

# Indecent Practices and Erotic Trance: Making Sense of Tantra

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## Six

### Scandalous Achievements

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Each rung on the ladder of sexual ascent sets us the task of making conscious whatever was achieved unawares on the previous rung. The new achievement enables us to glide up a rung without knowing how we did it. Having an "explosive" orgasm, for example, is a fairly natural and uncomplicated act. We know how we co-operate with our physiology to get it started. But once we are headed down the automatic path to orgasmic release, our mind can wander elsewhere and think about dinner or our problems at the factory.

The first step in turning our sexual arousal into an engine of spiritual ascent occurs through carezza. By closely monitoring our physiological sensations, we prevent the automatic and explosive release of sexual tension and use it to fuel an erotic state of consciousness. Thus at the rung of carezza we gain a certain consciousness regarding our biology. As eros enables us to glide just above the spasm reflex, our bodily arousal drives us further onto the subtle plane. When we reach the rung of longing, we exploit the imaginal world of eros, deliberately courting madness. In this state we have no capacity to return to the consensus world. If we are lucky, the unconscious forces of the self will re-organize our personality automatically.

According to what we have seen concerning the god-mad ecstatic saints of Bengal, the unconscious achievement at the rung of longing is considerable. The Bengalis say that those who become mad with longing have been over-filled with a peculiar sort of emotion they call *bhava*. The seams of the ego's vessel are sprung; and *bhava* gushes out in the symptoms of madness, while at the same time it prepares a "self" capable of containing superhuman quantities of divine longing. In this way, the self is re-organized, re-centered, and experienced as the abode of the divine Beloved. The saint's psyche has been completely re-structured by the force of kundalini acting unobserved in the unconscious.

A "sane" psyche -- namely one oriented solely to the empirical world of space and time and the persona field of conventional concerns and aspirations -- is incapable of finding the Beloved within. The Bengalis say that a "self" has to be prepared, a psychic receptacle much larger than the personal ego, one capacious enough to enclose the eternal forest of Vrindavana, where Radha dances with her Krishna. This distinction between a personal ego and an impersonal self is by no means unique to Bengal. It is fundamental to Hinduism, which calls the self "atman." Meanwhile, the divine principle which suffuses the universe, invisible to fleshly eyes, is called "brahman." The essence of enlightenment is to know that at bottom I am not my ego but atman, and that atman and brahman are one. For example, the Kena Upanishad says:

That which cannot be apprehended by the mind, but by which, they say, the mind is apprehended -- That alone know as Brahman, and not that which people here worship (I.6).

If a man knows Atman here [i.e., in conscious life], then he attains the true goal of life. If he does not know It here, a great destruction awaits him. Having realized the Self in every being, the wise relinquish the world and become immortal (II.5). (Nikhilananda, 1963: 99-100).

The transitory ego, which faces "a great destruction" at the moment of death, must realize that it is secondary to a larger psychic center, atman or "self." The Bengali doctrine of ecstasy treats the impersonal brahman, "the Self of the Universe," as an erotic god with whom the saint falls in love. This falling in love is transformative, in that the longing of love-madness (bhava) destroys the ego long before physical death and gradually brings atman, the self, to consciousness.

The psychology of C. G. Jung comes very close to Hinduism in the distinction it draws between ego and self. Furthermore, Jung frequently alludes to atman as cross-cultural evidence for an impersonal center in the psyche (e.g., Jung, *CW 6*: ¶189, 330-2; *CW 11*: ¶281, 956). The main difference is that Jung takes the very reasonable position that the ego, as center of consciousness, cannot have been destroyed if consciousness returns. When the Mad Woman of Calcutta points to her breast and says, "Look, there he is," her ego is speaking, pointing, and rejoicing. What is changed is that her ego has been displaced from its former illusory position as the central factor in her psyche. The self that had been unconscious has been recognized as the central factor, "a greater personality" with a cosmic scope, capable of containing the eternal Vrindavana. At the diamond ladder's rung of longing, all of this is accomplished wholly without awareness. The ecstatic is insane, and suffers only. There is no possibility of active, conscious participation in this process. Thus the problem for the next rung is to become aware of what is glossed over when we glide unconsciously into a psychic re-organization.

