

Indecent Practices and Erotic Trance: Making Sense of Tantra

by John Ryan Haule

Copyright © 1999

All Rights Reserved

<http://www.jrhaule.net/ipet.html>

Three

Beyond Orgasm to Eros

- The Oneida Community
- Carezza
- Erotic Trance
- The Meditation of Everyday Life
- The Nature of Eros

The contemporary pursuit of orgasm appears to lead to frustration and despair. Nevertheless we have seen one convincing story of sexual satisfaction in Juliet Carr's sketchy biography. She seems to have an inexhaustible supply of sexual energy which she has found so enjoyable that she has centered four decades of her life on it and shows no signs of slacking off. Furthermore, we slight her if we think she is no more evolved than a bonobo. For the bonobos do not consciously pursue sexual encounters. They just take them without thought, casually, briefly, and indiscriminately. But Carr is earnest, thoughtful, careful in her choice of partners, and spends a lot of time with them. She wants to learn all she can about sex and teach what she has learned to others.

Taylor believes the bonobos "cement" a cultureless social order with impersonal moments of mutual arousal. Carr has deliberately opposed a sexually repressive social order to "cement" herself with hundreds of distinct and irreplaceable personalities. She implies that none of her couplings is casual; each represents a unique quest for knowledge, and apparently not a few stay in touch and continue to pursue some sort of friendship long after the sexual engagements have been abandoned. Furthermore, it seems that orgasm for her is secondary to the arousal that makes it possible. We can hardly doubt that hours of light caresses with fingernails, lips, hair, and breasts are more important to her than a moment of throbbing release. She has taken the summer of her eighteenth year as the theme of her life. She will "go all the way" only after three months of "kissing and exploring one another's bodies."

She has chosen to become a Bhairavi; and although she may be a pale shadow of Vimalananda's initiatrix, the two of them share a sense that there is always something more. She is on a life-long quest. Sex for her is a "ladder of ascent." Mystics the world over have described their pursuit as a series of "steps," "stations," or "grades of initiation." Each involves the mastery of a well-defined technique or set of experiences: "When you can hold a bladder full of mercury for three hours without spilling a drop you have reached the level of the first qualification." Alain Danilou gives us a classical description of the initiatory

ascent in Tantrism in terms of five stages. The ordinary person who is entirely ignorant of a ladder of ascent is called the "animal man" (*pashu*). After the first initiation, one becomes an "apprentice" (*sadhaka*) or "spiritual practitioner." At the third stage, the aspirant becomes a "hero" (*vira*). Having passed beyond that, the Tantrika becomes a "self-realized man" (*siddha* or *kaula*) and generally manifests extraordinary powers. The goal of the ascent is to become "deified" (*divya*) at the fifth stage (Danilou, 1992: 183).

As a preliminary indication of what this highest attainment might be, we shall consider one of the sexual stories from the scriptures of Buddhism that John Stevens has collected in his book, *Lust for Enlightenment* (1990). Despite their shocking character, every one of these stories reflects the central vision of Buddhism: to concern ourselves with doctrine is to lose ourselves in fruitless speculation over why and how our breast came to be pierced by an arrow, when the only sensible course is to remove it. The Buddha was the "compassionate physician" who zeroed in on each individual's unique dis-ease. According to the stories Stevens has collected, if the shaft protruding from the disciple's breast had been sharpened and feathered in lust, the Buddha laid hold of it no less resolutely than if it were greed or despair.

Thus when his half-brother, Nanda, [1] proved himself unwilling or unable to relinquish "the perils of sexual entanglements, remaining hopelessly infatuated with his bride-to-be," the Buddha had him kidnapped before the wedding date and

transported Nanda magically to Indra's heaven and introduced him to the nymphs of paradise. Nanda had to admit that his fianc was no match for these celestial maids. "How do I get reborn here?" he asked. Buddha informed him that such enticing delights were reserved for those who behaved best. In hope of meeting the breathtakingly beautiful damsels again, Nanda resigned himself to the religious life (Stevens, 1990: 26-7).

Stevens' choice of language gives us a less than edifying portrait of Nanda. He takes up the ascetic life merely as a sort of dues payment to which he "resigns himself." His begging bowl and robe therefore seem to serve as a sort of time-clock card to prove "best behavior" so that he can again gain access to those "breathtakingly beautiful damsels." The arrow of lust has left its poison in his heart, lending a tawdry quality to his new life as a monk.

The story does resemble, however, some of the parables of Jesus: "The kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure lying buried in a field. The man who found it, buried it again; and for sheer joy went and sold everything he had, and bought that field" (Mt 13:44). Both Nanda and the treasure finder relinquish everything and never look back. In both cases the motivation seems appallingly low: greed and lust. Both story-tellers, however, are alluding to the transformation of those motives. A change in horizons has taken place. The profane world of money and sex becomes a symbol of heavenly treasure and dalliance with immortals. Their former preoccupations with real estate holdings and sexual entanglements take on new meaning, as they direct their sights to the transcendent world.

No admonishment could have persuaded Nanda to drop his infatuation with his fianc. Once acquainted with the enchanting maidens of Indra's heaven, however, his heart becomes impervious to the charms of earthly women. His change in course does not at all represent heroic self-mastery or superior will-power. His ego is redirected, as it were, from the outside. His consciousness is now elsewhere and dwells "for sheer joy" in the outer precincts of

Indra's heaven, even as his sandaled feet continue to kick up the dust of North Indian roads. That lustful heart that formerly wanted nothing more than "to possess and be possessed by" his fiancée's womb still palpitates before a vision of femininity. But now that vision glows with what Eliade has called "cosmic mystery." The arrow of his lust has become a ladder of ascent.

Nanda's story suggests that there may be no profane entanglement that does not harbor a seed of spiritual reversal. Indeed, the Buddha's attainment of nirvana, is itself sometimes portrayed as an orgasmic experience: at "Gotama's enlightenment the earth shook like a woman in the throes of bliss -- an all-embracing cosmic orgasm that transformed human consciousness" (Stevens, 1990, 19). Doctrinal propositions leave us cold, or at least guilty for not being able to relinquish our lust. The Buddha of the Nanda story appears to be saying that there is nothing wrong with our lust aside from its short-sightedness. It is but the first rung of the ladder. Look up and see where your path is taking you.

By analogy, our sexually repressive culture permits us to stand on the first rung as long as we fail to notice that it belongs to a ladder. From this perspective, sexual pleasure is dangerous but permissible, for it entangles us in social responsibilities. Sexuality has no vertical meaning; it is all about the "social cement" that ensures the horizontal stability of society. When we do not recognize sexuality for a ladder, we fail to see the rails we might grip to secure our stance. Those on the lookout for "liberated orgasms" are lurching upwards and flailing their arms as they try to avoid falling into the pit with Trachtenberg. Among the Americans discussed, only Juliet Carr has her hands securely on the rails. Because she has recognized the form of the ladder, she has learned to stand above the ground of our public consensus without teetering dangerously.

