Biblical Tantra: Lessons in Sacred Sexuality

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Introduction

Almost anything can be 'proven' in the Bible. The liberals prove their points by citing some Biblical passages. Conservatives prove their points by specifying other passages. One thing that divergent religious groups might agree upon is that the Bible is a source, perhaps the primary source, of Western sexual attitudes. The Bible is not, however, the only religious literature to conceptualize sexual attitudes and attributes.

In the East, the spiritual concept and practices of tantra informs sexual behavior. Tantra is described and examined in the light of Biblical literature. Specific lessons are drawn from this 'Biblical tantra.'

To begin with, this article differentiates between 'spirituality', the relationship between humans and the sacred, and 'religion', the organized expression of spirituality in creeds, dogmas, liturgies and so on (Bullis 1996). Spirituality lives life from the inside out. Religion lives life from the outside in. Tantra is primarily a spiritual enterprise and with only secondary religious motivations.

This article is divided into three sections. The first part introduces broad principles and practice of tantra. The second section applies these concepts to Biblical themes. The third section offers specific lessons arising out of Biblical tantra.

The Tantric Tradition of Sacred Sexuality

Tantric sexuality offers images that illustrate the relationship between spirituality and sexuality. Westerners are increasingly receptive to the connections between sexuality and spirituality. They recognize that 'the time is ripe for a deeper understanding of experiential spirituality and wholesome sexuality' (MacKee 1996: 98).

Eastern literature urging the integration of sexuality and spirituality has long been available to Westerners. The Kama Sutra of Vasayana (Burton 1962), originally written between the sixth century
BCE and the sixth century CE, was first translated into English by Sir Richard Burton in 1883. Another such work, also translated by Sir Richard Burton, was *The Perfumed Garden of Shaykh [sheik] Nefzawi* written in the court of the Bey of Tunis around 1550 CE. These works, and others like them, were confined to the studies of scholars and were more misunderstood than understood by the general public.

Several contemporary works have conveyed tantric themes to Western readers in the past three decades: *Sexuality: The Sacred Journey* (1994) by Marina Raye; *Sexual Secrets: The Alchemy of Ecstasy* (1979) by Nik Douglas and Penny Slinger; *The Art of Sexual Ecstasy* (1989) by Margo Anand and other books like them, present the tantric component for the West. Nor are the principles of tantra the exclusive property of Taoism or Hinduism; *The Holy Letter* (Cohen 1993), a thirteenth-century Jewish treatise, was released soon after its ideas appeared in the motion picture *A Stranger Among Us* (Hollywood Pictures Release 1992).

Recent Western authors, from a variety of theological disciplines, have asserted the close connection between sexuality and spirituality. Guberman (1986) asserts that mystical Judaism, through the kabbalah, values the spiritual connection between sexual relations and spiritual relationships, saying that 'such actions partake of the harmony of the cosmos, replicate it, and even sustain it' (p. 76). MacKee (1996) asserts that sexuality is related to peak spiritual experiences and notes that 'spirituality and sexuality are not seen as opposing dichotomies but rather as two sides of the same coin' (p. 97). Harrigan and Bullis (1992) assert that sexual attitudes affect the nature and practice of social work. The authors apply spiritual practices of prayer, religious imagery and visualization to issues related to sexual counseling.

Contributions to sacred sexuality come from writers on celibacy and gay and lesbian writers as well. In *Passions of Innocence: Tantric Celibacy and the Mysteries of Eros*, Stuart Sovatsky (1994) asserts tantric benefits without periods of genital contact and nonsexual friendships. The gay and lesbian community is recognized as helping to lift falsely imposed restraints that restrain sexuality as 'joyous play' (McNeill 1988: 134). Additionally, one characteristic of lesbian relationships, 'mutuality' (Hunt 1994) closely follows that of tantric practitioners.

