swami Krishnanda used to say, "It is better to aim at a lion and miss it than to aim at a jackal and hit it."

So the first key to success in *brahmacharya* is to recognize and understand the sacred and precious nature of the energy potential one has. When one has this clear perception that it is meant to be conserved, preserved and directed toward the greatest of all attainments, then one has a desire to be *brahmachari*. It is seen as a very positive process.

A second key to success, and a way of looking at both *brahmacharya* and the sex function, is even more fundamental, and it is one of the two factors that to a large extent have been personally utilized by me. It is to clearly perceive that first and foremost what they call the male sexual organ is not a sexual organ at all. It is only a urinary drainpipe. That is what it is, and that is its main function from the moment a child comes out of his mother's womb until he kicks the bucket.

Actually, if you look at it, sex is not in that part of our anatomy at all. Sex is not in the urinary organ; sex is in the mind of a person. So it is a question of your mental attitude. If you are convinced and train your mind to think of it in a sane and rational manner—it's only an eliminatory thing; its main purpose is not that which dominates the world and drives it crazy—then you're already free of it. It doesn't obsess you any longer because you don't think of it in the way most of unfortunate human

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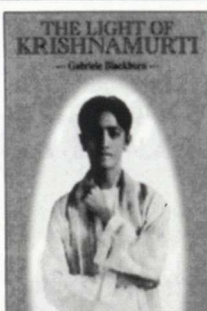
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society has been made to think.

When you come to think of it, the main function of the sex act is the most important, indispensable process of procreation. From a higher metaphysical sense, the husband and wife are cooperating with the Creator for perpetuation of the species so that creation will continue. That is its main function, not the experience of

enjoyment that accompanies it. That is a secondary offshoot of it. Then why was this function made so enjoyable? It had to be. The procreative function, the perpetuation of the species, was done through the sex act, and if it was not combined with a super experience of pleasure and enjoyment, no one would indulge in it, and its purpose would be nullified.

So Mother Nature in all Her wisdom combined these two.

But if the mind is diverted into higher things, automatically *brahmacharya* becomes easy. You can succeed in *brahmacharya* if the mind is totally taken up by something so wonderful, so big, it absorbs you and elevates you, and the mind is simply gripped by it. When you want an infinitely higher enjoyment, then you say: "My discarding this is not any discarding. My discarding the smaller enjoyments of the physical aspect of my being is not at all any renunciation to crow about." On the contrary, you are being wise because you want to go after something infinitely more wonderful. It is like throwing away pieces of glass if someone says, "I'll replace them with diamonds." That is another way of looking at the whole phenomenon of celibacy from the point

of view of the spiritual life and the highest attainment of illumination and enlightenment.

The third key to success is also something that I myself have used right from the very beginning, and I think it is the ultimate answer. The real secret of success in *brahmacharya*, the real key, is what I'm now going to state. The moment you begin to think that I am *atman*, unborn, nameless, formless—I have neither body nor mind; I am *satchidananda*—existence, consciousness, bliss Absolute; Self-sufficient—I am of the very nature of bliss Absolute; if you totally shift your consciousness to your reality, to your essential, eternal, true identity, then—finished! *Brahmacharya* is no longer a problem. The problem of *brahmacharya* ceases to exist except only once in a while due to old impressions. If some factor outside of you happens to act as a stimu-

lus, then an idea may come. Mind you, it is not only what your mental-intellectual mechanism thinks about yourself, it is also your feeling about yourself. If both your thinking and feeling are elevated to such a height, elevated to that dimension—it's not only a question of height, it's a different dimension altogether—and you move into that dimension, this lower dimension ceases to be of importance, ceases to have any impact upon you. It is there; it may function, but you are not at all affected by it in any way. Once you start cultivating staying put in the consciousness of your own identity, then *brahmacharya* is no longer a problem; it is solved. So the ultimate key to success in *brahmacharya* is *atma bhav*, to become absolutely convinced that you are something totally beyond body, mind, senses, etcetera. The mind, due to its habitual wrong thinking, may bring in a contrary idea that "I am so and so." Be indifferent to it. Dismiss it as nonsense. Refuse to entertain it. Don't pay any attention to it. Just be. Abide in your own Self. This is the key more than anything else.