The Buddha's gift to Nanda was to transport him to the very top of that ladder, where it rests on the threshold of Indra's heaven. Having been spared a laborious climb, he is brought directly into an altered state of consciousness where he realizes that those maidens can be visited at any time by one who has mastered the techniques of meditation. For he surely knows that he has not visited those *devas* ("shining ones") in his fleshly body. He knows he was transported by a master of consciousness, and now desires nothing more than to gain sufficient power over himself so that he can visit those immortals whenever he chooses. Evidently he was enticed into the community of monks in order to learn the techniques of sustaining such an elevated state of consciousness.

To concern ourselves with Indra's heaven, however, is to forget the ladder -- a much more valuable device for us ordinary individuals than magical transport. At this point we know only two things about the ladder of sexual ascent. To stand on it securely, we have to take conscious hold of it; and those, like Juliet Carr, who have their hands on the rails seem to have passed beyond orgasm as their goal.

The Oneida Community

About 150 years ago, the most famous American experiment in surmounting orgasmic release to discover a new meaning in sexuality came about in connection with John Humphrey Noyes' Oneida community. Noyes was a serious-minded Christian who believed that the Kingdom of Heaven could only be established on earth through a form of love that

was not confined by the legalisms and exclusivity of wedlock. He founded a community in Putney, Vermont, based on a form of "free love" that he called "complex marriage." Although the outrage of the good burghers in Putney forced him to move to Oneida, New York, in 1851, the experiment lasted some thirty-two years (1846-1879). Wives and husbands were forbidden, as was any sort of exclusive "special love." Each adult was to be the "spouse" of every other. There was a certain bonobo quality to this socialist community as regards the network of sexual bonds that "cemented" it. But a high level of human self-mastery was required as well, for children were not to be engendered indiscriminately. Only a communal decision could allow ejaculatory, procreative sex; and the community as a whole decided which parental pairs were likely to produce the most desirable children (Ahlstrom, 1972: 498-9).

John Humphrey Noyes was born in Brattleboro, Vermont, in 1811 to hard-working, grim New England Christians. By the age of sixteen he had prepared himself for a career in law, but a religious revival in his home town of Putney in 1827 changed the course of his life. He studied theology at Andover and then at Yale; and in 1833, at the age of twenty-two, he began preaching a radical trend in theology called Perfectionism. His colleagues thought he had lost his mind and was claiming to be without sin. He answered, "I do not pretend to perfection in externals, I claim only purity of heart and the answer of a good conscience to God" (Parker, 1935: 25). He saw "perfection" as living in the Kingdom of God while in this world, as did Jesus and his disciples. Paying close attention to the words of Paul, the author of most of the New Testament epistles, to the gospel of John, and to references in Matthew, Mark, and Luke to Jesus' reserving a secret doctrine to those who were closest to him, Noyes held that the "perfect" were to be distinguished from merely nominal Christians by their having taken on themselves the "complete" doctrine of Christ. His views on the secrets reserved for the fully initiated bear a surprisingly close resemblance to what Morton Smith's textual criticisms have recently revealed concerning Jesus and his followers (cf. Smith, 1973; 1998). Noyes did not have the benefit of modern critical tools but read his Bible carefully and with sound intuition and painful self-criticism. The excruciating honesty of his diaries makes them difficult to read (cf. G. W. Noyes, 1923).

In the 1830's Perfectionism split, with the so-called "libertines" or "antinomians" taking up the practice of "bundling" (unmarried people sleeping together clothed) and "free love." Noyes defended the stricter strain of the theological movement and had to defend himself "every day" against accusations that he participated in sexually questionable activities (Parker, 1935: 36-7). His transition from puritanical Christianity to "complex marriage" was a gradual process in which Abigail Merwin, Harriet Holton, and Mary Cragin played central roles.

The beautiful Abigail Merwin was his first convert to Perfectionism, and her angelic image sustained him through religious and psychological crises. Her father forbade their continuing association and married her to another man. Noyes responded with a letter to Abigail in which he confessed his belief that God had brought them together "pure and free, above all jealousy and above all fear" (*Ibid.*, 42). He predicted that the marriage would not last, and he was right; but she disappeared from his life on her own account. This prompted a "confidential" letter to his disciple David Harrison, in which Noyes expressed the view that the exclusive relationship of marriage is not in accord with God's will: "When the will of God is done on earth, as it is in heaven, *there will be no marriage*. The marriage supper of

the Lamb is a feast at which *every dish is free to every guest* (*Ibid.*, 44). Harrison, however, showed the letter to others so that it was eventually published in the libertine Perfectionist newspaper, *The Battle-Axe and Weapons of War* (*Ibid.*, 53). Noyes was forced to go public with his views and to quickly get himself married to silence the gossip.

He proposed a marriage that would not "limit the range of our affections" -- in effect an "open marriage" -- to Harriet Holton, who had been sending him money to finance his publications. She accepted. (*Ibid.*, 58-61). Still, he "always protested that he had never 'known' a woman in the Biblical sense until his marriage to Harriet Holton; and that he had never ventured outside the bounds of strict monogamy until the formal acceptance of complex marriage by the Putney family" (*Ibid.*, 119). After Harriet's fourth stillbirth in 1844 (she had given birth to one living child), Noyes was so affected by her suffering that he re-evaluated the nature of human sexuality, distinguishing the "amatory" function of sex from its "propagative" function. He began experimenting with what he called "male continence," that is intercourse without ejaculation. He was opposed to *coitus interruptus* in which the male withdraws at the last moment so as to ejaculate outside the vagina as "no better than masturbation."

I found that the self-control which it requires is not difficult; that my enjoyment was increased; that my wife's experience was very satisfactory, as it had never been before; that we had escaped the horrors and the fear of involuntary propagation. This was a great deliverance. It made a happy household (*Ibid.*, 67).

Mary Cragin entered Noyes' life when she and her husband George came to him for marital counseling. Mary had been seduced by the libertine Perfectionist Abram Smith. Noyes brought them back together, but in the process discovered an erotic connection between himself and Mary (*Ibid.*, 78-9). He found her to be a little girl in her frailty and intellectual attainments, but wise in love, like Mary Magdalen. She was effusive and charming with outbursts of affection and temper, and lived only in the moment (*Ibid.*, 86-7). Six years later, George Cragin wrote a letter to Harriet Noyes professing his love for her. She was receptive and reported the incident to her husband, whereupon Noyes called the two couples together and in 1846 the complex marriage began (*Ibid.*, 121). Noyes described it to his followers in a letter:

Our warfare is an assertion of human rights: first the right of man to be governed by God and to live in the social state of heaven; second, the right of woman to dispose of her sexual nature by attraction instead of by law and routine and to bear children only when she chooses; third, the right of all to diminish the labors and increase the advantages of life by association (*Ibid.*, 142).

"Life by association" amounted to "Bible Communism," and complex marriage was its linchpin. The primary aim was "to elevate a bodily instinct into the service of religious ecstasy," "a medium of magnetic and spiritual interchange." The exclusivity of socially sanctioned marriage, by contrast, was deemed to be "idolatrous" (*Ibid.*, 180-1). The human heart "is capable of loving any number of times, and any number of persons; the more it loves the more it can love. This is the law of nature, thrust out of sight, and condemned by common consent" (*Ibid.*, 182).