*Tantra and Consciousness*

The term 'tantra' comes from two syllables meaning the liberation or expansion of consciousness (Mumford 1987). This expansion of awareness is accomplished, not through religiously motivated liturgical acts, but through ordinary acts such as eating, breathing, and
lovenaking (Lemley 1996). ‘Tantra’ can refer either to a body of sacred literature or to the spiritual exercises themselves (this article involves the latter)—and sometimes it refers to both. The Mahanirvana Tantra (II.52), for example, states, ‘For the attainment of liberation with ease and delight, there is no way but to worship him, to meditate upon him, and to pray to him’ (Prabhavananda 1963).

Tantra emphasizes that everything in creation is a form of the one divinity. Everything is an aspect, analogy, or expression of the One. Rawson (1978) uses the analogy of the ‘divine drama’ to indicate that the One can play many roles yet remain the same actor. He says, ‘He is thus the dancer dancing the world... In the inner self He puts on his costume and make-up’ (p. 195). Instead of mistrusting the body as an avenue of spiritual growth, tantra values the sensual life, and the sexual life in particular, as an expression of the sacred.

Tantra asserts that spirituality devoid of the physical is facile and sex without the spiritual is shallow. So, lovenaking is a strong vehicle for spiritual formation and transformation. The spiritual disciplines of tantra are based upon a unified anthropology integrating the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. This model holds that sexual acts provoke spiritual responses. Rawson in The Art of Tantra (1978) writes, ‘Sexual intercourse is the principal form of “enjoyment” which Tantra harnesses to its spiritual ends, treating it as a paradigm of divine ecstasy’ (p. 83). ‘Spiritual elevation’ is how The Holy Letter (Cohen 1993: 80) describes this experience. The various levels of sexuality toward the sacred is the subject of the next section.

Sex as Sacred Strata
A principal tantric notion, already alluded to here, is that all human activity is ordered on spiritual levels or strata. This notion finds currency in such concepts as ‘the music of the spheres’ and spiritual cosmologies. These concepts, and others like them, refer to a strata of consciousness or of spirituality itself (Bullis 1996).

Plainly put, all sex is not the same. Sex, as an expression of energy, can be experienced on at least three levels (Ramsdale and Ramsdale 1991). The grossest level (tamas) is a sexual relationship that is violent, selfish and demanding. The partners, if one can call them that, treat each other as objects. Sex is an act designed for their personal pleasure. It is often a struggle—even a competition.

Tamasic sex is compulsive sex. It tends to produce a sense of mutual dependency.

In the next level of rajas sex, the lovers are passionate and thrilled. Their sex is dramatic and powerful. This level of sex can be based
upon the lover’s mutual need for desire—whether that need or desire is healthy or not. In rajasic sex, moreover, the flame, however intense, can go out.

Rajasic sex is dynamic sex. It produces an emotional high for both partners.

In the most transformative sex (sattvic), the couples are open to each other and to the expression of the sacred within each other. They respect, even adore, each other as the physical expression of a divine power—even as the god or goddess themselves.

Sattvic sex is transformative sex. It produces a sense of health and wholeness in both partners. Where there is the deepest love, there is the deepest healing.

Each stratum of sex both reflects and initiates corresponding levels of consciousness. Higher consciousness produces higher sex and higher sex initiates higher consciousness. This is sacred sexual symbolism at its best, for symbols empower the tantrika and the tantrika empowers the symbols. They are symbiotic and mutually supportive. Symbols are not ‘psychic potted plants’ that have no independent life of their own. They thrive on the partner’s experience of the sacred.

Tantric principles are not esoteric; they are long published for all to see. They are, however, learned experientially, not didactically. Tantric spiritual ecstasy begins with direct, tangible human experience (Guenther 1972). Similarly, attempting to understand tantra as an academic exercise alone distorts these dynamics. This is why tantra is so easily misunderstood. Truly understanding tantra demands experience and intuition as well as logic.

Tantra is, however, ecstatic and transformative. Tantric practices transform sexual energy into spiritual energy. ‘Ritual intercourse is a tool for consciousness expansion, overwhelming the incessant chatter of the thinking brain (cerebral cortex) with a flood of orgasmic excitement triggered by sensations in the erogenous zones (Mumford 1987: 47-48). Sexual energy can initiate spiritual energy.

