

PRAISE FOR *A RETURN TO EROS*

“Marc and Kristina are going where few dare to go. They are showing us what it means to live a fully erotic life.”

—**John Gray, bestselling author of *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus***

“*A Return to Eros* is the map for the new human. Read it and be forever enlivened and transformed! I believe this is the most compelling invitation ever written to live the Erotic Life. It changed my life.”

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“Surrender to this book. Erudite, provocative, and filled with lively insights, there is much to be learned from it about the sexual confusion of our times.”

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“*A Return to Eros* is a book written with no hang-ups, no compromises, and no holds barred. It rocks!”

—**Jonny Podell, iconic American rock 'n' roll music agent at the Podell Talent Agency**

“I’ve known Kristina for many decades . . . great to see she is sharing her life work with the world . . . Join the outrageous love train!”

—**Shep Gordon, legendary rock 'n' roll manager and *New York Times* bestselling author of *They Call Me Supermensch***

“*A Return to Eros* evolves our understanding of love, and does it in a way that will transform your own experience of love and Eros. It is a radically inspiring and important book that can help all of us recognize more deeply how love’s energy literally drives reality.”

—**Sally Kempton, author of *Awakening Shakti***

“*A Return to Eros* should be placed on the shelf next to the great works on emotional and sexual emancipation, including Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* and O Brown’s *Life Against Death*. Gafni and Kincaid remind us that eros and ethics are inseparable, that we must free the erotic from the ghetto of the merely sexual, and in so doing awaken our passion for truth and justice. There may be no more urgent lesson for our culture, which now stands on the brink of another descent into barbarism, that it is through and from love that true power flows.”

—**Zak Stein, EdD (Harvard), academic director of the Center for Integral Wisdom, faculty at Meridian University, scientific advisor for Neurohacker Collective, and cofounder of Lectica, Inc.**

PRAISE FOR MARC GAFNI'S
YOUR UNIQUE SELF

“It is very rare that one comes across a teacher or a book that is ‘changing the game.’ My friend, Dr. Marc Gafni, is such a teacher. He is a rare combination of brilliance, depth, and heart. Marc’s teaching on the Unique Self in an evolutionary context is ‘changing the game.’”

—**Michael Murphy, founder of Esalen Institute and author of
*Golf in the Kingdom***

“*Your Unique Self* could only have been written by someone who passionately lives his own uniqueness. Marc Gafni is a brilliant teacher and heart master with a rare capacity for empathy and a gift for creating community. This book contains the essence of his teaching on what it means to live from an enlightened life from a ground of one’s own personal uniqueness. This is a book that deserves to become a classic.”

—**Sally Kempton, author of *Meditation for the Love of It***

“Dr. Marc Gafni’s Unique Self teaching is seminal. What you hold in your hands is a radically exciting and groundbreaking book that will change forever not only how you think about enlightenment, but how you understand, from a post-metaphysical perspective, the very nature of human life itself. The Unique Self work is magnificent, and it belongs among the ‘great books.’

—**Ken Wilber, author of *A Brief History of Everything***

“At last—a safe, precise, and potent infusion—Unique Self! Not so much a book, as an antidote, *Unique Self* stands with spiritual teacher, scholar, and master, Marc Gafni’s *Soulprints* and *Mystery of Love* as a trilogy of love and healing for humanity. Read and be restored.”

—**Lori Halperin, leading clinician and theorist in fields of
marital and sexual dysfunction**

“With exceptional brilliance and an awakened heart, Dr. Marc Gafni speaks to all of us who are interested in the evolution of consciousness.

His teachings on the Unique Self enlightenment are essential for the next stage in our evolution. They have emerged from his direct experience, and I highly recommend them.”

—**Michael Bernard Beckwith, author of *Spiritual Liberation: Fulfilling Your Soul's Potential***

“Marc, a fellow drinker at the holy taverns has written a fine, fine book. Kabbalists say a Day of Tikkun (evolution, soul-repair) is coming. There are great stories here from the Hasidic masters and from Marc’s own life, honoring the unique soulmaking that has brought you to this moment. This book will deepen that astonishing mystery and awaken you to the individual beauty of your path.”

—**Coleman Barks, author of *Rumi: The Big Red Book***

“Marc Gafni’s overflowing heart and transmission of the Unique Self teaching profoundly moves me. Dr. Marc holds the lineage energy of the great Hasidic masters of Kabbalah, which he brings with him into the visionary initiative of Center for Integral Wisdom. There is little doubt in my mind that *Your Unique Self: The Future of Enlightenment* will become one of the classic texts that forms the World Spirit vision that our world needs so deeply.”

—**Lama Surya Das, author of *Awakening the Buddha Within: Tibetan Wisdom for the Western World* and founder of the Dzogchen Meditation Centers**

“At this historic moment, our human mind is passing the border toward a new consciousness. Marc Gafni is far enough ahead of most of us to articulate insights he gained beyond that borderline. Yet, like all great teachers, the author becomes transparent. Here is an invitation and a great opportunity to listen—not to Marc Gafni, but to your Unique Self. Thus this book becomes an indispensable travel guide into the realm of a vast new consciousness.”

—**Brother David Steindl-Rast, Benedictine monk and author of *The Spirit of Practice***

A RETURN
— *to* —
EROS

THE RADICAL EXPERIENCE OF
BEING FULLY ALIVE

MARC GAFNI AND
KRISTINA KINCAID



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To Shabbtai and Sara

*I come to speak dangerous words.
I ask only that you listen dangerously.*

—**CHUANG TZU**

But to live outside the law, you must be honest.

—**BOB DYLAN**

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FOREWORD

A *Return to Eros* is a tour de force of the kind that comes along once in a generation. The way this volume brings Eros to consciousness as the fundamental force direction and “purpose” of reality, on all levels and all quadrants, really is *the* discovery that underlies, directs, and “explains” the sacred purpose of cosmogenesis, the birth narrative of the New Human.

It’s the second coming of humanity for the first time in history incarnate as a fully embodied sacred sexual being.

It’s the early stages of the next evolutionary unfolding.

A Return to Eros forms the basis of evolutionary spirituality. It captures the glory of its conscious experience from the inside out in the sexuality and Eros of the evolutionary unique self.

It’s the experiential basis of the next stage of living and loving.

It’s the deepest reason for profound sexual yearning. It’s vital and is truly the only path beyond shame. It must not be denied.

It reveals the very nature of “God-in-evolution.”

It is the answer to my life question: What is the meaning of our new power that is good?

The answer is the manifestation of what this volume calls Evolutionary Eros in human form to its next level of the supra mental genius as consciously guided self and social evolution.

It’s the source energy, which can arouse the Planetary Awakening through Unique Self Symphony.

It is the juicy and delicious fruit of the joining of genius. Sexuality and suprasexuality become one.

God “took the risk” in revealing $E = MC^2$, the genetic code—the language of science—to give humans the powers of our ancient gods to use.

What the authors call “Love or Die” is the new commandment of the ontic human.

It is conscious evolution revealed as erotic evolution made aware of us in our loving.

It is the fundamental sacralization of sex at all levels.

The authors make the radical claim, which I believe is true, that when this force is not recognized, when it is denied, the result is abuse, whether in the form of rape culture or in the false complaints that attempt the rape of a name. It is only, the authors tell us, “when we embrace the full beauty of our embodied Eros, not merely in the sexual but in every dimension of our lives” that we begin to live in integrity.

Marc Gafni, the first author of this book, is an Erotic Radical. He incarnates the evolutionary Eros and articulates its teaching in ways that are several steps ahead of his generation. Like many radicals he has been made to bear the cross of a new vision. He has seen his actions falsified and distorted and experienced the projection and demonization that comes with the territory of incarnating this new vision of Eros. But as I have witnessed myself in a thousand conversations, he has kept his heart open in love, and turned his suffering into a gift and his pain into art. I am proud to stand with Marc as an evolutionary partner in offering this new vision of Eros and identity that is so vitally needed in our evolution.

Marc’s co-author on this volume, Kristina Kincaid, herself incarnates evolutionary Eros through her work with the body. Mentored by the leading-edge somatic teachers of our time, she understands the inseparable connection between one’s sexuality and one’s emotionality, and how that relationship is mirrored through our relationship to life. She brings a deep embodied understanding of the flow of Eros, love, and sexuality through the body. It is this teaching that can radically transform our

lives and birth the new human. The new human majestically called forth in this book will walk with unarmored body, will love with unguarded heart, and, through body, heart, and mind, be connected to all of life.

—Barbara Marx Hubbard
Futurist; President of the Foundation
for Conscious Evolution

FOREWORD

A *Return to Eros* is poetry. And not just poetry in spirituality, where poetry often catalyzes the spirit. Nor in eroticism, to which poetry often opens the door. But poetry in philosophy, poetry in science, and poetry in history—where poetry is often a stranger.

As such, *A Return to Eros* is not a book that will prove the return of Eros footnote by footnote. It is a book that generates the *feel* of Eros sentence by poetic sentence.

A Return to Eros does not fit into any recognizable genre. It is not pure scholarship even as it is scholarly. It is not self-help even as it inspires transformation. It is not religious in nature even as it offers visions that seek to unify the agnostic and the fundamentalist.

In fact, part of the delight of *A Return to Eros* is the element of surprise: Will we be treated to history or the future? To spiritual insight or scientific fact? To philosophy's sustainable gifts or to Gafni and Kincaid's reworking of those gifts toward the deepening of our future erotic wisdom?