The spiritual practice of sexuality was to be learned in an "ascending and descending fellowship" in which "novices were to have intercourse with those who were above them spiritually." This applied both to young men and to young women, but the strategy was

particularly important for young men, who were to be trained in "male continence" by practicing intercourse with women who had passed menopause so that their inevitable mistakes in "amatory" sex would not have disastrous "propagative" effects (Fogarty, 1994: 7). "Amativeness, the lion of the tribe of human passions, is conquered and civilized among us" (Parker, 1935: 187). To protect a woman's right to refuse any offer of sexual affection she did not desire -- for any reason at all -- "proposals were always to be made through the medium of an older woman" who served as a go-between (*Ibid.*, 183-4).

Loving relationship -- sexual and otherwise -- was the bond of the Oneida community; and it was strengthened by the regular practice of public criticism, in which each member of the community was open to the frank but balanced observations of the others. Bible Communism was a constant struggle to increase one's awareness of oneself and one's social relations. Noyes' own criticism of a certain John Skinner reveals a great deal concerning what the community's founder believed to be a proper "amatory" style of life. Traditional Christian virtues were expanded and radically altered through a growing appreciation of erotic connectedness:

The compound of a perfect lover is goodness and a musical external nature. . . . A compound of innocence and skill is the perfection of character. Mr. Skinner is an honest, serious, conscientious man; but these elements of his character are not sufficiently embodied in cunning, romance, and emotion. Love, perfected, is very cunning. Mr. Skinner is unpracticed, green, deficient in skill to make himself attractive -- *deficient* and yet *promising*. He has improved very much since he came here. One person has confessed that she loves him very much now, though she could hardly endure him when she first saw him, he was so pedantic and awkward. . . . (Parker, 1935: 216).

The Oneida community survived as long as it did for several reasons. It appears to have been a truly spiritual communism in which no individual was considered better than or given privileges over any other. The possessiveness of greed and erotic exclusiveness were overcome in a community that placed supreme emphasis on the freedom of all members to accept or reject sexual advances as opportunities for interpersonal and worshipful communication. Furthermore, this was not a group of "poets or political anarchists; they were farmers and mechanics who knew how to run a mill, plow a field, and lay a foundation" (Fogarty, 1994: 13). They became financially successful through competent, industrious cooperation.

Ironically enough, the community destroyed itself through a crucial change in its sexual economy. When Noyes' son Theodore returned from Yale Medical School in 1868, he brought with him the "scientific" notion of "stirpiculture," [2] the eugenics plan whereby the community would designate certain individuals to be the parents of planned children (*Ibid.*, 24-5). Robert S. Fogarty's publication of the diary of Victor Hawley, a young man obsessed with the idea of producing a child with Mary Jones, reveals the dark side of the stirpiculture experiment. The elders of the community consistently opposed propagative sex between Victor and Mary. The young couple were certainly not alone in their frustration and anger. A new social hierarchy had emerged whereby the elders were in charge of the giving and receiving of sexual attention when babies were desired. Exclusive "special loves" re-entered the community through the back door of stirpiculture and introduced tensions that the community could not solve. Fogarty enumerates five reasons for the failure of Oneida. "Science" replaced the spirituality of "Bible Communism." The community elders gained an authority that was distinctly contrary to the equality-of-all that had governed the group from its beginnings. All were no longer equal in the stirpiculture experiment. Couples wanted to

replace the openness of complex marriage with the exclusivity of ordinary marriage. And, possibly most important, Noyes' charismatic leadership could not be passed on to his son (Fogarty, 1994: 27).

Carezza

Noyes popularized the term "male continence" in 1866 when he published a book with that title. Near the end of the nineteenth century, the term was replaced in American sexological discourse by *Karezza* through the work of Alice B. Stockham (Deveney, 1997: 28). *Karezza* is evidently derived from *carezza*, the Italian word for "caress" and "expansiveness." It implies that a sexual "caress," extended by means of the man's withholding from orgasm, leads to an "expansive" state of consciousness, "the magnetic and spiritual exchange" which "elevates a bodily instinct into the service of religious ecstasy," as Noyes put it. In this volume I shall spell the term as the Italians do, *carezza*.

Having set out to establish the Kingdom of Heaven on earth by redressing the biological injustice of woman's victimhood in propagative sex, Noyes discovered that sexual experience can be a ladder of ascent. Propagative sex is horizontal and profane, while amatory sex is vertical and holy. Without having heard of Tantra, therefore, Noyes had hit upon one of its central truths, which Danilou articulates as "the double role of the sex organs" (Danilou, 1992: 57). Procreation is the lesser form, while the ecstasy of sexual bliss (*ananda*) is the higher form, leading to the divinized state. Noyes' insight concerning women is expressed in a Hindu distinction: the *parakiya* woman, who belongs to no one, is sacred while the *svakiya* woman, who belongs to her husband, is profane.

For a woman who is drawn to a mystical life and ecstatic experience, all permanent ties with men are an obstacle. Man is an enemy who prevents woman from freeing herself from the bonds of society, property, and the family. Either, like the vestals, she avoids all relations with men or else sexual relations must be a kind of ritual and sacred prostitution which creates no permanent or sentimental ties with man and avoids procreation (Danilou, 1992: 213).

According to both Noyes and Tantra, although neither partner wants or tries for orgasm, female orgasm is permitted, so long as it does not provoke ejaculation in the male. Ejaculation is a sort of clumsy mistake; and if it is inevitable, the man must withdraw from his partner's vagina. In modern Western popularizations of Tantra, however, ejaculation is more than a mistake; it is a "short circuit" that "sabotages the male orgasm" and "the shortest way to kill true love and make its sublimation impossible" (van Lysebeth, 1995:248). According to such contemporary authors, Noyes almost had it right. He only missed realizing that ejaculation and orgasm are two different things. There is a good deal of rhetorical flourish in the contemporary doctrine that "ejaculation is not orgasm." Nevertheless, it points to a genuine experience.

During "normal" sexual intercourse, the *last few seconds* before the final movement which releases the ejaculatory spasm are the most gratifying to the male. With the spasm, it's all over: what remains is disappointment. The pleasure the male gets from ejaculation is less than that experienced when he is on the verge of it. Tantra's solution is as clever as it is simple: making the most intense joy last as long as possible. Therefore, we have to avoid the ejaculatory spasm, and Tantra provides us with the techniques needed to achieve this.

The supreme art for a Tantric male, is to remain indefinitely on the verge, and by doing so, he has access to the "sexual heaven" in the brain, paving the way to the true male orgasm. . . . One can

go from purely genital pleasure to erotic, and finally to the spiritual (van Lysebeth, 1995: 300).