Spiritual Energy Centers and Pathways
This spiritual energy is at the core of tantric anthropology and practice. ‘Chakras’ are dynamic ‘circles’ through which pass spiritual energy and power. These centers, sometimes called lotuses, are located along the spinal column—though they are so subtle that they can only be perceived by the most sensitive. They are pathways for spiritual energy, called kundalini. The Kundalini is likened to a serpent coiled within us. When kundalini power, by exercises such as tantra, the snake is uncoiled and rises through the chakras. When it
reaches the seventh, and final, chakra the adept realizes a 'mystic union with the Supreme Lord' (Prabhavananda 1963: 150).

Taoist anthropology employs a similar set of roads through which the human body moves and changes energy. Chia and Winn (1984) explain specific techniques for transforming sexual energy into spiritual vitality. They all center around raising sexual energy, for both the male and female, by retaining and sharing their yin and yang. This means sexual intercourse in order to share energy for the purpose of health and spiritual development. The male, for example, learns to climax without ejaculation. The female learns to transform her ovarian energy through her spine to a higher consciousness (Chia and Chia 1986).

This discussion may seem highly conceptual. But the entire practice of tantra and the spiritual sexual response is actually highly experiential. An exercise (Muir and Muir 1989) exemplifies the usefulness of both the chakras and sexual duality. The exercise is called the 'nurturing meditation' and is designed to enhance intimacy to synchronize all the energy centers between partners and to balance the harmony between them. The couple begin by lying together spoon fashion. The partner on the outside envelopes in their arms the one on the inside (the one who needs more comfort or energy at this time).

Partners are encouraged to take great latitude in accommodating their own comfort. They should quiet their minds with a focus on their own breathing. One type of breathing exercise is called the 'harmonizing breath'. The couple breathes in together, holds breath together, exhales together and inhales together. During this exercise the outside partner, with each series of breaths, projects the energy characteristic of each energy center from the front of the body into that of the receiving partner’s back. Starting with the heart chakra, the giver imagines the energy of his or her center urging itself into the heart chakra of the partner. The receiving partner opens him or herself up to this flow. This same process is followed to the brow chakra, then the base chakra, then each of the other chakras in ascending order.

Besides sharing the physical body and the chakra lotuses, this exercise shares the breathing body as well. The breathing exercise resurrects the body of the breath. Sharing breath is sharing an intimacy of the inner body.

The relationship of this exercise, and others like it, to sexuality has at least three components. First, sexual desire is not an isolated experience. If one partner is tired, irritated, or lethargic, sexual desire and spiritual desire is diminished. Second, when both partners collaborate
in exchanging spiritual energies, sexual desire is also energized. Third, intimacy is heightened in a sensual, relaxed, giving atmosphere.

**Ejaculation Retention**
The spiritual discipline of ejaculation retention flows from the development and maintenance of spiritual energies. The sexual/spiritual concept of ejaculation retention and the conservation of spiritual energy may seem new, even revolutionary, to most Westerners. These concepts, however, have long been part of the Biblical traditions. For example, Leviticus reports a 'Ritual of Atonement' for males who spill their semen without benefit of intercourse: 'This is the law for him who has a discharge and for him who has an emission of semen, becoming unclean thereby...' (Lev. 15.32).

In both Hindu and Taoist tantra, the semen is regarded as a powerful and life-sustaining substance. Wasting semen wastes physical and spiritual resources. The Taoist text *Secret Prescriptions of the Bedroom* (Douglas and Slinger 1979) suggests 'After each ejaculation, the loss of semen should be compensated for by absorbing the essence fluids of the woman' (p. 265).

Sexuality is no stranger to theologians—and no stranger to Biblical theologians. Theological discussions, however, have centered upon the ethical or moral aspects of sexual behavior. Very few discussions have addressed the spirituality of sexuality. This is the central discussion following.

**Biblical Tantra Spirituality**
This section describes how tantric ideas are expressed in the Bible. Tantra's overwhelming purpose is intimately to know God (the sacred) and to have union with God. Tantra uses an astounding assortment of symbols to convey this meaning.

While this paper does not attempt a close comparison between Biblical tantra and Eastern versions, some of these expressions are similar to the tantric traditions explained previously, some will differ. This section specifies three concepts shared by tantric sexuality and Biblical sexual spirituality.