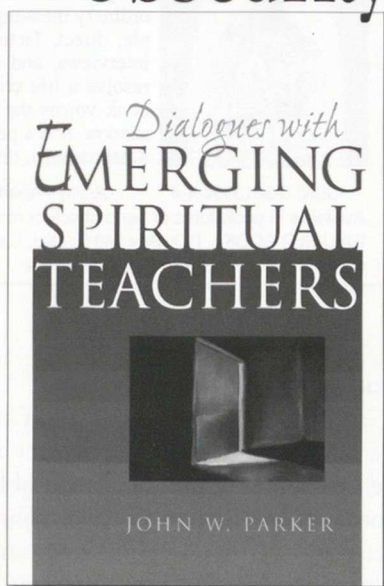
If you want to put it in devotional terminology, there is a nice little composition by Swami Yogananda. It goes something like this: "I am the bubble, You are the sea. Let me cease to be the bubble; make me the sea." And so the devotee prays to God: "I am Your child; what You are, that I am. You are divine, so I am divine. You have no body, so I have no body. I am pure spirit, all pervading, like You. Take me up into Your state of consciousness." So the devotee puts it in a different way. But the ultimate key to success in *brahmacharya* is the Vedantic process of shifting your consciousness—rejecting the body-consciousness and becoming established in your true Self-awareness as something where there is neither male, nor female, nor body, nor sex, nor personality. ■

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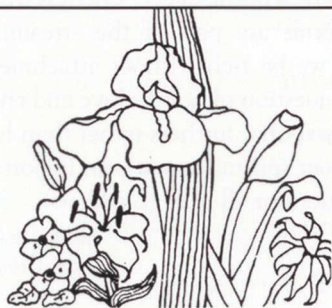
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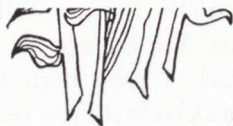
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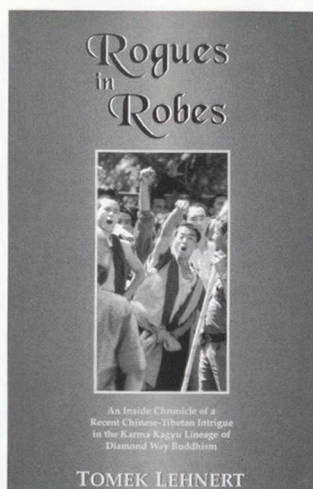
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Letters

continued from page 13

grown so strong that we are totally receptive to it. These capacities grow as we do spiritual work. Thus, I agree with Ken Wilber when he essentially says that we can't start at the end of the line. It is too harsh, too ruthless. It helps to be a little friendly at the beginning.

A third point of contention relates to the aspirant's relationship with the material world. (This may be worth doing a whole issue on.) I would like to respond to Chopra's statement that spirituality need not be divorced from materialistic values. I think it is true that spirituality need not be divorced from enjoyment of the material world. To keep them separate is to profane the world. Yet materialistic values usually come with a perspective that solidifies our belief in separation and obscures the deeper dimension. It is not a question of the inherent good/evil of wealth, but a more pragmatic concern about consciousness. Can we be materially rich and not lose awareness of the deeper oneness where all forms are part of the streaming? Can we be rich without attachment? The question of how to love and enjoy in a way that furthers rather than hinders our spiritual work is an important question for all of us to address.

Jasmin Lee Cori
Boulder, Colorado

IN LOVE AND LIGHT

WOW, THANKS so much for the informative articles in your Fall/Winter 1997 issue. You brought to light an issue which I have been thinking about quite a bit in the past year. Came just when I needed it. You see, I have felt from time to time, perhaps once a year, that tugging in my mind telling me that perhaps I am still not quite serious enough in my devotion to my spiritual path. I see all these spiritual books hit the stores and get devoured by a hungry public, and I wonder if

anyone even knows what it all means.

However, after reading article after article, each one more humorless, elitist and somewhat mean-spirited than the one before, I feel that if this is the attitude and mind-set a serious spiritual path brings about—forget it. You're right. We multitudes are just too shallow to really understand what the spiritual life is all about.

