

SEXUAL ENERGY AND TANTRA

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[NOTE: Those of you who would prefer not to discuss sexual energy should skip this short series of blogs please. Otherwise, read on.]

Of the many emotional states that are said to obscure our mind (what the Buddhists call 'kleshas'), perhaps the most powerful is that of desire, and in particular sexual desire. One thing we all know is that sexual energy usually gets our attention, whether it is with our partner or being emanated by a stranger on the street. If it is definitely out there, often hard to ignore, and it can be difficult not have some response to it, sometimes even embarrassing when we fall into it and let it carry us away a bit. This same energy is what makes the world go round and insures that all the species continue to exist, so it is not a weak force.

On the contrary, it is a powerful force, pretty much omnipresent and difficult to overlook, enough so, anyway, that it usually gets our attention whether we like it or not. If we don't enjoy being captivated by it, we tend to look down or away, and at least try to keep it at arm's length. This is often just a form of denial, but what choice do we have? The other alternative is to go with it, to give in and let ourselves feel it, but there is always the danger of being carried away by it to who-knows-where with who-knows-whom? It seems that few of us can just experience it and not be affected.

Buddhism has many practices for dealing with the disruptive emotions (kleshas) like anxiety, anger, fear, jealousy, depression, desire, and so on. Is it any wonder that there is a whole class of tantric practices devoted to desire, with sexual desire being perhaps the strongest for many of us?

There is not space enough here to go into tantric Buddhism in much detail, so some generalities will have to do. In a word, if some of the more traditional Buddhist approaches tend to keep desire and the disturbing emotions at arm's length, then the tantric (Vajrayana) approach is not to ignore these energies but to look right at them, be aware of them for what they are, and to learn to work with and transmute them. And I would guess that sexual energy is high on most people's list of the energies that we are moved by, one way or another.

In tantric practices, instead of avoiding the obvious, practitioners allow themselves to experience these energies and clarify them rather than just shunning or avoiding them. Of course this is not for everyone, can be a tricky business, and perhaps very dangerous at that. I am not suggesting it here, but rather explaining it a little. Also please note: I am not an expert in this area but, like many of you, am only interested in understand these energies better.

While there are many energies within us that may be blocked and therefore need opening or liberating, we all know that sexual energy is something undeniable in our lives. Is it then surprising that there is a whole class of tantras and practices devoted to untying the sexual knots many of us seem to have within us?

It is too bad that sex and sexual energy in general, even as a topic of conversation, is considered somewhat taboo in modern society, and perhaps we can all agree it is conspicuous by its absence. I guess this fact alone tells us it is "that" important. It's not surprising to me that

learning to use sexual energy properly is one way of dealing with it rather than simply avoiding it or giving in to it. The sexual tantras are all about using sex and sexual energy rather than avoiding it or going with it.

And for many people sex is indeed somewhat of a mystery, a mystery shrouded in taboo and hidden away to where we can't even talk about it. And all that really makes it secret is mostly our not looking at it, our not talking about it, and our not knowing it more freely and fully.

Meanwhile, we each deal with sexual energy, go through the motions, but often have no control over it or deep understanding of what it means and how to better use it. We just go along with the taboos and admonitions not to discuss it or let it air out. And yet sex and sexual energies fuel our imagination, are rife in the media, featured in our movies, and generally are on our minds or at least close by. That makes it very important to us, obviously.

Tantric sexual teachings and practices are all about how to grasp this energy and use it as opposed to being used by it. It is that simple. But these practices are considered "advanced" practice and for a good reason. Sexual control is difficult to master as most men know. In the next couple of blogs we will look into this in more detail. I hope this does not offend anyone.

Feel free to add your comments and to have a discussion. PLEASE share with those who might be interested unless this is too controversial to share.