**Sharing and Preserving Sexual-spiritual Energy**
The sharing and preservation of energy is both a practice and an instructive symbol of tantrism. The practice of sharing and preserving
energy embodies both this practice and this symbolism. I address the practice aspect first.

As previously noted, the law codes in the book of Leviticus prescribe climax and ejaculation. The code (here Lev. 15.16-18) is mandatory for sexual and spiritual health and growth.

And if a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water, and be unclean until evening. And every garment and every skin on which the semen comes shall be washed with water, and be unclean until the evening. If a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bathe themselves in water, and be unclean until the evening.

This passage creates an especially firm hedge around sexual activity. The hedge or barrier is erected, not because sex is itself impure or bad, but because sex has the potential to evoke and to provoke powerful dynamics connected with union with the sacred.

*The Holy Letter* (Cohen 1993) helps explain the spiritual import of the passage in Leviticus. It claims that a drop of semen disposes the nature of human beings; it is a person’s essence and their microcosm. While this notion is probably a holdover from the mediaeval notion that a sperm cell itself contains the seed for a new human being, the retention of semen, as prescribed here, is not just a duty. It has practical spiritual applications.

The first practical implication is that, without ejaculation, sexual intercourse is usually prolonged. Tantric literature is suffused with techniques, but the purposes concern us here. The prolonged penis-vaginal (lingam-yoni) contact, prolongs the transfer of energy between the lovers. For the woman, the man’s energy and her own intentions flood spiritual channels. For the man, the woman’s energy does the same thing.

It goes without saying, that sex alone is not the goal of tantra. Union with the sacred is not bought at such prices. The second practical implication is that the intention of the partners makes the difference. Intention, known as *kavanah* in Judaism, or ‘purity of heart’ in other disciplines, is known by a thousand names. It all comes down to this—that the union with God requires disciplines, techniques and the right intention.

Real spirituality is a gift, not a given. Symbols cannot guarantee intention, but they can urge and inspire it. The following sections discuss this consideration.
Microcosm and Macrocosm

The sacredness of the human being does not arise from itself. It comes from its purposefulness and plan in creation. An operational definition of the sexual plan and purpose is illustrated by the concept of the microcosm and the macrocosm. This means that the human body is a microcosm of the universe—and a sacred miniature at that.

This concept is the same as ‘as above, so below’ which is an ancient spiritual theme. This means that how humans relate (below) affects the spiritual dimensions (above). The Lord’s Prayer section ‘...on earth as it is in heaven’ is the continued spiritual legacy of this concept.

The Biblical book of the Song of Solomon, also called the Song of Songs, is powerful poetry in pursuit of the embodied presence of God. In the introduction to a recent translation of the Song by Bloch and Bloch (1995), the authors situate, in tantric tradition, the kingdom of God squarely in the midst of human sexual life. The authors state, ‘The Song of Songs locates that kingdom in human love...’ (p. 35). For example, in the Song (7.2-4) we read:

How graceful your steps in those sandals,  
O nobleman’s daughter.

The gold of your thigh  
shaped by a master craftsman.

Your navel is the moon’s  
bright drinking cup.  
May it brim with wine!

Your belly is a mound of wheat  
edged with lilies.  
Your breast are two fawns,  
twins of a gazelle.

The translators’ comment reveals the spiritual concept of the microcosm reflected in the macrocosm. They say, ‘Even in the elaborate artifice suggested by the [above] image, the natural world is inscribed on the woman’s body’ (p. 127). Images and acts of the human body, especially intercourse, influence the universe. Such acts impress the body of the universe with its own glad grace.

What became of the glad sexual grace of the sexual component in the Song of Songs? Specifically, what happened in the Christian context to desexualize the Song? First, it must be stated that the Song was not entirely desexualized. The mystical tradition, both in Judaism and early Christianity, preserved its sensually spiritual aspects. Second, while the reasons may be many and complex, they boil down to
suspicion, even antipathy, of the sensual and the physical, both in the early church and rabbinical writings. The early Church emphasized, even institutionalized, the dichotomy between the body and the soul.