When it comes to the future of love, sex, and Eros, what society often sees as black or white, the authors see in shades of gray. They invite us to confront our cognitive dissonance: "Puritanism lives side by side with promiscuity." Or: "We are not sure whether we are living in the golden age of sex or in a rape culture." The authors venture where others fear to tread: for instance, how we deal with rape of the body versus rape of a reputation should there be a false accusation. What is black and white to

some is a continuum for the authors: “Regret is not rape, and arousal is not consent . . .”

Yet still greater gifts of *A Return to Eros* are not in its surprises but in its weaving of diverse insights into a vision that is greater than the sum of its parts. The authors’ integration of the disciplines presents us with a tapestry that reweaves the source code of culture. We dance to the music of the tango that was sex and Eros and then listen for the tango that sex and Eros can become.

A Return to Eros, then, is paradoxical: It is both the return of Eros and the future of Eros. It is the return of love, sex, and Eros; and the future of love, sex, and Eros. It is about the history of religion’s constraints on sex, and about the history of religion’s lack of constraints on sex—especially how the esoterics’ embrace of sex forges the erotic and holy into one. As we discover religion’s esoterics embracing the erotic, we awaken our personal potential to heal our relationship with religion. It soon becomes no surprise when Gafni and Kincaid declare that *A Return to Eros* is all about sex and not at all about sex.

Although *A Return to Eros* is a return to the wisdom of Solomon’s temple, the Magdalene Mysteries, and Da Vinci, it is not a book about the past. Rather, it is a vision rooted in wisdoms forgotten from our past that inspire a more erotic future—what Gafni and Kincaid call a “memory of the future.”

All of this may make us yearn for simpler answers. But we recall Gafni’s warning: When simplicity falls short of reality, it leaves us feeling disappointed and disillusioned. *A Return to Eros* selects for readers who know that bringing the unconscious to the conscious level rewards us with the capacity to control our own lives—even if part of that control is the choice to “let go and let God.” And when we bring philosophies like “let go and let God” to the conscious level, we discover when we are using it to avoid responsibility. Eros, like golf, requires our taking control of the way we hit the ball even as we let go of control of the way we hit the ball. To Gafni and Kincaid, holding the paradox of Eros is a taste of paradise.

A Return to Eros considers “Eros to be the center of our reality . . . to live erotically *not merely in the sexual but in every facet of being.*” Their examination of the twelve faces of the Erotic, and of the many wrinkles

among those faces, is like being conscious of every drop in the next shower you take. The mere experience of considering every drop of the shower as if they were “all there is” will leave you feeling as enlivened as you will feel after reading *A Return to Eros*.

—Warren Farrell, PhD
Author, *The Myth of Male Power*
www.warrenfarrell.com

PREFACE

THE FUTURE OF LOVE, SEX, AND EROS

TOWARD A POST-TRAGIC SEXUAL POLITICS OF EROS

There are three primary levels of consciousness through whose prism we experience our lives. We will call these three levels the pre-tragic, tragic, and post-tragic.

Pre-tragic is the stage before tragedy. Life is good. Life is delightful. Life makes sense. It is ordered and reasonable. During the pre-tragic state we also experience pain and suffering, but our pain and suffering are not tragic. We are able to explain to ourselves and our intimates what happened. We might use religious, psychological, or scientific explanations. Explanation saves our suffering from being tragic.

The second level of consciousness is the tragic. The goodness of life is broken up by suffering, but we no longer feel able to explain it. The rules break down. Perhaps the suffering is more intense than any we have experienced before. Alternatively, our trust in the religions or philosophies of life that undergirded our explanations have been shaken, often

irrevocably. Our lives feel empty and meaningless, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”¹ We are overwhelmed by the tragic nature of life itself. We may continue to function, love, and even be highly effective achievers. But our joy mechanism is broken. We are cut off from the natural joy we once felt from the essential goodness and primal aliveness of life.

Most people live their lives at either level one or level two of consciousness, what we have here termed the pre-tragic and the tragic. Some people move from level one to level two as a result of lost trust in life, usually occasioned by a personal tragedy. Others move from pre-tragic to tragic because they are witness to the virtually unbearable suffering in the world. The laws and principles they had used to make sense of the world no longer seem sensible. Some individuals, after shifting to tragic consciousness, revert back to pre-tragic. This is either because they find some new, comforting explanation for their suffering (based on a superficial reworking of their old beliefs), or because they simply forget their experience of tragedy and fall back into their prior pre-tragic state.

But there is a third level that is available at the leading edge of consciousness. We call this level “post-tragic.” Here, the person or culture is able to once again participate in the elemental joy of living. This happens when the individual (or culture) is able to reconnect to the core Eros and aliveness of reality. In “A Dialogue of Self and Soul,” Yeats wrote of this third level, post-tragic consciousness, in the understated but raw Eros of his verse. Here is an example:

*When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing
We are blest by everything
Everything we look upon
Is blest.*

What causes the emergence of this third level of consciousness is always the deepening into what we might call emotional maturity or wisdom. Part of it may come from depth work that the person has done with his or her

own wounds. Another part comes from the maturity of letting go and letting God. Often the source is the evolution of a more poignant and potent worldview. But it always comes from some process of joyful deepening.

These same three levels of consciousness apply to the sexual. There is pre-tragic sexuality, tragic sexuality, and post-tragic sexuality. Pre-tragic sexuality has three major expressions:

- The first form of pre-tragic sexuality is purely animal sexuality—a physical, instinctual impulse unburdened by human values or narratives. This is the human attempt to partake in the purely animal mode of sexuality, which we will term “the sex-neutral narrative.” It does not work because it is basically regressive. While embracing the animal is essential for our sexuality, it is not enough. Most of us experience the sexual as being more than only physical.
- The second form of the pre-tragic sexual is sexuality defined by the laws, strictures, and taboos of religion. Sexuality is pre-tragic in this context because it is clear. Sex in every particular circumstance is either allowed and embraced or forbidden and rejected. Often the religious view is sex negative, but sometimes (for the sake of having children or even companionship), sex is considered positive or even sacred. But it is pre-tragic because it is fully understood. Sex has its place, its boundaries, and its permissions. All is explained. Everything is on firm ground. At this level of sexuality, we deploy law, culture, and taboo to sublimate the sexual and redirect its force to support our committed relationships. We further invest its power as the animating force in our cultural creations. At this level of consciousness, we feel the need to construct vessels of commitment that are sufficient to hold the raw, anarchic power and seductive beauty of the sexual. But this level remains pre-tragic because it is clear to us through laws and customs that are correct and therefore constitute the most right and righteous approach to the sexual.
- The third expression of pre-tragic sexuality is sex that occurred in the West during and in the years immediately following the

sexual revolution. Most of the old sexual ways were overturned. For most people, sex no longer needed to be tightly linked to marriage to make it proper and good. The contraceptive pill broke the causal link between sex and children. A new world was born. The sexual revolution gave us the sex-positive narrative. But it was pre-tragic because—like the sex-negative narrative—it boasted an uncomplicated clarity about sex. But all was not sweetness and light. The bland, pre-tragic, sex-positive narrative of the sexual revolution could not hold.

FROM PRE-TRAGIC TO TRAGIC SEX

Many of us today remain largely ensconced in pre-tragic sex. For some of us, that is because we are blithely positive about sex. Our arousal arouses in us virtually no ambivalence or complexity. Others remain pre-tragic because we live firmly within the boundaries of classical religious strictures around sexuality. Even if they are defined largely in their breach, the boundaries are clear. Our actions may be conflicted, but our frameworks remain cogent. We may be both sinners and saints, but we have a clear understanding of what it means to sin and what it means to be saintly.

But for a large swath of people in the Western world, pre-tragic sexuality is over. A second level of consciousness around sex has emerged. We have moved from the pre-tragic sexual to the tragic sexual. The sexual revolution gave way to a world in which sex is no longer innocent. Hidden issues of sexual abuse, sexual violence, and sexual harassment have come to the surface. On the one hand, there is a dramatic evolution of consciousness. A line is drawn in the culture that says, “No more harassment and no more violence.” Indeed, before the mid-1970s, even the words “sexual harassment” were not part of our lexicon and certainly not part of our laws. In the West the ascendancy of the feminine in education and in the workforce brought in its wake a vital new vigilance that says no to any form of sexual boundary-crossing that is not welcomed by both parties. This is an important step in healing the deep violation of the feminine that has characterized much of Western history.

And yet there is a loss of clarity around sexuality. With the loss of clarity comes a loss of innocence coupled with a new form of free-floating anxiety and even fear surrounding sex. We might even venture to say that there is a new puritanism in relationship to the sexual. The old sex-negative positions of religion seem to have covertly resurfaced in the campaigns against sexual harassment.

Now to be clear, we all agree that numerous forms of harassment and sexual violence were rampant in the pre-tragic sexual world. Even in the world of sexual revolution, sexual harassment remained a given. Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael famously remarked that the “right position for women in the Black Panthers is prone.” Marital rape was legal virtually everywhere. Rape in war was regarded as the spoils of the victors. Sexual enslavement of women of “inferior” culture or religion was common throughout the world. What we would today call sexual harassment or abuse was considered to be relatively normal.