In fact, all of the articles by your writers reminded me of the scene from Monty Python's *Life of Brian* (a movie we insipid spiritual consumers love), in which all the religious group separatists sit around on the steps arguing and factioning themselves off more and more from one another.

I particularly enjoyed Ken Wilber's article, in which he said enlightenment should be elitist—like basketball. After all, isn't spiritual practice supposed to be an entertainment spectator event? I guess that's what the Dalai Lama is—a kind of spiritual performer; he does something you and I cannot do, like an elite athlete. I'm so out of the loop. I thought spiritual teachers were more like coaches—not perfect, but willing to give their time to help you get better.

I am happy now to resign to my tiny little life of thinking that surrender to the will of God does not mean telling others they are doing it wrong. And thanks to Andrei Codrescu for pointing out that Jesus was wrong about the not-judging thing. I feel totally set straight now.

Deepak Chopra used to bug me. After reading your interview with him, I find him to be absolutely fantastic. At least he sees that he is kind of a joke. Isn't it funny that he's not the one who came across as pretentious? After reading that article I actually wanted to help others more. After reading Dr. Laura's interview I thought, "She's so right on about so many things." Too bad there'd be no Buddha and no Buddhists if everyone



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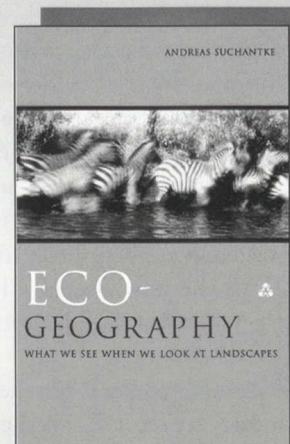
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agreed with her "no exceptions, no excuses" kind of living. I say, good for her. Whatever.

Congratulations on making the right-wing Christians seem fun.

In love and light,

Jake
via e-mail

HERE WE GO AGAIN

MANY TIMES while reading your magazine, before I am halfway through it, I find myself mumbling, "Give me a break! Where is Swami Beyondananda's humor when it is so desperately needed?" When your last issue arrived and I saw the articles on "The

Modern Spiritual Predicament" and "the crisis in American spirituality" I grumbled, "Here we go again." Then I read the interview with Deepak Chopra. He is a joyous lighthouse in a sea of gloom-and-doom writers who are "disappointed," "saddened" and "disturbed" by change. The only crisis is in the heads of people who are not able to let go of the past. You are not flowing with the river when you have to stop and analyze every little rock and bend along the way. Deepak Chopra is not to be taken seriously; he is to be enjoyed sincerely.

The serious seeker is on a head trip; the sincere seeker follows the heart. Enlightenment is a cosmic joke. If you want to "get" the punch line, you need to develop a sense of humor—fast.

Lighten up!

Anne S. Paul
Laguna Beach, California

THE END OF CYNICISM

THANK YOU very much for the latest issue of *What Is Enlightenment?* You managed to strike the right tone in addressing a very delicate issue. All the articles are written from a very open-minded perspective, yet they do not hesitate to present challenging and sometimes chillingly indicting conclusions. You show that, contrary to what is often believed in New Age circles, it is indeed possible to judge and have an open mind at the same time.

The issue is explosive reading. In your very frank and open discussion of the compromises and shortcomings of many forms of modern spirituality, you render inadmissible the easy answer of cynicism. In your uncompromising exposition of what is bogus in modern spirituality, you make it impossible for its detractors to dismiss it altogether because you have dared not only to criticize but also to address what spirituality should *really* be about.

A.V.B.
Amsterdam, Holland

STALLED ON THE ON-RAMP

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN a bit eager to say that while I've read James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy* (and its slightly less atrociously written sequel, *The Tenth Insight*), it was always by way of a borrowed copy, without a penny to his royalty account. (I exercised the same scruple with Marcia Clark's book *Beyond a Doubt*—but I digress.)