According to this contemporary argument, orgasm is not defined by genital spasms -- either in the male or in the female. It is defined, rather, by the number of heart beats per minute as recorded in laboratory experiments on couples having intercourse. By this measure, both men and women are capable of discrete multiple orgasms (non-ejaculatory) during a single love-making session, as well as continuous multiple orgasms. An ejaculatory orgasm, therefore, is a sort of "short explosion" which brings the man's sexual arousal to a "premature end," while a non-ejaculatory orgasm is a "longer and slower implosion." One is said to "fall backward" into non-ejaculatory orgasms, and to "fall forward" into ejaculation (Chia & Arava, 1996: 27-31). The Belgian advocate, Andr van Lysebeth, claims that ninety percent of males never experience the "cosmic ecstasy" of real orgasm (van Lysebeth, 1995: 298).

One gathers from these books that many women know precisely what the authors mean when they speak of "falling backward or forward," orgasm as "implosion or explosion," and multiple orgasms as "discrete or continuous." A woman of my acquaintance, when I told her what I was trying to say in this book, showed me a page from her diary from 1993. [3] Without prompting from any sex manual, she describes four types of orgasm that she has experienced. She starts at the top of the ladder and works down:

(1) the Implosion, electrical energy, fire; (2) the Explosion, liquid energy, female ejaculation, water; (3) the Purely Physical, being aware of how body parts are feeling; (4) the Merely Physical, detached observer, simply body feelings. During sex the object is to get *really* into your own body -- so really *into* it that one passes *through* it into the Other World -- the infinite expanses and eternity . . . which are "out there" and also "in here."

Apparently men are so easily overwhelmed by their involuntary ejaculation reflex and so in awe of its uncontrollable power that they are lucky to get to the stage of the "Purely Physical." For them, "falling backward," "implosion," and "liquid energy" are puzzling or foolish notions. They have to be persuaded and given techniques: squeezing the penis or pressing on the perineum to halt immanent ejaculation; breathing deeply and slowly or at least out of rhythm with the thrusting motion; relaxing the urogenital and anal muscles that tense involuntarily during arousal. Such exercises, however, belong only to the initial stage of male arousal; for if the heightened physiological state can be sustained for fifteen to twenty minutes, a critical point is passed and control becomes much easier (Chia & Arava, 1996: 45).

The man goes into a glide. The arousal that bucked and plunged while he sawed at the reins now stretches out in a smooth gallop. That directions for getting to the glide are filled with graphs and statistics tells us more about what we find persuasive than it does about the experience itself. This supportive data belongs to the realm of the "Merely Physical" and is clearly written for people who have never attained the higher stage of the "Purely Physical." Nevertheless, it points beyond the experience of the "detached observer" to a discrete rung on the ladder of sexual ascent and is the precondition for further domains of sexual experience all the way up to "Indra's heaven."

Noyes had no need for the new age project in physiological engineering that our contemporary sex manuals provide. He never heard about the Finger Lock, the Pubococcygeal Pump, the Big Draw, and Soul-Mating. He paid attention to himself and to

his partner and unquestionably arrived at a similar state of sexual knowledge without artificial exercises. The sex manuals, despite their sentimental gestures in the direction of spirituality, tinker with our physiological mechanics, evoking the detached style of empirical science. They make us forget entirely that "sexual heaven (of Indra) in the brain." Still, they are right in claiming that sexual arousal is a physiological condition. We can hardly overlook the endorphins that medical science has identified. Their graphs and statistics prove the accuracy of traditional mystical theories of physiology described millennia ago in Indian and Chinese scriptures.

In his overview of the history of Chinese theories of sex, Douglas Wile (1992: 5-9) describes this traditional view in ten propositions. (1) Ejaculation brings enervation, not relaxation; for it is the loss of something vital, not the attainment of balance. (2) Activation of sexual energy floods the entire system with a vital fluid. (3) Retention of semen retards aging (van Lysebeth is obsessed with this one). (4) Ejaculation increases the sex drive (cf. the obsessions that Trachtenberg describes). (5) Sexual energy can be accumulated from one's partner (i.e., *vajroli*). (6) Prior to puberty the boy's innocent hardness springs to life (*yang*) in the midst of supreme softness (*yin*); this time of wholeness, when *yin* and *yang* are balanced in *Tao*, is lost forever during the tumult of puberty (cf. Bhattacharya's good fortune in having been initiated at the age of eleven). (7) Abstention from intercourse causes psychological and physiological aberrations, which means that there is no healthy escape from practicing *carezza*. (8) Only with full arousal is semen "secure," i.e., that state of "glide" after twenty minutes of sustained arousal. (9) Harmony is achieved when the partners monitor one another's response and pace their own level of arousal to promote the other's pleasure -- the foundation of Vimalananda's *vajroli* contest. (10) Women love slowness and duration and abhor haste and violence, supporting our earlier suspicion that women are innately more receptive to *carezza*.

It is reasonable to conclude that all these principles are derived from the recognition that sexual experience can be a ladder of ascent. Those who know only spasmodic, ejaculatory orgasm are thrown into frustration and conflict (principles numbered one, four, six, and seven), while those who have found the rails of the ladder and learned *carezza* have achieved a state of balance and heightened awareness.

Since little was dependably known about human physiology 3000 years ago -- or even in the nineteenth century -- the traditional principles must have been deduced from their practitioners' states of consciousness. The language of physiology had to have been a metaphor for the ancients. They may have believed in it literally, but it was developed to explain their shifts in awareness. Indeed, it seems clear that the most convincing experience of all has to be the sense of having risen above one's own sexual tumult in the "glide" that makes the "semen secure" (eighth principle). For this is the ultimate subjective proof that mastery and higher states of awareness are possible. The notion that "the entire system is flooded with a vital fluid" (second principle) would be an attempt to describe what it feels like to enter the altered state of consciousness attained in the "glide."

It may well be the case that "secured semen," "glide," and "vital fluid" are all symptoms of a single condition that involves both physiology and awareness. It is certainly my experience that the crucial factor in entering the glide where semen is secure depends almost entirely on the level of arousal attained and that the best index of my degree of arousal is not so much

its temporal duration (e.g., fifteen to twenty minutes) but rather the flow of prostatic fluid. (Prostatic fluid is the clear slippery liquid produced by the prostate that lubricates the urethra. It can sometimes flow quite copiously during semen retention.) Possibly the ancients' belief that the body becomes filled with a vital fluid which alters one's awareness reflects my own experience that the change in consciousness required for glide is always accompanied by the evidence of glistening fluid issuing from the end of the penis. In any event, this phenomenon was central to the doctrine of Pascal Beverly Randolph, the nineteenth-century Afro-American proto-Theosophist. Randolph learned semen retention early in his career and later argued that carezza should be practiced only to insure that both husband and wife had -- in their foreplay -- reached the stage where vaginal and prostatic fluids were flowing freely before beginning intercourse. The sexual act, he believed, should then be carried out all the way to ejaculatory orgasm. Contrary to Noyes, Randolph held that refusal to ejaculate limited the mystical state of unity attained in sexual intercourse (Deveney, 1997). [4] Vimalananda seems to imply the same view in his description of the vajroli contest, where he says not only that each partner releases fluid to assist the other's participation but also, "They both thoroughly enjoy each other's play before the final coitus occurs." Finally, it should be noted that the universality of a high state of arousal coinciding with the presence of a vital fluid is supported by the fact that some forty-nine cultures around the world have a name for it (Mann & Short, 1990: 105). [5]