Nonetheless, most men did not harass, were not sexually violent, did not rape, and did not abuse women. The horrific lack of legal strictures allowed the actions of a small minority of men to inflict great pain and to poison the sexual culture of the world. The evolution of love that raised consciousness and made all these forms of sexual violation unacceptable, both legally and socially, is a desperately necessary and long-overdue advance. But a strong fragrance of the old anti-sexual puritanism seems to have crept its way into today’s sexual discourse. Legal scholars and social critics alike have pointed out that in the early days of the war on sexual harassment, the core issue was harassment. As years went by, however, the emphasis shifted to the sexual. Major cases of significant harassment with no sexual component were let off the hook, while any case that had even a whiff of the sexual was treated with full severity. Sex, once again, was bad.

The anti-sexual theme is covert, sensed but not articulated in the public mind. This is where the move from pre-tragic to tragic begins to emerge. We no longer have a clear sexual narrative. We are confused by sexuality. We are not sure whether we are living in the golden age of sex or in a rape culture. Rape on campus, date rape, and confusion about what constitutes consent—what is yes and what is no—abound. Regret is

not rape, and arousal is not consent, yet all too often they are confused. The hook-up culture of emotionally unattached sex dominates the campus mythos, yet very few college students say they feel sexually fulfilled or liberated. Women feel prude-shamed for not being willing to hook up and then slut-shamed for hooking up.

The anti-sexual attitude is covert. In so many dimensions of our culture, puritanism lives side by side with promiscuity. How else might we explain the national obsession with sexual scandal, such as the affair between Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky? The insatiable appetite of Americans for sexual titillation, combined with the fascination with public degradation and shaming around sex, virtually demanded that newspapers—driven by the race for advertising dollars—cover the details of the scandal more than any other event in the world for a period of nearly two years.

Today there are no clear guidelines and even fewer clear values regarding sex. It is true that we're seeing a long-overdue and welcome increase in sexual ethics. We have significantly less tolerance for all varieties of sexual harassment and violence. Yet the new sexual ethics are not rooted in a new sexual ethos. There is no sexual narrative that both dignifies and eroticizes our lives.

Hardly anyone is really happy with sex. If they are, it's only in the first wave of the sexual encounter when the passion is high and the egos are low. After that, most everyone feels like they are not quite getting enough, getting it right, or getting to move on when they are ready. And if they are getting some, they suspect it should be better than it is. Most everyone is quietly convinced that it is so much better for everybody else. Everyone is obsessed with that mythical couple, living somewhere in New Jersey, who are madly in love and having great sex after two decades of marriage. No one, of course, has ever met them, but reported sightings regularly crop up in magazines, talk shows, and self-help books. We live with the rampant dissatisfaction produced by the great tease of sexual satisfaction, which for the first time in history seems to be democratized. Everyone feels entitled, but virtually no one feels fulfilled.

SEXUAL SHADOWS

But if all that were not enough, sex is also a big-time killer. Men are raping men and killing men over sex. Men are killing women in domestic violence scenes. In the world arena, men still use sex in war to break down the social order and humiliate their enemies. While the term “rape culture” has been powerfully critiqued, more than a million rapes occur every year, leaving irrevocable damage on the lives of women and men. There is a powerful and important literature that suffuses culture which calls men out on this particular form of masculine shadow.

But don’t think that women are off the hook. The feminine shadow has women killing men over sex. According to extensive rigorous data, gathered by leading cultural critics Cathy Young and Warren Farrell, the level of domestic violence inflicted by women on men is equal to that inflicted by men on women. The literature of abuse reminds us that women are also killing men in domestic violence scenes. At its heart, virtually all domestic violence is connected to wounds around sexuality. Women also engage in what has been described alternatively as social murder or name rape. The early feminists were right when they said that the rape of a name is also rape. For example, to be falsely accused of rape or sexual assault, and to have those kinds of accusations disseminated over the internet, where lies live forever, is a devastating experience. In this tragic scenario, name rape is reenacted every day online. We interviewed women who had been raped and also had brothers, sons, or partners who were subject to this kind of severe name rape. According to these women—all with powerful feminist sensibilities—both are equally egregious.

Often false sexual complaints cluster together when a group of women (or men in the more classical lynch mob) bypass structures of investigation and justice in order to socially murder someone. For example, groups of women who feel rejected and hurt—finding out, as feminist writer Jessica Roemischer writes, “that they are not the only one”—may get together and use false or distorted accusations of sexual misconduct to socially kill a man.

In the internet age, disaffected people find each other more easily. Sometimes that is constructive and positive, specifically when the

disaffected have been genuinely victimized. At other times, however, people who gather together via the internet and other social structures manifest more of a moblike energy or group-think mentality. They incite each other's anger. Facts and ulterior motives are never checked or cross-checked and social lynching takes place on the web.

Malice is not limited to males. There is masculine shadow and feminine shadow. Feminist writer Hanna Rosin devotes a chilling chapter in her book *The End of Men* to feminine violence. Feminist writers like Daphne Patai, Katie Roiphe, Laura Kipnis, and Christina Hoff Sommers have long warned of the growing phenomenon of false sexual complaints by women. Of course the sexual shadows at play which generate malice are often hidden. As Milan Kundera reminded us, "malice can never admit to itself so it must plead other motives." As Patai and other writers point out, name rape hides its true intention under the veneer of victim advocacy. The perpetrator is usually disguised either as a victim or as a rescuer who is "protecting other women." There is always some politically correct formula used to cover up wounded ego and genuine hurt, which get lethally mixed with the often strange bedfellows of malice, envy, self-interest, and self-protection. The fig leaf of relatively minor sexual hurt in the normal arc of human relationships often masks the infliction of lethal hurt that is exponentially more destructive by many orders. All of this is part of the confusion of sexuality's tragic phase.

The confusion itself is the source of much of our devastation. It is the loss of clarity that moves us from pre-tragic to tragic sex. The tragic sexual leaves so many mortally wounded in its wake. There is so much pain from something that should be the source of so much pleasure.

All of these phenomena that are rampant in our culture are expressions of the tragic sexual. But that is just the tip of the iceberg. We have not even begun to explore the super complex territory of monogamy, the myth of the white picket fence, polyamory, open marriage, betrayal in its many forms, the great controversy surrounding "recovered" memories, post-facto reinterpretations of old sexual experience, the claims of rape culture, and the list goes on and on. And anyone who, God forbid, does not want the same kind of sex that the majority approves of is in big trouble. Same-sex couples struggle, transgendered couples struggle, and

anyone with any kind of alternative sexual drive has a rough start even before the pleasure actually begins and ends. The confusion around all of these issues is simply an expression of level-two tragic sexuality.

There is more than a little that is tragic in the contemporary sexual landscape. We are not sure about anything. Either God is more than slightly sadistic with a significant interest in teasing and even torturing us through the ordeal of sex or in some mysterious way it is the essential key to this whole life journey. We are not sure. Our lack of clarity drains our energy, robs us of passion, saps our vitality, and de-eroticizes our lives.

Given all of the above, along with the fact that our yearning for great sex is such a desperate and central issue in our lives, it stands to reason that the divine designer who set up this ultimate tease must be a flaming asshole. Or worse still, there is no designer, all is random and chance, and there is no “true north” or meaning in our sexuality. It will always be this hopelessly confused. That is the tragic view.

Or, possibility two: the inherent intelligence of the self-organizing universe totally and absolutely rocks. The love intelligence of the cosmos so desires our good that she wanted to place the deepest wisdom necessary to navigate our lives with power and passion right in the center of our experience—in the heart of our sexuality—just to make sure we did not miss it. That’s why all wisdom about life was encoded in the sexual. That realization moves us toward the post-tragic view of sexuality.

FROM THE TRAGIC TO POST-TRAGIC SEXUAL

We are lost in the tragic sexual, searching for a new narrative. We long for a return to sexual innocence. Not a pre-tragic innocence but a post-tragic innocence. We yearn to re-virginate. We are not seeking sexual license as much as we desperately yearn for a return to Eros. We yearn to live the erotic life. We want to live in an erotic society. To return to Eros, we need a new sexual narrative. Core to this new narrative must be a precise and potent understanding of the relationship between the sexual and the erotic. Are they the same or are they different? If they are different, how do

they interact with one another? Could it be that our sexuality is collapsing because we have lost contact with Eros? Could it be that when we look to sex to fulfill all of our erotic needs, sex collapses under the weight of a burden that it cannot possibly bear? Is our confused pathos around the sexual actually rooted in the urgent need for a new sexual narrative that clarifies the shocking relationship among the erotic, the sexual, and the sacred?

Until such a narrative emerges, we will weirdly vacillate between being puritans and libertines on alternative days or even during different hours of the same day. We are politically correct during the day while yearning to be sexually incorrect at night. Sexual anthropologist Esther Perel reminds us, somewhat sardonically, that we often demonstrate in daytime against the kinds of sexuality that we yearn for at night. We need a new post-tragic story of sex and Eros.

BEYOND MARCUSE AND BROWN: A RETURN TO EROS

Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown are the two great social philosophers who, in the latter half of the twentieth century, sought to reclaim a vision of Eros that might form the basis of a new human and a new society. But both of them lacked a sufficiently potent worldview from which that new vision of Eros could emerge. Marcuse was lost in the neo-Marxist restructuring of society, which failed to honor the potential, creative Eros of free markets and an emergent conscious capitalism. Brown sought to reclaim a regressive Dionysian innocence by recovering key stands in Freud's more mythical thinking, while recasting and rejecting still other dimensions of Freud.