Kenneth Moyle fairly included in his review of the *Celestine* books' phenomenal popularity ["Poorly Written New Age Soul Candy"], the image of a shallow end of a spiritual swimming pool being understandable and even helpful, while he rejected a wading-only pool. My own image is that New Age and Old Age fundamentalists may get stalled and satisfied on the on-ramps to spiritual highways. Shades of Falwell and Bakker!

David K. Trumper
Bala-Cynwyd, Pennsylvania

GOOD WORDS

I WISH TO EXPRESS my deep appreciation for the forthright, even blatant, invitation for honest, well-thought-out inquiry into responsibility presented in *What Is Enlightenment?* With the failure of "wait on God to do it for you" institutions, the "grab all the immediate gratification you deserve whatever the cost" media message, and the "drug it or drown it" mentality, the sharing of honest, realistic alternatives and the encouragement to assume responsibility in a supportive community is a wonderfully viewed possibility, a beautiful gift. What a remarkable collection of mind-altering articles in your magazine!

Sam M. DuBois
Raeform, North Carolina

UNTIL I READ *Mother Jones's* November/December 1997 issue dedicated to enlightenment, I was beginning to think that I was the exception to the rule that "no man is an island." It was in that issue that I learned of your mag-

azine. I have just finished reading your last issue and was thrilled to find that there are many others living today who share the same mind-set as I do.

Joan Morrone
Sebring, Florida

I HAVE BEEN LOOKING for a magazine of this quality for a long time. Finally, at long last, it has arrived.

Paul Word
Carter Lake, Iowa

CHAIN LETTER

I AM FASCINATED by my first encounter with your magazine, reading it cover to cover over this past day, its articles, letters to the editor, reviews, and a number of advertisements. For whatever reason, I am moved to comment on a letter you received from Cindy Oeser in response to a letter from Ken Wilber published in your previous issue.

Let me preface by saying that I have been a student for a number of years of the late Swami Radha, a remarkable woman of spiritual force, whose words and teachings by personal example influence me every day. One thing that Swami Radha stressed over and over again was that alignment with our life purpose involves conscious cooperation with our own evolution. Her conviction about this grew from the bedrock of her own hard-won experience, not the regurgitated formulas of some male spiritual authority. Swami Radha was radically committed to women's involvement and to their spiritual growth.

Ms. Oeser's main objection to Mr. Wilber is that his promotion of the idea of spirituality as a continuum is a masculine idea that probably does not apply to women. I disagree with Ms. Oeser's argument that at a fundamental level spirituality for women does not fit within a continuum. This conflicts with my own understanding of spirituality and my observations of and participation in Swami Radha's predominantly female yoga groups. She is right that a continuum does imply some



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form of linearity, but it is also a form of connectedness, of building on that which came before.

I agree with Ms. Oeser's comments about male attitudes which dismiss female spirituality as inferior. These attitudes serve neither men nor women, and deserve to be destroyed whenever the opportunity arises. They will be destroyed, however, not by perpetuating myths about "male spirituality" or "female spirituality," but only by cultivating awareness of our common spiritual destiny, which is liberation from the limiting concepts that all of us cling to so tenaciously.

Neil D. Claflin
Spokane, Washington

ANCIENT WISDOM



WHEN A COPY OF *What Is Enlightenment?* ["Can Science Enlighten Us?" Spring/Summer 1997] was given to me at a recent conference, I confess my immediate reaction was, "Oh no, not another one!" Now, having carefully read it through, I feel I should congratulate all those responsible for producing such an interesting—if strangely titled—magazine.

As Rupert Sheldrake well knows ["Maybe Angels: A Confluence of Imagination and Rational Inquiry"], the time is surely now right for our present-day science and scientists to make a bold and fundamental shift in viewpoint. To paraphrase Amit Goswami ["Scientific Proof of the Existence of God"]: nature is not physically based but is a spiritual issuance that materializes as a universal cycle evolves—or rather *involves*; and the word "spiritual" in this sense means that which is the root of all aspects of consciousness. This is completely the reverse of the view of the more materialistic scientists, which holds that consciousness is a byproduct of material organization,

and thus even the highest aspects of consciousness in humans, such as intuition, compassion and altruism, are the result of—indeed, are *produced by*—molecular movement.

