

Sex and Spirit

Wisdom of the Spiritually Incorrect

BY MARC GAFNI

If you stop to think even for a short moment, you realize that sex really is *the* great mystery of our lives. Two groups, however, suggest very different approaches to sex, and both of them are wrong.

One powerful group of forces is arrayed in culture to prevent us from getting sex. They tell us that sex is somehow wrong, immoral, or sinful. Even when we think we have gotten free of them, they pop up again inside our hearts or heads, wagging their fingers disapprovingly. And they remind us constantly of all the trouble sex has gotten the world into—from the Trojan War to the Clinton/Lewinsky drama. Not to mention the trouble it has gotten you and me into—emotionally, psychologically, personally, professionally, and physically. You have to admit that the sexual conservatives have a point. If you want to keep life simple, clean, and orderly, forgoing or limiting your sexual experience might be an excellent choice. If you like spiritual exercises, take a few minutes to list all the times sex has gotten you into trouble.

Lots of conventional moralists and organized religion fall into this category. Religion wants to affirm love and passion as virtues but to divorce them entirely from sex. So moralist religion works hard to erect boundaries that will protect us from the pitfalls of sex. Yet while we all know that sex requires some discipline, and that context and commitment count, most of us know in our hearts that the moralists are wrong, and that sex is ultimately—and overwhelmingly—good, and not merely a side benefit of achieving loving relationship.

It was perhaps the 14th-century Zen master Ikkyu who captured this spiritual sensibility best:

*With a young beauty, sporting in deep love play;
We sit in the pavilion, a pleasure girl and this
Zen monk.
Enraptured by hugs and kisses,
I certainly don't feel as if I am burning in hell.*

Which brings us to the second powerful coalition of forces talking about sex. This group tells us that sex is wonderful—if liberated, the panacea of all ills, if repressed, the source of all dysfunction. Freudians, other schools of modern psychology, sexual revolutionaries, and a host of other intelligent folk are working hard to strip sex of anything remotely spiritual or even emotional. They want to liberate sex from love, from Eros, and from the myriad of existential and emotional complexities.

These two approaches may be spiritually and politically correct, but they do not address our deepest knowing and yearnings. We all know that.

So we have to turn to the hidden wisdom. The Wisdom of the Spiritually Incorrect. The esoteric traditions of all the great systems of spirit—Kabbalah in Judaism, Ikkyu in the Zen tradition, the Tantric masters of Hinduism and Buddhism, Rumi and Hafiz of Sufism, and Mary Magdalene and the heretical Cathars of mystical Christianity. Veiled in every great

tradition there is a hidden, subversive, mystical teaching. In each of their traditions they are ignored, killed, crucified, or reinterpreted to avoid the full implications of their radical and spiritually incorrect teachings. These teachings understood implicitly that embedded in the sexual, in all its gorgeous and graphic detail, is all that is holy, all that is wise, all that

is sacred. The masters of the Spiritually Incorrect viewed the sexual act itself as a great sacred mystery that reflects all the deepest truths of the spirit.

In a world torn apart by fanatic fundamentalisms and insipid liberalism, we need a new teacher all of us can recognize and take home.

Contrary to conventional religion and much of psychology, the post-conventional, spiritually incorrect tantric masters insist that sex is integral to love and Eros. There is no disconnect. And not because it is nice, secure, and comfortable if you are able to love the person you are sleeping with. But far more powerfully because—and this is the secret of it all—*the sexual is the ultimate model for Eros and love*. In every ethical sexual encounter, one can create an energetic container for the sacred, for opening up fully and absolutely into the love and grace that is already there. The sexual in all of her

intricate detail is the most potent teacher, ripping us open if we will but let her, to the radical fullness of the divine who seeks our pleasure and goodness.

One 13th-century follower of the Kabbalah said it most dramatically: “Whoever has not desired a woman is like an ass and even less than an ass, for it is from the sexual that one understands divine service.” Or in the language of Zen master Ikkyu:

*Rinzai's disciples never got the Zen Message,
But I, the blind donkey, know the truth:
Love play can make you immortal.
The autumn breeze of a single night of love is
Better than a hundred thousand years of
Sterile sitting meditation.*

Sex stands as the ultimate symbol, both signifying and actually modeling the sacred wisdom that needs to animate and guide all areas of life. The goal of life is to live erotically in all facets of being, and sex is the model par excellence for sacred erotic living in all of the nonsexual arenas which make up most of our lives.

Eros Everywhere

Deep understanding of the sexual is the ultimate guide to accessing the spirit in every dimension of our reality.

We are not talking about sexual technique—even when important, it is technical at best. Sexual technique can never make you a great lover. To be a great lover in all facets of your being, you must listen deeply to the simple yet elegant spirit whisperings of the sexual. Nietzsche got some-



thing right when he said, "The degree and kind of man's sexuality reaches up into the topmost summit of his spirit."