This theological institutionalization was codified in the poetic device of analogy—likening one thing to something different. Analogizing the Song separated the text from the skin. Rabbi Akiva, from the second century CE proponent of the Song, treats it as a desexualized analogy of Israel and God. He even warned that those who ‘warble’ the Song at banquet houses will have no place in the afterlife (Bloch and Bloch 1995). While the rabbis analogized the lovers as the soul or Israel and God (even though no mention of God exists in the Song), the early Church analogized the lovers to Christ and his Church.

Sexual Theosis and Anamensis
The third theme, sexual theosis and sexual anamensis, are corollary and connected, to the second theme. The theological operations whereby sexual behavior becomes sacred can be described as theosis—‘the deification of created beings by uncreated grace’ (Lossky 1974: 98) or as anamensis—‘the initiation into a mystery, the revelation of a reality’ (Lossky 1976: 98, 189).

These two processes or dynamics are related to the tantric ideas of union of God and the chakras. In seeming contrast to some tantric traditions discussed, Biblical tantra is solidly monotheistic. Much of tantra’s language uses the imagery of the One lord or One god—and we are manifestations of, for example, Shiva and Shakti. Shiva can be described, for purposes here, as the divine will and Shakti can be described as this divine will expressed. Shakti is the power behind the divine principle. Shakti is the divine consort of Shiva (Prabhavananda 1963).

The related maxim ‘God made himself man, that man might become God’ (Lossky 1974: 97) expresses a similar idea. Applied to tantra and sexual transformation, this maxim means that there is an organic, reciprocal and palpable relationship between our sensual experience and our spiritual experience. Succinctly put, ‘bodily experience can reveal the divine...’ (Gudorf 1994: 217). Expressions of the body’s uncovering and discovering the divine are the subject of the following section.
Theological Lessons of Biblical Tantra

Several theological lessons flow from concepts incorporated in a Biblical tantra. The term ‘Theological lessons’ is employed here because these lessons arise from first-hand experience, not from second-hand reflection. These concepts, ‘Sex as Sacred Symbolism’, ‘Sex as Communion’, ‘Sex as Prayer’, and ‘Sex as Sabbath’ are introduced below.

Sex as Sacred Symbolism
The tantrika or sadhaka (practitioner of tantra) is surrounded by a cosmos of sexual-spiritual symbolism. Just as tantra is not based upon the interpretation of only cognitive experience, however, the tantrika does not employ symbolism as an intellectual exercise alone, but as a means to transform consciousness.

Symbols conceal as much as they reveal. Symbols, for example, can tell only part of the story of union with the sacred. We have to experience the rest for ourselves. If it is true, and I think it is, that ‘We need to recapture a vision of the divine eros as intrinsic to God’s energy, God’s own passion for connection...’ (Nelson 1992), then second-hand experience is not enough. Tantra is a discipline where first-hand experience of the divine is prized.

Tantra, as earlier noted, uses everyday, objects as foci to initiate a state of prayer. Everyday objects are an aspect of the great, universal, divine energy. Color also acts as such a manifestation. These manifestations actually ‘feed’ and nourish us physically and spiritually.

Color, when broken down into the spectrum, is absorbed through physical and spiritual pores. Each color of the spectrum is absorbed into specific spiritual centers called chakras. Each color corresponds to its own spiritual center (Garrison 1964). Such a cosmology suggests its own methodology.

It is no secret, then, that tantric disciples use sunlight and various colors as part of their practices. Lighting candles, arranging specifically chosen flowers, picking certain colored paintings, and wearing particularly colored jewelry do more than just create a beautiful setting. These elements of color are spiritual menus nurturing different spiritual organs. Each color offers its own cure and spiritual consequence. Experiencing and contemplating the full spectrum of color enables the tantrika to experience the sacred more fully.

Sex as Communion
Perhaps the most significant symbolism in tantricism is the ‘maithuna’ or sacramental, sexual union. During this union the man
becomes the god Shiva and the woman becomes Shakti. This sacred union represents the 'Shiva marriage' between Shiva and Shakti.