Sexual Energy and Tantra: Part 2 of 3
March 27, 2012

The point from yesterday's blog is that sexual energy is very much with us in life, is hard to control, and attempts to control it, like trying to grab a loose fire hose, are unpredictable, at best. It is easy to get yourself and others all wet. So there is the danger of sexual energy (as the ancient writings say) turning downward rather than upward, thus perverting itself and getting totally out of our control. Who knows what we might do if we dare to entertain that energy? Indeed, sex is a powerful force in our lives and in society.

In other words, it takes a certain amount of courage and skill to even attempt to grasp sexual energy, and real and careful practice to control it. Most men know this from experience. That is what premature ejaculation is all about, of course, an inability to relax and control the sexual energy, to let it expand and be absorbed by the entire body. After all, this is hot stuff.

Even those who have no partner, who go it alone so to speak, have these same problems. Sexual energy moves us to wanting to do something about it until we do that something. The result is release and a downsizing of our desire back to some manageable plane, but there is also usually a sense of loss involved, a sense of dropping "down" to a lower level of energy. A nice word for it might be "relaxing," but enervation is also a term that could be used. I won't argue that here, but I could.

Certainly the Tibetan writings make it clear that loss of semen shortens the life energy, and thus, the life. I know this is a hard idea (sounds like fundamentalism) to accept, and every teenage boy rebels against that thought. The point is not so much whether this is true or not, but what on earth can we do about it? If we are not supposed to spill semen, what are we to do with it and the energy that drives us to want to do something about our sexual impulses?

Well, the obvious answer is that semen is for procreation, but in reality much more semen is spilled (and by many orders of magnitude) than is used for making babies. We all know that. And we can't be making babies all the time, and sexual energy (while not always) is often strongly present in us. What to do?

The tantric textbooks all advise males to retain the semen, to hold on to it. It's precious. And these same books describe all the benefits of doings so, like not growing older fast, retaining a youthful appearance, soft skin, and so on. It sounds like a reversed fountain of youth. Women apparently don't have to be so careful with their bodily fluids, but I am not knowledgeable on that.

And what happens psychologically when we ejaculate? I can only speak for men, of course. The moment comes very powerfully (pun intended), and if we could experience it in slow motion and with awareness we would find that every orgasm involves going back to the beginning of creation, before time. Or, perhaps a better way to express this is that every orgasm is a complete recapitulation of all the steps of consciousness and the evolution of conscious – going in a complete circle – experiencing the cycle.

The fact is that ejaculation at the deepest physical level involves a loss of consciousness externally, but inwardly we experience (and are perhaps aware of) the cycle or circle of life from the beginning back to the present. It is in a way like being born again each time. So, it is very powerful.

Tantric Buddhism is filled with symbolism, much of it graphic, like the difference between a downturned lotus flower and an upturned one. And these analogies are for the purpose of helping the practitioner to turn (to take that example) the downward-pointing lotus upward, but how to do that and what does it mean?

It means that while most men are used to getting it out of their system, spilling their seed, it is possible to grasp that energy where it lives and direct it inward and upward instead out outward and downward, thus turning the lotus flower up. This change of direction is possible for sure, but it is not easy to do this. And my understanding from the sacred texts is that it can be more difficult to do alone than with the help of a partner, thus the reason for tantric sex with a partner, not to mention all the partners that exist in the world.

And forget about all the hoopla about tantric sex being exotic. All sex is tantric to some degree, an attempt to deal with sexual energy; all that is missing is some training and practice. It could be important for us to know that mastering that energy can offer all the bliss of an orgasm with no loss of semen or energy. This is what some tantric sexual practices are all about.

Just as sexual arousal is easier with a partner than with a lone hand, so to speak, so working with a partner is the obvious and traditional way to raise up sexual energy, whether you ultimately direct it out and down or in and upward. Understand?