Erotic Trance

The Italian philosopher Julius Evola has wisely given the state of consciousness priority over mythic theories of physiology. He speaks of the attainment of "glide" after an extended arousal: "Once the precipitation of the semen-*bindu* is arrested . . . the orgasmic crisis is stabilized in an exalted and transfigured form, or in a state of active trance" (Evola, 1992: 133). He does not define "trance" very clearly, apart from calling it "a natural shift of consciousness onto the subtle plane . . . [which] may prevent ejaculation" (*Ibid.*, 132). In doing so, he recognizes that human consciousness plays a decisive role in our physiological functioning. For example, orgasm (with or without ejaculation) may occur in the dream state when we are engaging with an imaginal figure. That a sexually charged imagination can accomplish a result equivalent to physical intercourse is fundamental to Geshe Kelsang Gyatso's Tibetan Vajrayana tradition, in which an imaginary consort is a relatively safe and easily acquired partner in the practice of sexual yoga.

I use the phrase *erotic trance* in this book somewhat reluctantly, for in popular English parlance *trance* is used to designate an undesirable, even pathological disorientation. It seems to be an inferior state of consciousness. In contrast, I use *erotic trance* to indicate a *heightened* state of consciousness, access to an alternate reality which is illegitimate only from the profane point of view. Erotic trance elevates us into one or another form of *sacred* consciousness. Thus the disagreeable connotations of *trance* belong to the profane standpoint according to which everything associated with Tantra is deemed a pathological divergence from sound morality and common sense. For the phenomena of Tantra to be appreciated as valuable, our understanding of trance must be revised as well.

Certainly Evola uses the term *trance* to indicate a significantly altered state of consciousness in which one is not disoriented but rather experiences the empirical world and one's own body "on the subtle plane," that is, with a significant imaginal input -- much along the lines

of Eliade's observation that every naked woman embodies "cosmic mystery" when viewed in a ritual rather than a profane context. Thus, whatever else it may accomplish, religious trance is characterized by a shift into sacred space. Evola adverts to this fact when he observes that accumulating the vital fluid of *ojas* (Wile's second principle) generates "a special magnetic aura" in a "personality that inspires a kind of holy awe" (Evola 1983: 218).

Thus when the flow of vaginal and prostatic fluids reveals a change in our physiology, our consciousness has also been changed. A moment's reflection on the state of awareness that inevitably accompanies this physiological change will disclose the fact that our conscious field has been both narrowed to the point that only erotic issues have any vital meaning for us and expanded to the point that new and "subtle" realities become self-evident, whereas only a moment before they were unthinkable. Trance conducts us to the numinous realm of the religious cosmos. Dan Merkur (1992: 64-70) emphasizes this point when he defines trance as a state of ecstasy in which one no longer has the will power to doubt the truth of what one experiences, one "is convinced that the numinous is *real*." During the time of trance, we believe *involuntarily* in the imaginal reality we see. We are "gripped" by something whose Truth is so overwhelmingly self-evident that we have no choice but to believe. We may doubt this later, once the trance has ended, but not while entranced.

Transcending the will is the essential point. In the early stages of sexual arousal, one has to observe one's sensations carefully and exert a great deal of will- power to avoid the involuntary ejaculation response. During the crucial fifteen or twenty minutes before "glide," the body is being flooded with endorphins. It is reasonable to think that these proteins from the pituitary shift our consciousness into trance, an "exalted and transfigured form" of consciousness that changes our relationship to our physiology. Runners speak of the euphoria that endorphins generate in their body as they overcome the first signs of fatigue and receive their "second wind" -- another sort of "glide" through which a change in consciousness transforms physiology. The literature on religious trance is filled with accounts of entranced individuals who have surmounted their physiology: drinking great quantities of alcohol without suffering intoxication, wounding with knives or spikes without pain, rapid healing of wounds. [6]

Sexual arousal, therefore, is by no means unique in inducing the very trance whereby its own disturbing effects are overcome. Once we enter trance, the threat of involuntary spasms is drastically reduced. What we had striven for is achieved -- not by our own deliberate effort but by a force separate from our ego which we now seem to ride. It moves us onto the "subtle plane," where our partner -- who was only a "special friend" a half hour before -- has now become "an enchanted woman" or a goddess. We "inspire awe" in one another, and feel ourselves filled with a mystic energy that no longer has to be cultivated but which cultivates us.

But we do not have to practice carezza to be in awe of another person or to feel that we have fallen under a spell. Eros, which does indeed affect us physiologically, always transports us to an altered state of consciousness where the mysterious person who faces us seems somehow "predestined" to enter our life. We are inclined to think that this individual who was a stranger moments before is someone we deeply know. Perhaps we were involved with one another in a "former life." We speak of being "enchanted." We may be embarrassed to find ourselves thinking such thoughts that make no sense in the empirical world of everyday

life. But we feel our experience is too exceptional to be confined by the language of ordinary events. We do not speak of such irrational notions with everyone, but are delighted if we should happen upon someone who understands, who has been through something like this herself. Perhaps we are in a "trance," for as much as we try to reason with ourselves, we find we cannot eradicate these foolish beliefs from our hearts. When we encounter our "special person" again, we invariably wonder why we even tried.

In *Play of Consciousness* (1978), Swami Muktananda pretends to be puzzled by this phenomenon:

Once a young man came to see me. "Babaji," he said, "I am very confused -- give me peace. Some time ago, I fell in love with a girl, and since we both liked each other, we decided to get married. However, as we were confirming our decision, she met someone else whom she liked better and married him instead. I am suffering terribly because of this. I can't bear this pain."

I said, "There's nothing to worry about. Just find another girl and marry her."

He replied, "That's all right, but my mind has become possessed by her, and even if I tried a million times, I could not get her out of my mind."

"But why do you remember her like this?" I asked.

"It's not that I remember her," he replied. "The memory of her comes to my mind by itself. Without my doing anything, I see her image moving in front of my eyes" (45).

Muktananda teases us with this story. How could the young man have gotten into such a state? Why does he not regard his guru with this sort of devotion? After all, no holy man ever gave him a mantra based on her name; he never "worshipped" her "according to any prescribed ritual." Like John Humphrey Noyes, he needed no teacher or manual of instruction. Muktananda concludes the young man has been meditating on this girl in his heart. He has been treating her the same way Muktananda treats his Sadguru [7] Nityananda.