This divine marriage is a sexual communion. Yet, at the same time this symbolism reveals technologies of tantra as well. This is why the maithuna is called a 'sadhana' or a spiritual practice. This practice employs symbolism as an experiential element.

For example, along with the Shiva marriage, both color and objects carry large packages of symbolic power. Specifically, the maithuna ceremony used five symbols (Garrison 1964). Food, as well as color, literally feeds the chakras. They are likened to the 'sefira' in Jewish kabbala formulations as well as the concept of the micro and macro cosmologies; 'Like tantra, the sephirot [emphasis in original] system indicates that the human being is a replica of the universe' (Blank 1991).

Wine represents fire or the 'prakriti' cosmic energy. This represents the transforming 'fire' of divine power. As fire, changing wood into ash, burns both oxygen and fuel into heat and light, so too prakriti ignites our inert selves into lives alive with energy, including spiritual and sexual animation.

Meat represents the element of air and all animal life. All animals thrive on air. Air is the engine of spiritual combustion. This is the breath of God—the animating power in Genesis as God breathed life into all flesh (Gen. 2.7). Of course, in the Biblical languages 'breath' could mean also 'wind' and 'spirit.' A clear connection between breath and spirit is made in Gen. 6.17 where God sends a flood against 'all flesh in which is the breath of life.' Tantric practices rely highly upon breathing exercises for attuning the body and the spirit.

Fish represent water and the body's creative powers. This symbol is used to practice energy ('prana') circulating around the universe as well as inside the human body. Just as water courses through channels of rivers, so too, pranic energy flows through the micro and macro cosmos.

Parched cereal represents the earth element. They represent the 'geodesic' lines or 'ley lines'—powerful currents running along the surface of the earth and of human beings. For example, the old Sarum ley line runs across the Wiltshire–Hampshire border in southern England from a tumulus linking Stonehenge, the Salisbury cathedral, an Iron Age camp at Clearbury to an Iron Age hill fort (Westwood 1987). Thus, tantric practice urges sensitivity to the place and forces of the place in which the practices are conducted.

The fifth, and final in this series of symbols is sexual intercourse itself. Sexual intercourse is the culmination and completion of the five
elements. Intercourse is a symbol or the duality of life and of its essential unity. A nineteenth-century painting from Rajasthan shows the centrality of the five elements. The five sacred elements are depicted in circles that themselves surround a depiction of a guru (Rawson 1973).

Sex as Prayer
The Tantra uses the body’s own natural inclinations to invoke the presence of God, including breathing and sex. For the tantrika, sexual activity is a rich form of prayer. Tantric prayer is similar to any other prayer, with some significant and necessary exceptions.

Anand (1989) indicates several ‘tantric attitudes.’ Among them is meditation characterized by a deeper and deeper relaxation, punctuated by a freshness and a ‘de-automizing’ of the sexual experience. An attitude of surrender or rest in the divine urges lovers to see each other and the sacred in new, unhabituated ways.

A prayerful state, a state characterized by reverence and energy, is unconcerned with the performance of sexual tasks. Even a casual observer of the many prints and sculptures, associated either directly or indirectly with tantric practices, recognizes the relaxed and meditative expressions on the lovers’ faces. They are not the facial expressions of rude, desperate or even excited sex.

For example, one painting, an eighteenth-century temple wood cut, shows a couple in acrobatic intercourse (supporting each other with their feet) while the man plays the flute. Another painting depicts a prince and his lady making love, gazing steadily into each other’s eyes, while the lady holds a flask in her right hand and a cup in her left (Rawson 1973). Their faces seem engrossed, introspective, and intensely aware of something beyond themselves, yet something deeply personal to themselves and their consort.

As we have noted, the goal of tantric lovemaking is not ejaculation. The goal is always the invocation of the presence of the sacred. Tantra makes a clear distinction between orgasm and ejaculation. They are not synonymous. That presence is, in tantra, palpable and practicable.

Sex as Sabbath
The sabbath is a time for rest and renewal. The sabbath creates a space for the presence of the sacred. Honoring the sabbath itself recognizes and initiates the sacred in the midst of all life and all living. Sacred sex is no exception.