However, transitioning from outward/downward to inward/upward is apparently not trivial and requires time and real practice. It is easier to just keep losing the sexual energy through outward orgasm than it is to raise and absorb the orgasm internally, but some yogis and yoginis can do that. Most of us have little idea how to do it. I mean: no one even told us it is possible, much less introduced us how to achieve it!

As mentioned, from what I understand, learning to transmute this energy from outward to inward

takes time and practice. It is not that it is so intrinsically difficult but exactly how to do it has first to be pointed out. Then we have to actually learn how to do it and practice it alone or preferably with a partner long enough to make it a habit, after which the habit stays with us. You can try this at home. We know how to handle that energy to some degree already.

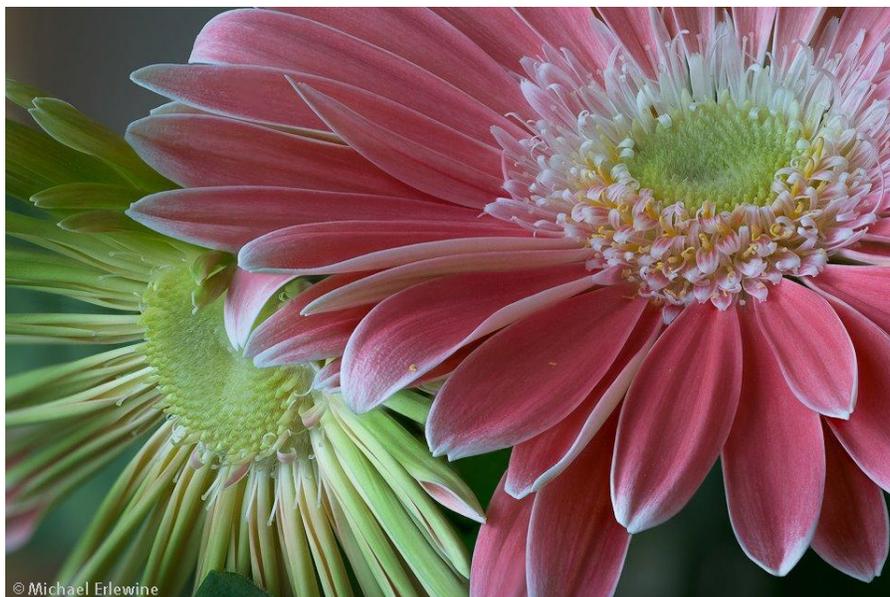
And, as mentioned, the ancient texts tell us that learning this habit is harder for a single person than it is with a partner, thus the interest in tantric sex with a partner. The Internet is filled with sites on tantric and sexual yoga. Please don't think that what I am pointing out here is that. I have no idea what all of those sites are about, but most of them look pretty sketchy at first glance.

What I am doing here is just introducing this topic and hopefully encouraging more awareness of the sexual energy in the world around us, and perhaps suggesting that we examine if our energy is going outward rather than inward, and downward rather than upward. And of course we can't just grasp that energy and convert it by wishing it so. And it is very strong energy and whatever we are doing with it now is an ingrained habit.

What we can do is begin to be aware of this energy and stop ignoring it or automatically turning away from it. And fear of it will gain us nothing. Get used to it consciously. It does not help to cross our fingers at it (and shun it) or jump in head first and get carried away by it. For starters, just be aware of it.

And be aware that society tells us that sexual energy is acceptable in one situation but not acceptable in another. However, it is all the same energy, because it is our reaction to it that makes this so. Therefore, rather than hide our head in the sand, just be aware when it exists or arises. That is a good start.

Sexual Energy and Tantra: Part 3 of 3
March 27, 2012



Although how to master sexual energy is not a secret, and is written about in both Hindu and Buddhist texts, it is also not something that can simply be pointed out once intellectually and then we somehow just get it. Therefore it is somewhat of a mystery but not because sex is mysterious, but because it is difficult to even approach in our society. Sex comes wrapped in taboos, except for what is permitted socially. When we arouse our sexual energy or it becomes aroused, and it begins to rise up, we lack the knowledge and technique to bring it up our spine or chakras to our heart and on to our head. Long before that could happen we lose control and it spills out along the way. There is another kind of orgasm.