Today it is clear that whatever their crucial contributions, neither neo-Marxism nor psychoanalysis is the fertile ground from which a new erotic worldview will arise.

In this work it has been our tender and audacious intention to articulate just such a new erotic worldview. We tried to tell a new story about sex whose subplot is the powerful relationship among the sexual, the erotic, and the sacred. We retold the story of love, distinguishing between

outrageous and ordinary love. We articulated a new meta meme: The Universe is a Love Story. We are convinced that this worldview is a sufficient basis to catalyze a return to Eros and a sexual narrative that is an affront to shame. Our vision of Eros is rooted in a spiritual, mystical, scientific, evolutionary worldview, which understands that all of reality is allurements, and which experiences the sexual as an expression of the erotic evolutionary impulse that moves all of reality. In this worldview, rooted in the best science and spirituality available on the planet at this moment in time, the sexual is the seat of all wisdom.

In this new narrative, Eros is not merely ordinary love, which human egos deploy as a strategy to achieve security and status. Rather, Eros is the outrageous love, which moves the sun and the stars, which is the very heart of existence itself. When we awaken to the Eros of evolution alive within us, we awaken as outrageous lovers. Our model for outrageous love is none other than the sexual itself. The sexual models the erotic; it does not exhaust the erotic. The erotic and the holy are one. This is the core of the post-tragic narrative of sexuality that will allow us to move beyond the pervasive sexual shame that covertly suffuses our culture and is the root of so much suffering and pain. This new sexual narrative is the necessary basis of a new sexual politics of Eros that has the potency and power to take us all home.

SOURCES FOR THE NEW NARRATIVE

We draw the new narrative from several sources. Systems theory, evolutionary theory, and science are crucial sources. Various schools of psychology, integral theory, attachment theory, and the social sciences all contribute significantly. But the core wellspring from which we drink is a great Hebrew mystery tradition. Mysteries are meant to remain esoteric, secret. Therefore, allow us to share with you why in our generation it is both permitted and even a sacred obligation to share these mysteries.

We live in an age when ancient wisdoms, long relegated to the basements of the spirit, are being reclaimed. The Zohar, the magnum opus of Hebrew mysticism, teaches that our era is the one in which the “gates of

wisdom will be opened.” For the first time, after several eons of intense spiritual evolution, we have the vessels to hold the light of the ancient secrets. The mystics suggest that we may well be able to hold the light more deeply today than even the ancients for whom the wisdom was initially intended. It is only now, after the vessels of law, science, and ethics have been integrated into our psyches, that we can go back and fully reclaim Eros and enchantment. It is in the service of the great Hebrew Goddess of Eros (Shechinah) that we enter the mysteries.

We, the co-authors of *Return to Eros*, are—or at least aspire to be—erotic mystics. We study, teach, and try to live the sacred erotic texts in our lives. The think tank of which we, Marc and Kristina, are, respectively, president and board director, is committed to envisioning and evolving the future of Eros in every field of human endeavor. The Outrageous Love Project (www.OutrageousLove.com) and the Integral Evolutionary Tantra School (www.IntegralEvolutionaryTantra.com) are two projects that emerged from the Center, which we were delighted to cofound. Both projects are committed to articulating a next-stage vision of Eros and ethics, which humbly and audaciously evolve the source code of culture and consciousness.

The Hebrew mystery texts on Eros, as well as those of other spiritually incorrect traditions, have been our guides and friends for many years. Of course, like all mystics who engage sacred wisdom, we hear the text in accord with the inner melody of our souls. We now share this song with you in the form of this book. You are invited to find the place in your soul where you can receive and integrate this ancient wisdom into your own song.

Let this be not a monologue but a sacred conversation. Share with us your words, your thoughts, the poetry of your soul, and we will be honored to receive at AReturnToEros.com.

With all the outrageous love and blessings in the world and beyond,

Dr. Marc Gafni and Dr. Kristina Kincaid
Carmel, California
New York, New York

PART ONE

**THE COSMO-
EROTIC
UNIVERSE**

CHAPTER ONE

A NEW SEXUAL NARRATIVE

If you stop to think even for a short moment, you realize that sex really is the great mystery of our lives. This is truer today than it was in any previous generation. For we have lost the story line of meaning around our sexuality. There are four basic stories about sex that we have inherited in our culture, and none of them addresses our sexual experience. These hand-me-down narratives can loosely be labeled as sex negative, sex positive, sex neutral, and sex sacred.

SEX NEGATIVE

The sex-negative narrative is articulated in our culture to prevent us from having sex. They tell us, of course, that it is for our own protection. According to this narrative, sex is somehow wrong, immoral, or sinful. The spokespeople for sex negative are quite potent. Even when we think we have gotten free of them, they pop up again inside our hearts or heads, wagging their fingers disapprovingly. Even if we have successfully removed them from our minds and psyches, they still show up in the way our bodies respond and behave. And, of course, 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 us into—emotionally, psychologically, personally, professionally, and physically. It's all the fault of sex.

You have to admit that the sexual renunciates and conservatives have a point. If you want to keep life simple, clean, and orderly, foregoing or limiting the sexual experience might be an excellent decision. If you like spiritual exercises—and you are up for it—take a few minutes and write down all the times sex got you into trouble in any or all of the above areas. We predict you will probably generate quite a list.

Lots of religious and conventional moralists fall into the sex-negative category. Religion typically affirms love and passion as virtues but divorces them entirely from sex. Moralist religion works hard to erect boundaries that will protect us from the pitfalls of our sexuality.

But the sex-negative narrative, while it certainly has a point, clearly does not fully capture our experience of the sexual. While we all know that sex requires a dimension of discipline—context and commitment matter for sure—most of us know in our hearts that the moralists are wrong and that sex is ultimately, and overwhelmingly, good. And it's not merely a side benefit of (or a tool for achieving) a loving relationship. As the fourteenth-century Zen master Ikkyu observed:

*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.*

SEX POSITIVE

This brings us to the second story about sex that we hear in our culture: the sex-positive narrative. This story is told by a powerful coalition of forces talking about sex. This group tells us, "Sex is wonderful. If liberated, it's the panacea for all ills; if repressed, it's the source of all dysfunction." Sexual revolutionaries, Freudians in disguise, along with

many other intelligent folk and proponents of schools of modern psychology, work hard to strip sex of anything remotely spiritual or even emotional. They want to liberate sex from love, from Eros, and from the myriad existential and emotional complexities. To these individuals, sex is simply positive.

Truth be told, Freud himself was the most influential modern cheerleader at this party. Rooted in a hydraulic model of the psyche, which slightly confuses human beings and steam engines, he taught us that if we could just find a way to release sexual tension in a balanced way, we would be healthy and happy. The problem with this narrative is that, though we may be having much more sex, we are not feeling much more positive.

In fact, after engaging in all of the sex that so many generations thought would signal heaven on earth, we are shocked to find that the same feelings of alienation, depression, and emptiness still plague us. Okay—hydraulic equilibrium achieved—what are we supposed to feel when the sexual revolution failed to bring us any closer to liberation? We remain mired in suffering, just as before.

SEX NEUTRAL

This brings us to the third sexual narrative: sex is neither positive nor negative. The third sexual story is the sex-neutral narrative. This story was articulated by a host of sex researchers, perhaps most prominent the highly controversial, but highly impactful, Alfred Kinsey. Kinsey's father was a fundamentalist Christian who raised his son squarely in the sex-negative camp. Kinsey rebelled, however. Receiving his PhD in biology from Harvard, he argued that sex is simply a neutral biological mechanism. He sought, in both his personal and professional life, to completely disinhibit sex from any sense of being either negative or positive. For Kinsey and the sexual story he put into our culture, sex—all forms of it without exception—is simply biology. "So let's get over all of these inhibitions. Why all the fuss about it anyway?"

The problem with this third narrative is that, like the sex-negative philosophy, it does not fully capture our sexual experience. Sex just does

not feel neutral to us. Having sex and having dinner just are not the same. But that's not all. The more neutral we make sex, and the more we make it available, like food, the less satisfied we are. Uninhibited sex is available in infinite variety in almost every imaginable social or commercial context, and yet we do not seem any the better for it. So much sex and so little pleasure. So many orgasms and so little fulfillment.

A few decades ago, a sociologist named David Riesman called sex “the last frontier.” If this is true, then we have crossed it and found it wanting. Psychologists report that patients rarely complain about sexual dysfunction or repression anymore (what seemed to be the most common complaint in the days of Freud). Rather, the malaise of our time is the lack of feeling or passion and a disconnect between sex and spirit. Sex is all around, and yet it is hard to tell whether anyone is truly enhanced by it. Indeed, no one even seems to be really enjoying themselves—at least not in any sort of sustained manner.

T. S. Eliot describes this state of affairs in his epic poem “The Waste Land”:

*She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;*

Eliot speaks of the hidden alienation from the sexual even after the Church's sexual mores have been overturned.

*Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass;
“Well, now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.”*

The alienation sets in the moment it's over, surfacing our discomfort with our own sexing.

*When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,*

We pace—unable to rest in what should be the aftertaste—our confusion around sex darkening what should have been the afterglow.

*She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.*

SEX SACRED

The fourth sexual story, often deployed as a counter to the sex-neutral narrative, is sex sacred. Rooted in certain strains of the great religions, this narrative claims that sex is not negative, neutral, or even positive. Rather, it is holy. The evidence of sex's holiness, the sex-sacred story, is taken to be self-evident. Sex creates life, life is holy, therefore sex is holy.