A sabbath does not just happen. It is created with intention and innovation. This is especially true for a sexual sabbath. Sexual
sabbaths are a relatively new concept and experience. There are precious few examples and models upon which to base such practices. While Westerners are used to having house blessings, baptisms, blessings of marriages, newborns and the infirm, there are no blessings or sanctifications for sexual arousal and experience. What is the liturgy for creating a sabbath for sexuality?

A close analogy is creating a 'sexual sanctuary', an idea offered by Margo Anand, who suggests a plan for creating a spiritually sacred place (Lemley 1996). The plan is as simple as it is effective. For example, she recommends, after removing all clutter from the room, place a bed or blanket in the middle of the room and decorate the space with meaningful objects such as candles, crystals, artwork and artifacts. Eliminating clutter is an excellent way to cleanse the space and the psyche of extraneous thoughts and intentions.

She then suggests partners face each other and walk around the room, singing or chanting short prayers like, 'Let negative energies such as worry, fear, anger, greed and impatience leave the room' (p. 76). Walking, or circumambulation, is a venerable spiritual tradition. For centuries, pilgrims have paced around crosses, sacred wells, labyrinths, churches and mountains. The same is true for sexual pilgrims.

Anand suggests both physical and verbal follow-ups to conclude the initiating ritual. Both partners can light four candles and repeat the affirmation, 'I purify this space. I purify my heart.' The simplicity and focus of this prayer makes it a mantra. Affirmations are used increasingly as a methodology of sexual healing (Ray 1992; 1976). Affirmations ceremonially consolidate and consecrate the sacredness recognized in this space.

Several elements arise from this planning, which could be applied in various ways, under different circumstances, and for different dispositions. Tantra has always advocated spontaneous, genuine expression over preserving a tradition for the sake of preserving it. Tantra refuses to create a museum for the spirit—even a gilded one. It has never exalted form over substance. Couples are free, even encouraged, to create their own ritual according to their own tastes and preferences. These elements are outlined below:

1) Be present in the moment—not what comes before or next. Creating a sabbath, first and foremost, requires attention to the sacred among each lover. Attention to the other reflects attention to the divine. In fact, in some
tantric practices, the couple dresses like Shiva and his divine consort, Shakti.

This element presupposes that the tantrikas (disciples) attempt to put preoccupations aside. The next day’s tasks, small angers, disappointments and worries are laid aside in the surrender of the moment. Preoccupations replaces divine passion.

(2) Make ritual acts consistent with who you are. Tantra requires no one to compromise moral or ethical codes. It delights, however, in breaking down barriers of empty ritual and preconceived notions.

(3) Make the ritual acts mutual. Mutually appreciated and valued acts combine in a fusion equal greater to the sum of its parts.

For a mutual ritual to be real, both partners must know each other intimately. ‘Intimately’ does not mean only sexual closeness. It means an openness to the other and to the sacred. It means listening as well as speaking and giving as well as taking.

(4) Make the ritual acts fun. A somber sabbath is no sabbath at all. A sabbath is recreational and it should be interesting, intriguing, and inspirational. It should revive the body and spirit.

If the ritual acts are not joyful and something to which to look forward, there is something wrong. This does not mean that each partner enters into sacred sexuality with unbridled enthusiasm each and every time, without fatigue or distractions or even indifference. Such mixed feelings often accompany devotees of all spiritual disciplines. To deny such feelings is counterproductive and downright dishonest.

Fun does not necessarily mean hilarity or revelry. It means a joyful centeredness. The figures in the paintings, noted above, showed contented smiles, not a distracted grins. They expressed mutual enjoyment of each other and of the sacredness to which they responded.

Conclusion

Tantra, an ancient spiritual discipline of sacred sexuality, enjoys increased interest among scholars and lay people alike. Tantra asserts a close connection between sexual intercourse and the incarnation of divinity into the human sphere. The Biblical literature also illustrates this and other tantric principles, particularly in the Song of Songs.
Sexual practices, emphasizing attention to sexual ritual, sexual sabbath, and sexual symbolism flow from this Biblical tantra.

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