On the one hand, everyone who is sexually active is a kundalini practitioner, just not a very adept one. For most men, the mere friction of the process is enough to end it early. This is where the feminine (and women) come in. In the Buddhist tantra, all kinds of abstract symbols are offered to describe women. But the texts clearly say on many, many advanced practices that ALL women are sacred and should be treated as goddesses. Think about that for a moment please. The feminine principle is realized in the female body. Every woman is a mudra or seal.

It says women (ALL women) represent the deepest truth of emptiness. I repeat here what the texts say, and listen up gentlemen: all women are goddesses and should be treated as so. Even the great Mahasiddha Naropa is quoted as saying "No Karmamudra, no Mahamudra." Anyway, Buddhist emptiness is equated with receptivity, albeit infinite receptivity, also called "Wisdom." Emptiness, wisdom, and receptivity are all more or less synonymous. Woman is all of these and all of these say the same thing.

It should be obvious just from the physical evidence of birth that women womb the world of beings. Almost all beings, male and female, emerge and are born from women, from the female. Every man who has attended a live birth knows how powerful and humbling that process is. Nothing secret or esoteric about birth. It is also a sign of something, folks.

The simple facts are omnipresent, right there in front of us. And in the tantras, the symbol of the male is compassion or skillful means. When compassion (man) is united with emptiness (woman) we have a true yoga or union. That is what all the tantric yab-yum art is about, compassion and emptiness in union, a male and female embracing. This is something we all know about.

All this abstract talk about wisdom embracing emptiness, and the like. These are symbols, of course, but the symbols are also real. Men and women actually do embrace sexually and form a union. The sexual fire and force is being aroused and raised by each of us who engage in this kind of activity, whether alone or with others. We each raise up the solar fire but we do not know how to contain it for long, much less raise it beyond the outer physical form, and so we often lose it instead of using it. And we don't yet know how to internalize it. Internalizing it and holding this energy is what karmamudra is about.

It is not something we can do in a day or a week. There is some basic disciplined awareness that needs to be learned, and few of us have the patience to learn it. Sure, the carrot is the "bliss of realization," but the stick of learning meditation and all the yoga practice it involves seems just too difficult for most. That's the rub.

And the sacred texts say that while it is difficult (but not impossible) to learn this alone and without a partner, it is considered easier and traditional to learn this with a partner, which is often referred to as one's consort, whether male or female. Together a couple can raise the solar fire, the kundalini, and if practiced carefully, it can rise up and move inward, not spilling

any outward. Together two partners can hold that fire.

With practice, the sexual energy reaches a point where it begins to be absorbed rather than spilled. As it rises, the energy turns to light, and the urge to ejaculate is sublimated or dies away, but the energy is kept and contained. Not a single drop is lost.

I am no expert in all of this and certainly not recommending that we all run out and have more sex. I am suggesting we might be more aware in the sex that we do have. What might be possible is that we begin to learn with our partner to gently and gradually raise the solar fire upward in our bodies. We already raise it, but we lose it along the way and it spills out. We can do something about this, if we wish.

Gently loving our partner gives rise to this energy and that old country song "Fan It and Cool It" has the right idea. Take your time and don't blow your cool. Any of us can start there, with or without a partner. I hope this brief introduction is clear but not crude.

And a last thought for the men out there, of whom I am one:

Let's open our eyes and see as the sacred writings state that all women are like goddesses, young and old alike. Their nature is kind, open, receptive, the personification of emptiness and wisdom. An encounter with emptiness, even a whiff will shatter any arrogance we have and arouse our natural compassion. One thing all of the texts agree on is that without receiving the blessing of women, no tantric yoga will be successful. This is also true for plain old ordinary sex.