That is a pretty good argument as far as it goes. But again, it does not address our full experience of sexuality. Just ask yourself: is most of the sex that you have for the sake of procreation? For most people, most of the time, most of their sex has nothing to do with making babies. So to root the sex-sacred narrative in sex for babies just does not speak to the truth of our full sexual lives. Besides all of that, are we really sure what we mean when we talk about sex or anything else as sacred or holy? We know it means that sex is not just neutral or even merely positive. But what does "sacred" really mean, anyway?

A NEW SEXUAL NARRATIVE: SEX EROTIC

So although all four of the sexual narratives contain some elemental validity, they are, at best, true but incomplete. They each may be spiritually and politically correct in their respective cultural space, but they do not address our deepest knowing and yearnings about sex.

We need a new sexual narrative. We need a new story. Enter the philosophy of sex erotic. This fifth sexual story, the one that addresses most fully our sexual experience, is that sex is indeed sacred but not only when it creates children. Sex is not sacred only because it creates life. Sex is sacred because it *is* life. Sex is the very pulse of life itself. Sex is the fundamental nature of all existence. Therefore, sex is the ultimate guide to

living in alignment with all of reality. Let us call this new sexual narrative “sex erotic.”

If sex is life, then naturally sex is the seat of all wisdom about life. Sex is not only our great delight and pleasure—sex is our ultimate teacher about living. For life itself is, at its core, Eros.

SEX MODELS EROS

The paradox of this book is that it is all about sex and not about sex at all. Sex is life. But if we are only alive in our sex, then we are already dead. By contrast, being fully alive in the sexual models for us what it means to be radically alive in every facet of life. The experience of being radically alive is called Eros. To be fully alive in every dimension of your life is what it means to live an erotic life.

That is why we have termed the new sexual narrative “sex erotic.” Sex erotic suggests that sex and Eros are not to be collapsed synonyms. Sex and Eros are different but closely related terms. Sex is sex. Eros is the radical aliveness that animates and drives all of reality. The new sexual narrative of sex erotic informs us of two great truths. First, that sex is the expression of the evolutionary Eros that animates and drives all of reality, awake and alive in us. Second, that sex models for us what it means to live in Eros in every facet of our existence.

The purpose of this book is to articulate the new sexual narrative. Sex is neither negative nor neutral nor merely positive. Sex is not even just sacred because it creates life. The new narrative is that sex is life. That’s why our aliveness is most directly accessed through sex. To be sexual is to be alive, and to be alive is to be sexual, but our basic yearning is not just to be fully alive during sex but also to be radically alive in all parts of our life. It is this voice of authentic yearning that is our most reliable spiritual guide. To be radically alive in every part of our life is what it means to live in Eros.

What, then, is the relationship of sex to Eros? The answer is as profound as it is simple: sex models Eros. But sex does not exhaust Eros. Sex models what it means to live an erotic life in every arena of your

engagement. To be radically alive means much more than simply being sexual. To be erotic only in sex is to live a deadened life of quiet desperation. Sex erotic implies that sex—when it is lived in its fullest form—incarnates Eros even as it models Eros. Sex erotic teaches us how to live in Eros, not only in sex but also in all the nonsexual dimensions of our lives. That is what it means to live an erotic life.

Eros is aliveness. Aliveness occurs as *you*, when the energy of reality awakens in you and through you. Eros is the vitality that pulses through our atomic structure, making our protons and electrons dance in perpetual ecstasy. Eros is the passion that makes our cells and atoms yearn for each other, always allured and constantly sexing. Eros is what makes us want to dance. Eros is—very literally—what transforms a relationship from a strategy for security to an event of cosmic significance. You can be sexually active and in relationship and remain profoundly lonely. It is only when you realize that your own attractions and allurements participate in the attraction and allurements that is the very structure of the cosmos that you begin to live an erotic life.

In the lived sensuality of an erotic life, loneliness makes no sense. Loneliness is the opposite of Eros and aliveness. Eros is wholeness and interconnectivity. It is the essential nature of a cosmos whose core truth might well be: reality is relationship. It is only when you realize that reality is relationship and that your relationship is part of the grand cacophony of relationship at every level of the cosmos that you truly transcend loneliness.

When you really get the scientific truth that your erotic autobiography is an intended outcome of the love intelligence of reality, then you begin to be at home in your life. The scientific reality of your radical uniqueness is shocking when you really get it. You have an irreducibly unique atomic and cellular signature. The extent and precision of your intricate uniqueness is made clearer every day with new studies and evidence. Your level of dazzling uniqueness intuitively implies intention. When you know that you are personally addressed and intended, you fall in love with your life. Your heart beats faster, and your eyes open wider. You realize that the ache of your wetness or the throbbing of your fullness is reality awake as you. The truly alive person does not know the ennui

of boredom. Everything is fascinating to the person who is truly alive. It matters not whether it's a piercing pain, a moment of pleasure, a bucket of grief, or a glimpse of beauty.²

THE MEANING OF EROS

Eros is the principle of aliveness and magic inherent in all of reality. Something infinitely real animates everything. Reality is realness, which is another way of saying Eros or aliveness. Everything radiates an intense aliveness. The intensification of aliveness is the natural result of living an erotic life. Most people have had the experience of visiting a place and finding it vibrating with aliveness, color, and immediacy. Some years later they may visit the same place again and find it drab and dreary. Most likely it is not the place that has changed, but the person. Beauty is always in the eye of the beholder. When your eyes are alive, then the hills are alive. When your eyes are asleep, then even the most beautiful vista is deadened.

Our lives are a search for passionate aliveness. Our lives are a search for Eros. We remember well Eros lost. Until we are able to recover Eros, we are filled with an inconsolable longing that can be healed by no external balm.

We hunger for the depths of aliveness, for it is only from those depths that we are capable of love. It is only in the quivering of aliveness that we are capable of being all we can be. That is what it means to be holy. The opposite of holy is not unholy. The opposite of holy is superficial. The holy is the real. We long for what is real. That is why we yearn with all of our being to return to Eros.

NOT SYNONYMOUS

When we talk about Eros or the erotic, we suffer from any number of confusions. There's an important relationship between the erotic and the sexual, but as we said above, they're not the same thing. Eros is the essential aliveness of reality—it's the experience of being on the inside, like

when you're running and at some point you break through and you're in the zone or the inside of experience.

There is a fullness of presence in Eros and a feeling that your yearning participates in the evolutionary yearning of being. In Eros you have a felt experience that you are not separate; you experience your own interconnectivity with the larger context, with the wholeness of it all. All blessings flow from Eros. The goodness of life, the color in a black-and-white world, and all ethics flow through the channels of Eros. The loss of Eros is the failure of ethics. Creativity, intimacy and relationship, politics, economics—nothing moves without the erotic. When there's a disconnect from Eros, systems begin to break down both in the world of the personal and in the world of the collective.

When you feel fully alive, when you are in Eros, there is no question about the meaning of life. When you are in Eros, there is no question about the essential goodness of life. When you live in Eros, life is self-evidently meaningful and obviously good. Here is an example of how sex models Eros: when you are on the edge of orgasm, you are on the inside of life—yearning, totally present, ultimately connected, lost in the experience, and yet most radically your Unique Self. When you are in Eros, you have no questions about the meaning of life. You are life.

At the edge of sexual explosion, you do not stop in the middle to contemplate philosophical issues or life's meaning, nor do you question the natural goodness of life. You are fully alive and fully in it. In fact, those five qualities—living on the inside, fullness of presence, yearning, wholeness and interconnectivity, and the experience of your unique identity—are the first five of the twelve faces of Eros that we will be exploring in this book. "Sex models Eros" means that sex models the experience of being on the inside, fully present and connected, deeply yearning, and ultimately yourself, in every facet of your life.

ANCIENT ARTICULATIONS

For ancient articulations of this new sexual narrative, we turn to the hidden wisdom of the spiritually incorrect masters. These masters taught

the esoteric traditions of all the great systems of spirit. They are the erotic mystics. The esoteric name for this tradition in the earlier sources is “the Secret of the Cherubs.” We will meet the cherubs formally in chapter three. For now, a brief introduction will suffice.

The cherubs are two figures that live atop the Ark of the Covenant in Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem. According to the sacred text, the voice of God “speaks from between the two cherubs.” What is not known other than to initiates in the esoteric tradition is that these two cherubs are locked in ecstatic sexual embrace. The voice of God speaks from between the sexually entwined cherubs.

The spiritually incorrect Tantric masters were not limited to the Hebrew mystics. They appeared in different guises in all the great traditions. Their true teachings were always esoteric, hidden from public access. Only the initiates truly understood their radical intention. These masters are called the Kabbalists in Judaism, and the Tantric masters in Hinduism and Buddhism. Rumi and Hafiz in Sufism were initiates, as were the Cathars in mystical Christianity. One master of the Zen tradition was named Ikkyu. Mary Magdalene was a master in the hidden Christian tradition. We add to these ancient traditions a vital modern wisdom tradition that we will refer to as Evolutionary Spirituality. This contemporary wisdom lineage is rooted in evolutionary science, systems science, modern physics, biology, chaos theory, and complexity theory. (More about Evolutionary Spirituality in later chapters.)