Let me give four examples of particular qualities of Eros and essence, qualities that are the fundamental nature of higher consciousness in all the nonsexual arenas of our lives. All of these qualities are paradoxically and subversively modeled by the sexual.

Means and Ends Become One

In the erotic sexual, we need no reason or rationale to reach for summit of fulfillment. We act not to gain some vaunted empty prize. Rather, we act for its own sake. We act for the very sake of the erotic sexual itself. There is no distinction in the sexual between means and ends. They collapse into one in the realization that they were never distinct at all. The path becomes the destination.

Giving and Receiving

In the erotic sexual, giving and receiving are revealed in all their wondrous glory to be one and the same. The mystics sometimes called this the secret of the kiss, for in the kiss, the false dichotomy between giving and receiving—indeed, between giver and receiver—is exploded in the rapture of ecstatic union. The greatest gift is the fullest openness of receiving. In the erotic sexual, we receive the other so deeply that our heart is opened to the widest expanse we could ever feel.

Pleasure

In the erotic sexual, we are invited to the sanity of pleasure, to the realization that the world is not indifferent to us but actively and even desperately seeks our deepest pleasure. To be sane is to know reality; insanity is a rupture with reality. The erotic sexual remembers us to the infinite pleasure that is the truth of all that is.

Surrender

It is in the erotic sexual that we not only are aflame and alive with love that is giving, but we also understand that to give, is to give up control. We loosen the reins we once thought would fix everything that is so painfully broken, as we realize that everything is already fixed, that grace is always alive and available, and that everyone is doing what they need to do.

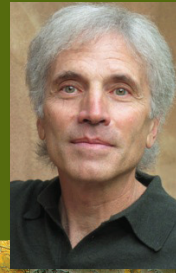
In the erotic sexual, we do not settle for the paltry comfort of a shivering clitoral orgasm. Rather, we reach for full and radical openness. You must be willing to open your entire being, to surrender your heart as your entire soul is given over to be ravished by God.

There is only one thing that a man or woman truly wants, underneath it all and after all other wants have been filled. The human being wants to be taken by God. The Hebrew mystics teach that when man and woman merge in the full radical consciousness of total opening to God, they make love not merely with each other but also experience the ultimate penetration as well as the infinite embrace of the Shechinah. When we make love we spread our partner's heart open to God through the depth of our own surrender.

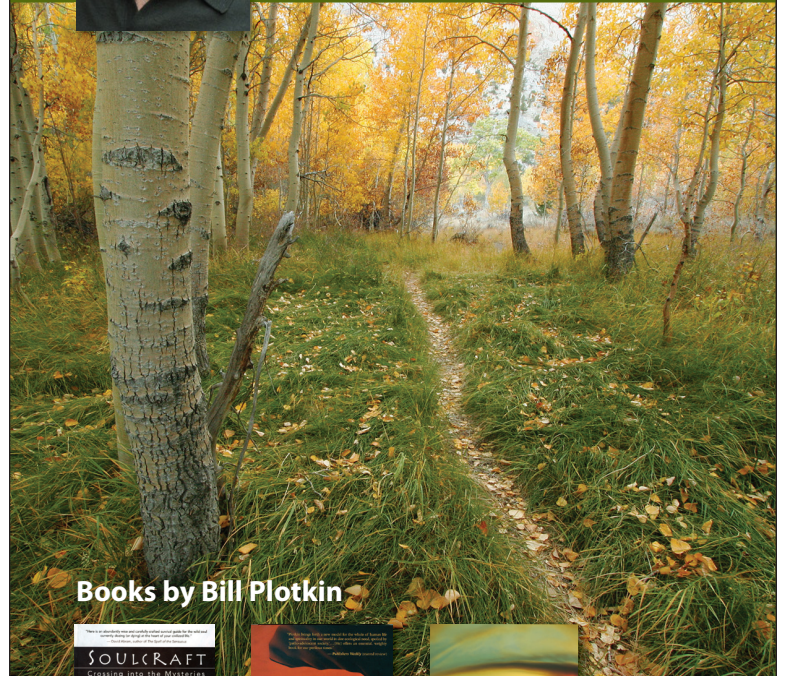
Love is the only way to live that is not insane. Everything in your life will always betray you. The only way through betrayal is to totally surrender to be lived by God as God. It is not enough to be loved by God. God's love still leaves us lonely. It is only when we are lived by God that the crisis of our identity is solved. 🍃

Marc Gafni directs the Center for World Spirituality in Northern California. His most recent book, Your Unique Self: The Radical Path to Personal Enlightenment, earned a 2012 USA Best Book Award. UniqueSelf.com and Ievolve.org.

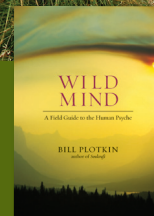
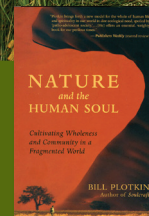
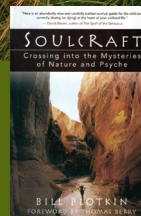
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