The young man's consciousness has been "transfigured" and "shifted onto the subtle plane." He thinks of his lost beloved day and night, perhaps catches himself sighing as he pronounces her incomparable name. He finds that name resounds within him, even when he tries to distract himself. An involuntary dynamic has taken over and proves itself far more powerful than his will. He "glides" on the power of a source alien to his ego which makes his former fiancée the object of his unconscious mediation -- much as Indra's "shining ones" gripped Nanda, the Buddha's half-brother. Although the memory of his lost beloved brings him nothing but pain, he is as powerless as a man in the trance of carezza to annihilate the subtle realities that grip him and compel his involuntary belief. He hopes that Muktananda has the power to end this erotic meditation and bring him peace. It is beyond his own capacity to do so.

But even as we listen to this story and know very well what Muktananda is driving at, we also fight with it. What kind of love could this have been, we wonder, if the girl could so easily find "someone whom she liked better"? No doubt he is lucky to have lost a beloved who could so quickly have changed her mind. The young man has certainly overvalued the bond he shared with her. It turned out not to be as eternal and immutable as he once believed and sometimes still does. He was deluded. His erotic trance "has elevated" him to a "subtle plane" inhabited by chimeras. When we say, "Love is blind," we implicitly make reference to

trance, a state of involuntary belief, where we may as easily be deceived as enlightened.

Eros is a passionate sort of love. It may well lead to a "divine madness," a god-intoxication that reveals cosmic mysteries and changes our life for the better. But it rarely does so without plunging us into confusion and pain. It is by no means unusual for us to fight appallingly painful battles with someone we love erotically. We may astonish ourselves with our ferocity and wonder why it is only this uniquely wonderful person that can elicit such venom from us. Eros may be the greatest blessing ever to have befallen us or the most devilish curse. Strangely it may be both. It makes us crazy; and what is worse, we are inclined to love our madness and be impatient with those who would talk us out of it.

We do not need to practice semen-retaining intercourse to know eros. Eros takes us on its own terms and generally when we least expect it. With eros we do not have to struggle with fifteen or twenty minutes of genital stimulation, constantly increasing the level of our arousal while fighting the involuntary spasm reflex. Eros needs no vajroli contest. But we might wonder whether carezza needs eros. For when we shift into that "glide" where our physiology is surmounted in trance, we surely set foot on a "subtle plane" characterized by numinosity and intimations of eternity. It makes sense to think that perhaps the partners in carezza are using their physiology to evoke eros artificially. If they avoid the tumult and pain of spontaneous eros, perhaps this is due to the "ritual context" of carezza -- the fact that it is practiced in a time and place set aside from ordinary life. The Oneida community abhorred "special loves." Its members sought to induce erotic states of consciousness without possessiveness and without wedlock. There was no question of trying to live day-in and day-out with last night's companion in ecstasy. Being "spouse" to everyone in the community, they were wed to none and thereby avoided the everyday friction of clashing habits and aspirations.

The Meditation of Everyday Life

Muktananda's point in telling the story of the young man tormented by the loss of his beloved is to reveal to us that we are meditating all the time -- even if we have never visited an ashram or set aside a special hour of the day. Muktananda meditates on his guru, the young man on his lost beloved. Noyes, in practicing carezza, meditates on his body as a preliminary to meditating on tonight's partner. In the fifteen or twenty minutes leading up to "glide," he is "getting into his own body -- so really *into* it that he can pass *through* it into the Other World." Every one of these meditators has reached an Other World. But they may be on different planets: Muktananda contemplates God in his guru; the young man contemplates loss and desolation; and Noyes is probably someplace in between.

Muktananda continues his discourse by telling us of a factory owner who has come to him for instruction and thereby reveals a fourth "planet" of meditation. The would-be disciple says,

"Babaji, I try to meditate, but as soon as I sit down, worldly things come before me -- the office, the factory, the children. What should I do about it? I just can't meditate."

I answer, "But you certainly are getting meditation. To have your office or factory appear within you is meditation. To see visions of your children is meditation. Aren't you satisfied with the fruits of your meditation? All the things you have loved, thought about, and pursued in your

everyday life are now bearing fruit for you. You have visions of your factory and your office and your children; yet you do not consider it meditation. Look brother, I am in the same situation. I meditated on Sadguru Nityananda. I adored the different aspects of my *sadhana*. [8] I embraced and kissed the feet of my dear Gurudev. [9] Now all this continually rises in my heart. 'Gurudev, Gurudev' repeats itself within me even when my mind is not thinking of him. My Guru floods my body; he is in every part of it. He comes to me in dreams and is perfectly real to me" (Muktananda, 1978: 45).

This factory owner is just like us. We sit down and try to quiet our mind -- to take it away from all those ephemeral and hectic concerns that fill our waking hours -- and inevitably we find ourselves "distracted." If it is not by twinges in the body, then it is our habitual concerns coming back to haunt us like the ghost of our lost love, our job, our children, and so on. We would like to be taken away from all that. Would it not be wonderful if we could just throw a switch and sink into God-consciousness? But unfortunately the factory owner who sits down to meditate is the same man who is filled with the ephemeral and hectic concerns of his everyday life.

This problem begins before we ever sit down to our yogic task. Muktananda tells us that when we look upon meditation as a unique and isolated practice we overlook its very nature. We deny the dissatisfaction we have with our *habitual* meditation, the one that goes on day and night whether we attend to it or not. In the spiritual practices of the East and the West, this is by no means a radical doctrine. It is what all of the spiritually accomplished have discovered. St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), for example, the founder of the Jesuit Order, the Society of Jesus, urged each of his followers to be *in actione contemplativus*, "a contemplative in action." Whatever their daily occupations, they were to perform them while simultaneously contemplating God (Meissner, 1992).

The radically new piece -- although it is so obvious we cannot help but wonder how we have overlooked it all our lives -- is the fact that we are all meditating, all the time, even if we have never heard of meditation. This doctrine appears to be a kind of Hindu version of the teachings of don Juan Matus, Carlos Castaneda's guru (Castaneda, 1972). He calls it our "internal monologue." We are constantly sustaining our unconsciously constructed and socially sanctioned lifeworld by talking to ourselves about it all the time. The factory owner, for example, talks to himself about the price of his raw materials, the idiosyncrasies of his suppliers, the difficulties of getting his machinery repaired, the frustrations of motivating his employees, and the fluctuations in the price of his product. He meditates on his factory day and night, not only when he is sitting at his desk in his office, but also while driving his car, taking his dog for a walk, chewing his dinner, and making love with his wife. His life is filled with his factory. And his factory, the object of his meditation, shapes him into its image. He is a factory owner and nothing more.

This man's factory ownership is his survival strategy. If he can keep his factory productive, he can pay his bills, support his family, and enjoy some pretty nice vacations. The factory is more than a source of income, however; it defines his existence. Its success makes him a successful man, a person who can hold his head up in society and expect admiration. It makes him "a mover and a shaker," a man of considerable power, one who has negotiated the hectic and ephemeral world of survival and come out on top.

C. G. Jung calls this *persona*, a term that refers to the masks actors wore in antiquity (Jung, *CW 6*: ¶800-2). But although our persona is surely a mask we put on for social purposes, this

facile Jungian description seems to turn *persona* into an arbitrary object -- something we can don or doff as we choose. Muktananda's factory owner finds he cannot escape from his persona. Even when he tries to "meditate" -- in the sense of a disciplined and special activity -- , he finds that his factory continues to be the object of his preoccupation. Whether he is sitting down with crossed legs and closed eyes or overtaking "semi's" on the interstate, his meditation takes place in the *field of the persona*, that set of assumptions and beliefs that might also be called the *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of the times, or consensus reality.