Veiled in all of these great traditions is a hidden, subversive, mystical teaching. It is either ignored or reinterpreted to avoid its full implications. The great teachers were literally killed, socially murdered, or otherwise sidelined from positions of influence. They were destroyed because the fear of Eros overwhelmed both the goodness of Eros and the wisdom of Eros.

The ancient religions, in their public teachings, sought to impose a measure of order and stability on the ignorant masses. To do so, sex had to be controlled before anything else. This is the legitimate reason for the sex-negative teaching of the great religions. Today, what we need most desperately, however, is not to control sex. Rather, we need to reinvest our sex with a meaning and purpose that is equal to the central role that sex plays in our lives. We have killed all the gods except for Aphrodite,

the goddess of sex. It is in the sexual that we still hear the murmuring of the sacred. But we cannot quite make out the words. We need to articulate a new sexual story. We need a story that invests not only our sex but all of our life with fresh aliveness and a new plot line of meaning.

The source of this narrative is in the spiritually incorrect teachings, which understood implicitly that embedded in the sexual, in the full panoply of its gorgeous and graphic detail, is all that is holy, all that is wise, and all that is good. The masters of spiritually incorrect Tantra viewed the sexual act itself as the great wisdom mystery reflecting all the deepest truths of the spirit. In a world torn apart by fanatic fundamentalisms and insipid liberalisms, we need a new teaching that all of us can recognize and take home.

Contrary to conventional religion and much of psychology, the post-conventional, spiritually incorrect Tantric masters insisted that sex is integrally related 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—and this is the heart of the secret—because the sexual is the ultimate model for Eros and love. The erotic and the holy are one. In every ethical sexual encounter, one can create an energetic container for the sacred, for opening up fully and absolutely into the radical aliveness and love that are already there. The sexual in all of her intricate detail is a most potent teacher, ripping us open, if we will but let her, to the radical fullness of spirit that seeks our pleasure and goodness.

One thirteenth-century Kabbalist put it this way: “Whoever has not desired a woman is like an ass and even less than an ass, for it is from the sexual one understands divine service.”³

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 . . .*

And just in case he was being too subtle, and to avoid being piously misinterpreted, Ikkyu continues:

*Stilted koans and convoluted answers are all monks have,
Pandering endlessly to officials and rich patrons.
Good friends of the Dharma, so proud, let me tell you,
A brothel girl in gold brocade is worth more than any of you,*

*Emerging from the world's grime, a puritan saint is still nowhere
near a Buddha.
Enter a brothel and Great Wisdom will explode upon you.
Manjushri should have let Ananda enjoy himself in the whorehouse –
Now he will never know the joys of elegant love play.*

Sex stands as the ultimate symbol, both signifying and actually modeling the sacred wisdom, which 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 that make up most of our lives. The sexual is in the hidden teaching of the spiritually incorrect Tantric masters. It is the ultimate spiritual master. Thus, 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, sexual technique is technical at best. Sexual technique can never make you a great lover. You can only be a great lover if you are fully alive. 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, the great German philosopher, got something right when he said, “The degree and kind of man’s sexuality reaches up into the topmost summit of his spirit.”

SEX IS THE ANSWER

Is there anything except sex that so grabs our rapt attention; incessantly pursues us; and occupies our daydreams, fantasies, and yearnings? The

mystics are just stating the obvious when they say that, with sex, God is trying to GET OUR ATTENTION. “Hello . . . over here! Pay attention!” Now we are not talking about the God who sends good people to burn in hell because they slipped up on one of his impossible demands. Nor even the Grandfather in heaven who hands out chocolate to do-gooders. Forget that God. The God you don’t believe in doesn’t exist. Rather, the God that exists for us is the personal, erotic life force that courses through reality and knows our name. The God we believe in is the vitality of an intelligent Eros that initiates, animates, and drives all of reality and addresses us personally. The God we believe in is the force for healing and transformation in the world. The God who knows our name is the God who so clearly calls out to us that sex is the answer.

When religion splits us off from our sexuality, we correctly intuit that something is deeply askew. But sex is not a panacea. Sex is not a drug that will soothe away the lurking feeling of ennui and that this cannot be all there is. Good orgasms will not a good life make. Sex is also not merely neutral or simply sacred because it is the method of procreation. Rather, sex is the answer as a model and not as the sum total of all Eros, holiness, and wisdom. Sex, if we will but listen, is a great master of the spirit—better than any guru, psychologist, rabbi, or priest. Sex can teach us how to reclaim the erotic in every nonsexual aspect and element of our lives. For Eros is not sex. The sexual models the erotic; it does not exhaust the erotic.

EROTIC AND NONEROTIC SEX

When we say that sex models Eros, we are not talking about the merely sexual. We are talking about erotic sex. The merely sexual involves a few pathetic grunts, maybe an occasional kiss and nice word, the titillation of the narrow section of the genitals for a few minutes at the most, and a brief fleeting pleasure at climax. If you are lost in mere sex, then you will never penetrate and never be penetrated.

We all know that titillation of the sexual instruments feels good. That is not, however, the sum total of Eros. Superficial feeling good is for

people who are afraid of the full divine power of the erotic sexual. When the sexual awakens as the erotic sexual, it takes on an entirely different quality of power, potency, and pleasure. Sex is not a path unless it cracks you open to the divine.

People cling to the outside of the sexual, to breasts and pallid orgasms, because they are afraid to open up to the full power of Eros. It is the fear of Eros that keeps most people fixated on pathetic titillation. Sex invites us to be open as love. Not as ordinary love but as outrageous love. Outrageous love is Eros. The Hebrew mystics teach together with Ikkyu that the universe in every second is always making love. The Kabbalists call it *zivug*. In this world, the incarnation of that divine movement, the perpetual divine lovemaking, is not ordinary sex but erotic sex. Enter into the inside of sex, and you will find God, the sacred lover and gorgeous, divine paramour of the cosmos. The inside of sex is outrageous love. The inside of sex is Eros.

ORDINARY LOVE AND OUTRAGEOUS LOVE

Understanding the distinction between ordinary and outrageous love is the doorway to all that is magical and mysterious both in the cosmos and in life. We need to realize that Sex with a capital S is a love story. Not an ordinary love story, but an outrageous love story, an erotic love story. Because outrageous love is Eros. It is the radical aliveness and purpose that animates and drives all reality on every level of creation, all the way up and all the way down. Ordinary love is an experience of the human personality, which feels separate from all that is, grasping for some measure of security and comfort. Ordinary love is a strategy of the ego desperately fleeing the feeling of lonely desperation.

The Bengali mystic Tagore alluded to the distinction between ordinary and outrageous love when he said, “Love is not mere human sentiment but the heart of existence itself.” The love that he called “mere human sentiment” is what we are referring to as ordinary love. The love that he calls “the heart of existence” is what we are calling outrageous love, or Eros.

The mystics of the Kabbalah called ordinary love “the love after creation.” They called outrageous love “the love before creation.” Love after creation is in reaction. It is all too often culturally conditioned and imposed. Love before creation is what the great writer Dante called *l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stele*, “the love that moves the sun and the other stars.” It is the love that moved the Infinite to manifest reality in the explosion of the big bang. It is the love that is the evolutionary impulse driving all reality to higher and higher levels of consciousness and love.

Ordinary love is valid and good, but it is a strategy of the ego. It is a legitimate and even necessary human experience. It may win you comfort and some measure of illusory security, but ordinary love cannot take you home. Home is the experience that there is no place to go because you have already arrived. Home is when you stop seeking the meaning of life because it becomes outrageously self-evident. Home is when you fall in love with your life anew every day. Home is the knowing that every place you go you are being carried. Only outrageous love takes you home. Outrageous love is the dance of allurements and attractions at the very subatomic level of existence. Outrageous love is the ceaseless, ecstatic, creative pulsation that drives the entire process of emergence. Outrageous love is the field of allurements, at every level of reality—from atom, to plant, to animal, to human—that holds all creation together.

But outrageous love can become part of your human experience. Living becomes extraordinary when we access outrageous love in the course of what we like to call ordinary life. When you love your beloved not merely as an unconscious strategy of ego but as an expression of the Eros of existence, outrageous love is awakened in you, and your entire experience of life changes. When you hold your beloved's hand with ordinary love, your hand gets clammy rather quickly. You can't quite find the right position, and soon you want to unclasp. When you hold your beloved's hand with outrageous love, you feel like all is perfect and you want the moment to last forever.

Another scenario. Your baby is crying. Pick up the baby with the hands of ordinary love, and the baby continues to cry and fidget, often more intensely than before. But pick up the baby with outrageous love, and the baby literally melts into you. The crying naturally recedes, and the

baby falls into a profound and deep state of rest. The infant has been lifted up into the lap of Eros, and she knows it. You feel the bliss of her resting in the depth of your being, which is the Eros of existence—outrageous love itself. This shift inside you, from emptiness to Eros, from ordinary love to outrageous love, is the change that changes everything.

When the very Eros of existence is awakened in you, you are awakened as outrageous love. You become an outrageous lover. You begin to live an erotic life. Sex transforms from the pitiful grasping for fleeting fulfillment that is not working for virtually anyone, to something else entirely. Sex is revealed as the potent prose and poetry of reality itself, incarnate as your body and your desire. Sex is revealed as the love story of all of reality, happening in and as you. Sex is revealed as the source of all wisdom, pointing us toward the erotic and the holy in every dimension of life. It is a virtuous circle. Sex models Eros. You begin to live the erotic life in every dimension of your nonsexual life. As you re-eroticize your life, you are personally transformed. At the same time, regular sex transforms into erotic sex. Ordinary sex becomes outrageous sex.