The "new" view has been a fundamental of Theosophy for many thousands of years, and all students of Ancient Wisdom will surely now hope that such thinkers as Goswami, Sheldrake and others will go on to take the teaching of a spirit-based universe a few steps further. The implications of such a doctrine for our understanding of the nature of space, for example, should totally change what astronomers and astrophysicists will be writing books about in the next century.

Good luck to your magazine. I wish it a long and *influential* life.

Alan P. Hughes
Sussex, UK

"MIND IS THE BUILDER"

WITH REFERENCE to your interview with Amit Goswami, "Scientific Proof of the Existence of God": Goswami's notion that consciousness *creates* matter appears to be an oversimplification. Ongoing developments in a living perennial philosophy, namely Theosophy, the Edgar Cayce readings and past-life research, indicate a triune level of downward causation beginning with Spirit. As Cayce said, "Spirit is the life, mind is the builder, and the physical is the result." "Consciousness" is regarded as another name for spirit or life. It would seem, therefore, that levels of *mind*—not raw consciousness—create the visible universe.

Why bring up Theosophy and the Cayce readings—nonscientific sources in the face of a scientist's interpretation of principles and data? Because the clairvoyance used in these schools of thought has proved to be highly reliable. And when the subject matter that is clairvoyantly perceived is the same as that under scientific consideration, clairvoyance holds the promise

of refining scientific hypotheses. When a clairvoyant such as Cayce was able to go into a trancelike state and perceive the fifth and most subtle state of matter, on which the record of all things and events since the beginning of time is said to be stored, the prudent scientist, who is sincerely seeking truth, will not ignore what Cayce reports.

Goswami says that "consciousness, not matter, is the foundation of all that is" and "consciousness is not made of material." But how do we know that an aspect of consciousness does not consist of the purposeful play of quanta or elementary particles, concentrations within larger quantum fields in which they are embedded? Theosophy maintains that the slightest matter is informed with consciousness and the slightest consciousness has a material aspect. And the Cayce readings also state that mind partakes of both spirit and matter. Is not the ultimate Force or stuff of the universe both spirit and matter? Consider also the wave-particle aspects of matter and that every particle has its antiparticle. Must we not come to realize this fundamental trinity of dualities? Yet, despite the conceptual usefulness of this trinity, even more fundamental and ultimate is the cosmic fact that "all is one." This, too, we must come to realize. And seen in this light, Goswami's idea of monistic idealism does seem right.

Goswami's overly simple "instantaneous cosmology" also requires refinement. "What agency converts possibility into actuality?" he asks. Again, the perennial philosophy suggests that, in the beginning, it was God's desire that brought the universe into being; thereafter, in the human world, it is human desire or will. It is human minds and wills that have created the earth's patchwork of "asphalt jungles."

Paul James
Virginia Beach, Virginia

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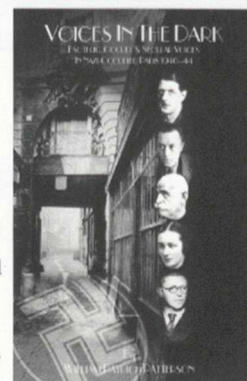
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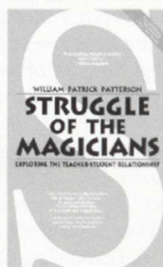
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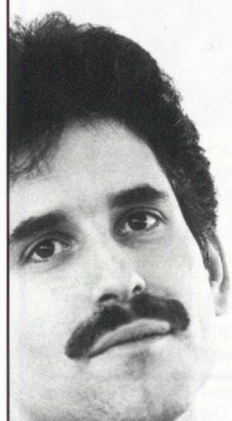
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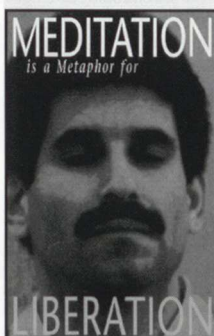
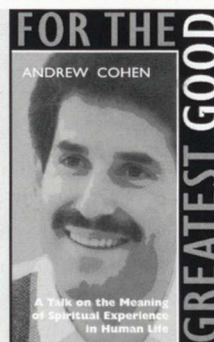
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