We all live our everyday lives completely immersed in the *persona field*, speaking words and performing actions that are "politically correct," playing the game of economic struggle, acquiring degrees from graduate schools, hiding our aggression behind polite facades. Our persona is not merely the facade, however; it is the whole life strategy lurking behind that facade by which we struggle to survive. It is the "planet" of our everyday trance state in which we are incapable of disbelieving. The persona field of consensus assumptions exerts a force upon us like the gusty wind that sea-gulls have to correct for, as they dive for bits of garbage floating on the waves. We have become so attuned to the comings and goings of those gusts that we never think about them. We correct our course thoughtlessly and with great precision. Negotiating the hectic and ephemeral world of the persona takes a tremendous amount of energy, but we dare not neglect it. It is the object of our internal monologue, our habitual and constant meditation. We monitor the world about us incessantly, like the gull who picks up the slightest changes in the direction and force of the wind, as well as the approach of his brother and sister gulls and their rank in the local pecking order. Furthermore, none of this automatic internal talk distracts us from the succulent morsels bobbing below.

The Nature of Eros

What *does* distract us from the morsels and the strategizing is the sudden appearance of someone who better satisfies our heart. Suppose Muktananda's factory owner runs into some earthly Venus. His meditation changes abruptly. He learns how shallow the infatuation with his factory has always been. Perhaps he had long known this in some remote corner of his mind: a vague dissatisfaction that was easily ignored, a dim suspicion about how confining and shallow his factory-centered preoccupations were. Certainly they had been powerful enough for many years -- perhaps decades -- to assert the factory as his only object of meditation. But when he meets his earthly Venus, the bottom falls out.

Certainly there are impediments to his union with her. He is married. He wants to relinquish neither the prestige of his factory ownership nor the family life that gives him security and warm connection. Yet this strangely compelling woman he has met speaks to a part of his nature that is incomparably deeper and more important than anything he has ever concerned himself with before. He has entered erotic trance where his eyes are opened to realities on the subtle plane, and he has no doubt that they are vital. Even if he manages to avoid the entanglements of an affair, he will not be able to still the new meditation that whispers the name of his earthly Venus incessantly. He will be distracted by this erotic and involuntary contemplation and may make mistakes at home, at the factory, and on the road between them.

The subtle realities introduced into his life by his erotic glide will have mythological

dimensions. His earthly Venus appears as an "enchanted woman" or one of Indra's "shining ones." She poses him a fateful challenge, and it seems to him a matter of life and death what he will do about it. His old life seems now so superficial and paltry in comparison with what she represents that her image, held constantly and involuntarily before his mind's eye, beckons to him, urging him to change his course. We can imagine several mythologically patterned directions that he may take.

One of these might be the Greek story of the hunter Acteon's accidental encounter with the goddess Artemis bathing in a stream. Our factory owner is thunderstruck by the unearthly beauty of her nakedness. I do not mean that when he meets this actual human woman, the one we are calling his "earthly Venus," that he has literally seen her unclothed flesh. I mean that when he looks into her eyes the bottom drops out of the persona field he has always taken for granted. Although fully clothed, she is far more naked to him in that moment than when she steps into the shower. He encounters her in the trance of eros, where no manners, habits, or pretenses count for anything. He feels he sees right down to her soul and knows her in an essential manner -- as he has never known anyone else all his life long.

The vision is too much for him. The numinosity of her beauty and power on the subtle plane of his erotic trance blows him away. He is frozen in awe -- like a teenager before a movie star, like a rude hunter before a naked goddess. He is powerless to speak or move. He is filled with confusion and terror while frozen in fascination. It is as though he has grabbed a live electrical wire. He cannot let go, and he cannot stop shaking. After an endless moment riveted in this confusion, his humanity falls away altogether; and he is reduced to a wild stag in rut, chased by his own hunting dogs and torn to bits. His personal integrity is shattered in the face of a force that is too much for him. He will never again direct his business successfully. His family life falls apart. He develops no productive relationship with this Artemis. He descends forever into madness.

But the factory owner's encounter with his Venus does not have to end so disastrously. Perhaps she catches his eye from afar, as the Theban princess Semele attracted Zeus. Ever aware of his wife's jealousy, he also imitates Zeus in waiting for the cover of darkness to declare his amorous intentions. He is determined to retain his domestic connections and his persona-field prominence. Nevertheless, in the presence of his Semele his personal power is elevated to Olympian heights. Although she cannot see him in the dark, she feels the caresses of a god on her body; for their love-making takes place in the temple of Eros.

Typical of his identification with Zeus, our factory owner wants no more than a one-night stand. But his dalliance in the mythological field of eros has consequences. Semele has conceived Dionysos, the god of fertility and the vine, who liberates our emotions and fills us with joy and even frenzy. A god of death and resurrection.

Although the factory owner returns to his wife (his Hera), he is not finished so easily with Semele. She demands to see him in the light, and the divine vision shatters her as finally as Acteon. Zeus sews the zygote that will become Dionysos into his own thigh. For our factory owner, this means that the implications of his encounter with an earthly Venus will remain unconscious for another "nine months." But the divine child is already an intimate part of his life. He barely guesses the changes in store for him.

In the Artemis story, an unintegrated personality has been blown to bits forever by a single archetypal urge, symbolized by the wild stag in rut. Our factory owner is overwhelmed by his boundless sexuality, and he is powerless to bring it under control. It runs amok fatally, stirring up his *aggressive* instincts in the form of Acteon's hunting dogs. Formerly, they were harnessed to his persona strategies. They obeyed him and helped him track down the business deals that made his factory a success. But when the bottom falls out of that world and he finds himself in the mythic realm of eros, he cannot extricate himself from his identification with the wild stag's sexual frenzy. At this point the dogs' savagery, too, is turned loose. The shaky old personal synthesis he enjoyed in the persona field dissolves into an internecine battle to the death of his sanity. [10] In the Semele story, on the other hand, our factory owner keeps his distance from the numinous dangers of eros by a kind of dishonesty. He identifies *unconsciously* with the philandering divinity of Zeus, outwardly retaining his allegiance to his consort Hera's propriety in the persona field. But he is hardly unaffected. Great changes have been made deep in his unconscious. Dionysos incubates in his thigh. He has only *postponed* a more unsettling encounter with the requirements of eros. The day will surely come when his emotions will be liberated -- perhaps through an encounter with another earthly Venus. Next time he may not be so lucky. An erotic, Dionysian frenzy may well be lying in wait.