SEX: A LOVE STORY

We need to realize that sex is a love story—not an ordinary love story, but an outrageous love story. An erotic love story. Outrageous love is Eros. Ordinary love is legitimate, but it is limited in the gift it can give you. In this world, that incarnation of the divine movement called outrageous love is the perpetual divine lovemaking. Participate in that perpetual movement of reality's lovemaking through your body and the result is not ordinary sex, but outrageous erotic sex. Enter into the inside of sex and you will find God, the sacred lover and gorgeous divine slut of the Cosmos. The inside of sex is outrageous love. The inside of sex is outrageous Eros. The qualities of Eros are the qualities of the sacred; the erotic and the holy are one. The goal is to re-eroticize all of your life, and your teacher and your guide is the sexual, the seat of all wisdom.

In the upcoming chapters through the end of part two, we will explore in depth the Secret of the Cherubs. At the heart of the secret is the new

sexual narrative: sex erotic. These chapters form the essence of the Secret of the Cherubs. Parts three, four, and five will explore the twelve faces of Eros—erotic qualities that are, at the same time, characteristics of Eros and paths to Eros.

Each face of Eros is an expression of a different texture of radical aliveness. When all of these awaken in you, you are living an erotic life. Each face is a portal through which to return to Eros. The twelve faces are:

- The First Face: Interiority: Living on the Inside
- The Second Face: Fullness of Presence
- The Third Face: Yearning and Desire
- The Fourth Face: Wholeness and Interconnectivity
- The Fifth Face: Uniqueness and Identity
- The Sixth Face: Imagination
- The Seventh Face: Perception
- The Eighth Face: Giving and Receiving
- The Ninth Face: Surrender
- The Tenth Face: Play
- The Eleventh Face: Creativity
- The Twelfth Face: Pleasure and Delight

The experience of being radically alive comes from all of these faces of Eros taken together. To live the erotic life is to have the most potent and powerful access to each of these faces. In each of them, sex is our teacher. It is our portal to accessing the radically alive experience of each face. But our experience of the faces does not end in their sexual expression. Quite the opposite. It is all about sex and not about sex at all. Sex models each of the faces of Eros, and in so doing, gives us a vision of what it might mean to live them fully in every dimension of our lives.

It would be a great tragedy of the spirit if the only place where we experienced the faces of Eros were in the sexual. That would be to relegate Eros to the narrow confines of the bedroom, when it needs to soar through our kitchens, our offices, our carpools, our classrooms! In erotic living, we seek the realization of these qualities in every dimension of our

existence. From work, to play, to politics, to intellectual pursuits—in all of these we seek erotic experience.

Erotic engagement could become our daily fare if we just freed our Eros from its old casing. These hand-me-down ideas of an Eros that is only about sex have become threadbare. We must reweave the fabric. The full pleasure of living, the joy of fullness and creativity, can come only when we re-eroticize our lives. Until then, human beings will turn to the shadows of Eros—rage, abuse, and violence—to remind themselves, through the intensity of those experiences, that they exist.

FACES AND PATHS

One of the fundamental principles of Eros is the path is the destination. In a true path, there is no split between the path and the goal. We are creative not only for the sake of the product that emerges but also for the sake of the creative experience itself. We do awareness practice not merely to get to awareness but also because the practice is awareness. We have sex, among other reasons, to feel intimate, but the experience of sex is intimacy itself. In the same way, the authentic and potent experience of each face of Eros is also the path to Eros.

The path and the destination are the same. Each face of Eros is a distinct path of Hebrew Tantra. In each, the sexual opens the door, giving us a taste of that particular face of Eros, so that Sex models for us each face of Eros so we can live that face in every dimension of our lives. The return to Eros cannot bypass sex because erotic sex models for us how to live erotically, how to be radically alive in all of the nonsexual dimensions of our lives.

CHAPTER TWO

EVOKING EROS

Our lives are spent teetering on the edge of the void. You know, the void—the big hole you feel inside. Usually it is a dull and throbbing pain, the background noise of most lives. We rush around, doing everything we can to fill the hole. We have a handy word for this rushing about: avoidance. A dance around the void. We develop the most elaborate maneuvers we can imagine, never realizing that it is all a-void-dance. That if we could but taste fullness for a moment, then the vacant dances of consumerism, addiction, empty sex, and violence would be transformed into the erotic dance of Being.

The emptiness is so palpable and overwhelming that we would fill it at virtually any price. We seek immediate gratification, a quick fix—a book, a drug, a relationship, a job—anything to fill the gaping chasm, the hole in our wholeness. We run desperately looking for the next watering hole that might fill up the emptiness we feel so deeply and try so hard to hide.

On the outside our mad dashing about may look like a dance, but we are really gasping for air. Picture a bee in a bottle. Seen from the outside, the bee darts from side to side in an ecstatic dance. On the inside, however, there is neither dance nor ecstasy. The bee is slowly dying, suffocating. It

was not meant to be this way. Life should not be a pathos-filled scramble for some snatches of authenticity in between empty charades.

THE EROTIC MYSTICS

The ancient wisdom of the erotic Hebrew mystics makes one essential promise: There is a better way to live. In the midst of uncertainty and anxiety, joy and meaning remain genuine options. We can choose life and love, or death and fear. To experience the fullness of every moment, to move from isolation to deep connection, is our birthright if we but claim it.

The great invitation of the spirit is to heal our pain, opening us up to the possibility of joy, ecstasy, and love. There is another way to dance: the dance of Eros, the dance in which we all have a place. This book is about sharing the dance of Eros with you.

As you probably know, most people assume that Eros is merely a synonym for sex. It is not. The fact that we so often confuse Eros with sex merely reminds us of how distant we are from true erotic engagement. To dance with Eros is to live and love erotically in all the arenas of our lives, beyond the merely sexual. That is what it means to be holy. Just as holiness should not be limited to our houses of worship, Eros should not be limited to our bedrooms.

Eros is to be fully alive. Eros is to be fully present to what is. It is to open your eyes and see for the first time the full beauty and gorgeousness of a friend. To smell the richness of an aroma, to feel the fullness of throbbing desire, and to taste the erotic experience that connects you with every being. It is to feel the palpable love that dissolves the walls of ego, anger, and anxiety.

Eros is the feeling you have when you stop trying to get someplace because you realize with great joy that you are already there. To be erotically engaged is to feel the radical interconnectivity of being as a living reality in your life. For the spiritually incorrect mystics, neither dogma nor doctrine will take us home. We need Eros. Eros is the key that provides deep meaning to everything—satisfying work, joyful relationships,

effective parenting. Starvation, fundamentalism, greed, war, and the rape of the Earth are all the result of lack of Eros.

It is the mystery of Eros that was at the core of the teachings of the temple in ancient Jerusalem. The dance with Eros was called the dance with the Goddess. In the hidden tradition of the erotic mystics, it is the Shechinah, the Goddess whose presence suffuses reality. The mystics render the sacred text as follows: “Make for me a temple” and the Shechinah, the Goddess—literally, the erotic presence—“will dwell in your midst.” She is Eros incarnate.

We will call these teachings the path of Hebrew Tantra. One of the meanings of the Sanskrit word *tantra* is “to expand.” Hebrew Tantra is about expanding Eros beyond the sexual to include all the nonsexual areas of our lives. To dance with the Goddess is to live the erotic life not only in sex but also in every facet of our existence. Hebrew Tantra is a means of accessing the aliveness of erotic energy to become one with the divinity that courses through us at every moment.

These teachings on sex, love, and Eros were secret. Sourced in the temple mysteries, they were transmitted in secret by the erotic mystics in all the great traditions, often at great risk to both the teacher and the student. Modern popular books, like the fiction best seller *The Da Vinci Code*, are potent because they are perfumed with the fragrance of this ancient mystery tradition. *The Da Vinci Code* is a popularization of the Mary Magdalene tradition, which asserts that Mary and Jesus were sexual. It understands sex in a very different way than sex was viewed by the classical Christian tradition. The erotic love between Jesus and Mary is a model for living the sacred life. The Magdalene tradition is rooted in the mysteries of the Jerusalem Temple, which understood that the erotic and the holy are one.

The ancient teachings about Eros have never been taught publicly, and for good reason. They were thought to be too explosive to be taught to the general public. Read superficially, they could be misunderstood as merely sexual license or an abandonment of interpersonal ethics. As we shall see, however, they are neither. Rather, the temple mysteries are a profound and powerful path of love and Eros. For the temple mystics, the goal of life was erotic living. The essence of their teachings was to transform sexuality into a loving guide to fullness, Eros, and joy.

THE QUESTION OF MEANING

When we live from the lap of Eros we stop searching for the answer to the question of the meaning of life. The meaning of life becomes self-evident. The split between the ordinary and the extraordinary disappears. It is not that we come up with a great answer. The question simply falls away. Imagine that you are having the best sex of your life with a person you love deeply. Do you stop before the explosion to ponder the meaning of life? We think not. Not because you have come up with the answer but because the question falls away in the fullness of the moment.

When all of your activity has the same level of self-evident meaning, then you are living the erotic life. T. S. Eliot once referred to this as “living an autotelic life.” *Auto* derives from the Greek word for “self,” and *telic* comes from the Greek word *telos*, which means “goal” or “end.” An autotelic person means one who is so fully immersed in the current of life that every activity is not merely a means to an end but an end in itself. For such a person, every activity is an expression of the fullness of life rather than a grasping for happiness or achievement. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an activity that is autotelic “is one which has a purpose in and not apart from itself.” The autotelic life is the erotic life.

THE RETURN TO EROS

In the language of the erotic mystics of the secret temple lineage, the return to Eros transforms reality and liberates the Goddess. Eros is outrageous love, the love that is the essence of all reality. The return to Eros happens when outrageous love becomes alive in our lives.

Eros is what we are talking about when we say God is love. God is not ordinary love, a strategy of the ego. God is outrageous love. God is Eros. Or said differently, in the language of the leading edge of evolutionary theory, reality is Eros. Reality is animated and motivated by Eros, and it self-organizes toward higher and higher levels of complexity and consciousness.⁴

Finally we will evolve the very source code of consciousness and transform our core experience of life by closing the tragic gap (which has persisted both in our personal lives and throughout human history) among the erotic, the sexual, and the holy. We will see that you can only be fully alive, powerfully ethical, and in love if you are living a full erotic life. The erotic life is purposeful even as it is powerful and poignant. But Eros is also potent in that it is always potentiating new possibility. As the great philosopher of science Alfred North Whitehead reminds us, the constant emergence of novelty is the very nature of Eros. In the fullness of erotic living you are literally a virgin, always touching for the very first time.

THE FAILURE OF EROS

We will demonstrate the surprising counterintuitive principle that the failure of Eros leads directly to the collapse of ethics. Virtually all forms of acting out, addiction, depression, violence, and abuse are rooted in the loss of aliveness—what the mystics allusively call the fall of Eros. Every form of success, fulfillment, and joy is the natural result of living the erotic life. It is only in the erotic life that we experience a life well lived. In the erotic life, we not only love on occasion; we are actually lived as love. When we live in the lap of Eros, we are able to keep our hearts open in all situations. Eros does not bypass the hurt; rather, it fills it with aliveness and love. Eros is not tepid and polite; Eros is dynamic and outrageous. The credo of Eros is simple: we live in a world of outrageous pain. The only response to outrageous pain is outrageous love. Outrageous love is Eros.

Even if we could somehow put aside the starvation and the wars, an even superficial view of our own society reveals that something is seriously askew. This is not a detail problem but an essential flaw in the plumb line of our culture. Every forty seconds someone kills themselves. Every year upward of one million people will experience a failure of love so intense and painful that they will voluntarily end their lives. In the last forty-five years, suicide rates have increased by 60 percent worldwide.

The figures are highest in Western democracies like Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, New Zealand, Finland, and, of course, the United States.

Suicide used to be largely limited to the elderly—people who had, at the end of their lives, looked back and been unable to make sense of their story. Not particularly comforting news, because all of us want to, and most of us will, reach old age. But the jolting news is that the average age of suicide is going down. Suicide is now one of the three leading causes of death among those aged fifteen to forty-four. Now of course it would be nice to dismiss this unpleasant information with the thought that only crazy or severely depressed people commit suicide. Note, however, that for every actual suicide there are ten suicide attempts. Suicide attempts have increased in the last forty-five years twenty times more than “successful” suicides.

Add to this the easily inferred truth that for every person who attempts suicide there are a lot more people in just as much pain. They are just as lonely, just as alienated, and just as depressed, but they simply are unable to do anything about it. So they live in limbo, suspended between hells, all the while maintaining the facade of normal and even successful lives.

And yet our guilty feet have got no rhythm. Beneath our desperately dancing steps lurks a yawning abyss of emptiness that kills our joy and poisons our satisfactions. We need another way to dance.

We will introduce you to a dancing master in chapter four who will show us this new way. He reminds us that Eros is a genuine possibility in our lives. Stay in the emptiness, he tells us, and it will become full. Where before you danced to the music of competition and *grenvy* (greed and envy), you are now aroused by the alluring melodies of Eros in every sphere of your life. You no longer feel like you must obey God; rather, you participate in the divine.⁵

Eros is revealed in the sound of a woman singing, the caress of a small deed of loving, or a tear quivering with tenderness. Eros is found in the silence of presence between close friends working side by side, or in the ecstasy of lovers screaming the name of God. Eros is when you explode in pleasure that affirms the very goodness of existence. Eros is when you delight in giving or receiving a gift that makes life worth

living. Eros makes itself known in all genuinely felt pain and joy, anger and ecstasy, in which we enter the feeling so deeply that we come out the other side more whole and more alive. All of these fill our emptiness and enliven our days. We are no longer alienated from our own lives, living externally, wondering, “Is this all there is?” To dance with Eros is to step inside to the full glory and wonder of your life. To live and love with passion, purpose, and poignancy—to be radically alive in all the facets of our being—is what it means to live an erotic life.

EXPANDING LOVE LISTS

One cannot be told that life is worthwhile. One must experience the erotic love of living firsthand. Yet so few people have an unmediated sense of the radical aliveness and infinite dignity of their lives. It is this very erotic sense that is so essential to making our lives a triumph. This is the experience that we call the erotic life. So many of us today are secondhand consumers of secondhand joy, never touching Eros directly. And when our Eros fails, there truly is nothing left to live for.

When we exile the essential Eros of love into the experience of romantic love with only one person—beautiful as that may be—the erotic is in exile. For there is no one person to whom we can give over the power to make our life meaningful or meaningless. When we exile Eros into the sexual, when the sexual becomes the only place that we taste the erotic, the erotic is in exile. And then sex collapses under the weight of a burden it cannot bear.

In every chapter of this book we will further unfold the stunning relationship between the erotic and the sexual. This relationship articulates a new narrative of sexuality that radically transforms both your understanding and your experience of the sexual and of sex in your life. Sex will become not the sum total of your erotic experience but the portal into ever deepening Eros in every dimension of your life.

Eros is experiencing that your existence drips with aliveness and overflows with meaning, no matter what your particular circumstance may be at a given moment. The universe feels, and the universe feels Eros.

Eros is not hard to find and impossible to avoid. For Eros is the very nature of reality itself. We are drenched in Eros. We just need to open the door and realize we are already on the inside.

When you live in Eros, you fall in love with life itself, and with your own life, again and again. From that place of being in love with life you fall in love with many people, not necessarily romantically or even sexually. But you realize that your love lists are too short. Love cannot be limited to the people who give you economic security or to whom you are connected biologically. Love rooted in Eros is not ordinary love. Ordinary love is a strategy of the ego seeking security and comfort. All too quickly, ordinary love becomes comfortably numb. Love rooted in Eros is not ordinary but extraordinary. It is radically alive. Eros is not mere fancy or passing sentiment but rather the essence of existence itself.

LOVE OR DIE

We are confronted, personally and globally, with a stark choice: love or die! It is that simple. Again, by love we do not mean ordinary love but outrageous love, that which we have called Eros. Eros is no longer a luxury—it is an absolute necessity for the survival of the individual and the planet. In the last half century, modern psychology has documented an age-old truth: a fully nourished baby who is not held in loving arms will die. The loving arms that ensure a baby's wholeness and health are not the arms of ordinary love. It is not the love of an ego seeking security. Rather, the love of a mother or father is the Eros of existence holding the baby and keeping her safe. This is outrageous love, the fabric of existence itself. This is the love about which Solomon, builder of the Hebrew Temple, wrote, "Its insides are lined with love." Just like a baby will die if not held in love, so too our world—even with all the resources, intelligence, and technology at our disposal—will die if not held in outrageous love. A de-eroticized world cannot survive. We must embrace a personal path with heart and a global politics of Eros.

Life is a choice. What is the rhythm of our dance? Are we dancing masters or bottled bees that appear to be dancing but are gasping for air?

Who are our dancing partners—desperation and emptiness or Eros and the Goddess? Are we outrageous lovers in all facets of our lives or are we apathetic, deadened, and indifferent? Bees in bottles always sting. But everyone knows that to sting is to die. The only way to not sting is to learn to be a dancing master.

The great mystery tradition of Hebrew wisdom is about a radical and profound path toward becoming just such a dancing master. The ancient Temple in Jerusalem was the center of a society, where the Hebrew mysteries were practiced and taught. At the core of the temple mysteries lay an ancient set of radical understandings about sex, love, and Eros. The Hebrew mysteries gently but powerfully charted a path that, if we but have the courage to walk it, will teach us how to live erotically in every facet of existence.

The invitation and the challenge of the spirit in our generation are to create a politics of Eros and love. That can only begin to happen when each person in the polis takes responsibility for the erotic quality of his or her life. We need to, and we can, realign our souls with the vital currents of loving energy that course through our universe. We need to return to Eros. We can decide to enter the flow, and from that place on the inside, transform first our lives and, ultimately, our planet.

At the epicenter of holiness in the ancient Hebrew Temple in Jerusalem was the Ark of the Covenant. You may remember it from the cinema—it is the very same Ark that Indiana Jones sought to retrieve in the classic movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. As we said earlier, atop this Ark was carved a pair of figures called cherubs. Surprisingly, the cherubs were locked in sexual embrace. These entwined cherubs were not only atop the Ark but were also the major decorative motif all over the temple walls, doors, and sacred vessels. Even if you absolutely affirm the sexual as a wonderful part of your life, sexually entwined cherubs at the axis mundi of holiness in the Jerusalem Temple? What might this possibly mean? We will explore this mystery in the next chapter.