Despite their differences, these examples share a common element. Both times the factory owner and his Venus have lost what tenuous touch they had with their wholeness. They have entered the field of eros and been destroyed by forces too powerful to manage. Such stories give an entirely new and disturbing meaning to the sense of "fatefulness" that comes with erotic trance. If we are "Acteon," we will pass by any number of goddesses without noticing them. Only an "Artemis" can bring us to a halt. Only a Zeus can stop a Semele. This is the psychological meaning of that irrational conviction we have had that our earthly Venus was "destined" to enter our life.

We enter the temple of Artemis and perform her rites in exactly the same manner as all her other worshippers. We all say the same words, perform the same actions. Artemis becomes our whole world. She usurps the place of the self for us. When we are identified with Acteon and our beloved is Artemis, we are in the subtle field of eros but have lost ourselves. There is nothing to center us. Harmony and balance do not prevail.

We can imagine a third, more satisfying, alternative for Muktananda's factory owner. Perhaps he sees that dazzling woman in the manner of the great Islamic saint, Ibn al-'Arabi (1165-1240). *Al-Sheikh al-Akbar*, the Greatest Spiritual Master of Sufism, met his earthly Venus in the person of his teacher's daughter, the fourteen-year-old Nizam. In his poetic rhapsody, *The Interpreter of Desires*, which describes what he experienced in Nizam, Ibn al-'Arabi writes:

She said, " I marvel at a lover of such conceit
to walk so proud among a garden's flowers;"
I answered, "Do not wonder at what you see --
it is yourself, in the mirror of a man" (Wilson, 1988: 67).

He is saying very much what the Upanishads tirelessly repeat, "Thou art That!" In the erotic trance that gives us access to the subtle plane, we have the opportunity to go beyond outward appearances. In doing so, we see the *principium individuationis* (Evola, 1983), the essential

being of our partner. But in that essential being, Ibn al-'Arabi says, we see our own self. Really to see our own self, the wholeness which transcends our ego, is as close as we can get to seeing God. For he also says, "Whoever imagines he sees the Reality Himself has no *gnosis* [ultimate knowledge]; he has *gnosis* who knows that it is his own essential self which he sees" (Ibn al-'Arabi, 1980: 77).

God appears in the objects that he has created, and erotic love provides us the most powerful vision we can attain, enabling us to see *through* the fleshly object that attracts our eye to the Ultimate Reality lying beyond. Sufism calls this *fana'*, passing away, annihilation. We pass away from the ego's reality in the persona field and pass *through* our beloved to realize God. [11] This is not God "in Himself," Who is beyond all direct knowing, but God perceived in and through a created being. We need the "support" of a perceptible being in order to gain access to the transcendent realm. The highest form of this, for Ibn al-'Arabi, is the union between a man and a woman in erotic trance. In his book, *Bezels of Wisdom*, he says:

When a man loves a woman, he seeks union with her, that is to say the most complete union possible in love, and there is in the elemental sphere no greater union than that between the sexes. [Man's] contemplation of the Reality in woman is the most complete and perfect. . . . Contemplation of the Reality without formal support is not possible. . . . Since, therefore, some form of support is necessary, the best and most perfect kind is the contemplation of God in woman. The greatest union is that between man and woman (Ibn al-'Arabi, 1980: 274-5).

The three possibilities we have imagined for Muktananda's factory owner sketch a rather broad outline of the experience of eros. At one extreme (Ibn al-'Arabi) the factory owner may be offered the highest goal possible, divine union. At the other extreme (Acteon) he may be destroyed utterly. The story of Zeus and Semele suggests a middle position: the factory owner deceives himself, his beloved, and his wife. Although his earthly Venus is destroyed, he himself seems to escape both disaster and enlightenment. But the seed has been planted for a Dionysian "return of the repressed." Eros is not apt to leave him alone for very long. The next time the extremes represented by Acteon and Ibn al-'Arabi will burst upon him with renewed force. His fate is still unlearned.

These extremes describe the essential nature of eros. On the one hand we are drawn irresistibly toward the shimmering prospect of transcendent unity. When we first gaze into the eyes of that "special person" who seems "enchanted," even "divine," we may well believe we have fallen into the hands of a benevolent fate. We glimpse the prospect of melting into unity with the incomparable being before us, and we know we ourselves will be enlarged. We will leave behind what now seems to be a boring and impossibly confining identity, the person we so recently thought we were. The door to Indra's heaven swings open. We know that all this was "meant to be." Our erotic trance reveals the immensity of the subtle plane, and we know that we have always belonged there. The scales have finally fallen from our eyes. We have had a taste of eternity and never dream of going back.

On the other hand, nothing is more frightening and destructive than eros. We find ourselves on the verge of a fatal frenzy. We are seized with terror at knowing we are only a second away from being out of control. That "enchanted one" whose eyes speak to us of unity threatens us simultaneously with obliteration. A force is conjured between the two of us that we know is greater than we are. It will not leave us alone until we are shattered. Even the sublime promise of unity requires the destruction of everything we have known ourselves to

be.

To have eros open our eyes to the subtle plane, therefore, is intrinsically a chaotic and disorienting event. We are pulled both ways simultaneously: irresistibly inward toward unity and in panic outward from the threat of annihilation. No wonder we prefer to keep our eyes closed to the mysteries of eros. In comparison, the survival struggle of the persona field is tame. It is far easier to believe that sexual attraction represents nothing more than the urge to procreate -- the ultimate "social cement." For as long as we see our sexual urge as purely horizontal in its intentions, we can remain quietly ignorant of the vertical dimension of sexuality and its potential as a dizzying and dangerous ladder of ascent. Indeed, the pursuit of orgasm may be the surest way to avoid eros, for eros appears only in the tension between the lure of union and the terror of annihilation.

1. This suggests yet another meaning for the name, Vimalananda: "the purity of the Buddha's half-brother," who enjoyed the nymphs of paradise.
2. *Stirpiculture* was Noyes' own term for the program of scientific breeding, from the Latin *stirps*, meaning "root, stock, or strain" (Parker, 1935: 253).
3. Five years before this writing.
4. He also employed the mingled male and female fluids for "magical" purposes designed to change consciousness even further. More evidence of this sort will appear in succeeding chapters.
5. For example, *prana* and *ojas* (India), *ch'i* (China), *n/um* (Kalahari !Kung), *mana* (Polynesia), *neyatoneyah* (Lakota Sioux).
6. For example: Bramly, 1979; Crapanzano, 1973; Crapanzano & Garrison, 1977; Deren, 1970; Figge, 1973; Goodman, et. al, 1974; Svoboda, 1986.
7. Sadguru (Saguru): the prefix, *sad* or *sat*, means "Being"; cf. Vimalananda's term "Sadashiva." The sadguru, through his own higher nature, reveals Being or God to the disciple.
8. Sadhana: "the means to completion," the practices employed in a spiritual path.
9. The suffix *dev* is derived from *deva* (literally "shining one"). It refers to a god, celestial being, or enlightened one. "Gurudev" is a title which designates the guru as a "divine teacher," the being in and through whom one has access to God.
10. The nature of the internecine struggle is described eloquently by Donald Kalsched in *The Inner World of Trauma* (1996).
11. I have described this phenomenon at some length in *Divine Madness* (Haule, 1990).