Indian culture suggests a theory for how madness is surmounted. It distinguishes three stances toward life that a person may take: "leashed," "heroic," and "divinized." By the end of her process, the Mad Woman of Calcutta has been "divinized" (divya), in fact "divinely mad" (divyonmada), in that she and her Beloved are dancing in the eternal Vrindavana within her breast. She has realized atman as the center of her psyche; and the metaphysical fact that "atman and brahman are one" is what "divinizes" her. Her emotional state is described as divya-bhava: a form of love (bhava) which is characterized as divine (divya) union (McDaniel, 1989: 154).

We all begin, however, in a state of being "leashed" (*pashu-bhava*). *Pashu*, literally means "animal," especially any animal bound by a leash (*pasha*) (Feuerstein, 1990). *Pashu-bhava* refers to the longing experienced by people who are controlled by the "leash" of traditional morality and collective thinking. The ideals that everyone takes for granted create a sort of "magnetic field" which realigns us all, pulling us into conformity with the public consensus. This persona field, in which we strive for respectability, honor, and social survival, controls the thinking and aspirations of the "sane" individuals in any society. Our longing to transcend the hectic and ephemeral conditions of our lives as "pashus" resembles the tethered dog who wishes to chase a rabbit. We look for the transcendental rabbit -- more-or-less in vain -- only within the orbit of our leash, only in the territory our culture defines as morally acceptable. *Pashu-bhava* may be certainly god-oriented emotion, but it focuses on conventional distinctions between good and evil. When the *pashu* becomes god-maddened, he acts like an intolerant fundamentalist.

In the story of the Mad Woman of Calcutta, we are told that an individual can make the transition from being "leashed" to being "divinized" in a wholly unconscious manner while spending decades "out of her mind." Reaching the next rung, that of the hero, requires that this achievement be made consciously. The secret is to be found in the middle phase of the process described as "leashed-heroic-divinized." Only the "hero" (*vira*) makes the transition deliberately and consciously. To understand the fifth rung, therefore, we have to investigate the state of mind that characterizes the hero (*vira-bhava*).

### The Hero

*Vira* is a cognate of the Latin word, *vir* (adult human male) from which we derive the English words *virtue* and *virile*. The *vira* is filled with vital energy (*virya*) (Feuerstein, 1993; Evola, 1983). Not only are heroes "off the leash"; they are ready to do battle with the rules of conventional morality. Heroes are always the ones who break out of consensus thinking, brave the dangers of going against the stream, and come back with a prize. Their antinomian attitudes and behavior may be flagrant and extreme to the point that an observer cannot determine whether a given eccentric is insane or wisely purposive, as Alexandra David-Neel implies regarding her encounter with a pair of anchorites in Tibet:

I have never seen such strange human creatures. Both men were frightfully dirty, scarcely covered by a few rags, their long hair, thick as brushwood, covered their faces and their eyes shot out sparks like a brazier. . . . They looked around them like wild beasts newly caught in a cage. . .

[On being given baskets of provisions] one of them hastily pulled something from under his rags, plunged his claw-like hand in my hair; and then both of them flew away like hares. . . . [The man had left her an amulet supposed to] secure me the company of a demon who would drive away any dangers on my road and serve me (David-Neel, 1971: 62-3).

Although the casual observer may have difficulty distinguishing the *vira* from the god-maddened ecstatic, the difference is crucial; for it has to do with whether the aspiring saint's path is voluntary or involuntary. Mad saints choose nothing and oppose nothing. Their behavior violates the rules, but their awareness is elsewhere, and they have no power to resist the tide of madness. *Viras*, on the contrary, remain oriented in the empirical world while consciously cultivating antinomian behavior so as to obliterate the distinctions that confine conventional mentality like a leash: good and evil, purity and pollution, auspicious

and inauspicious, nature and culture, matter and spirit, humanity and divinity.

In deliberately behaving *as though* such distinctions do not exist, viras hope to arrive at the "divya" stage, where everything is truly equal, truly one. They seek a condition that is "beyond all extremes and all moralities; all objects and actions are equally valuable" (McDaniel, 1989:154). Thus the three-fold distinction pashu-vira-divya implies a religious and psychological development from (1) accepting the good/evil distinctions of society, (2) deliberately challenging them, and (3) arriving at a position "beyond good and evil." The task required at the heroic rung is to struggle consciously with moral values -- usually by the deliberate pursuit of indecent and scandalous practices.

Once we recognize that kundalini underlies everything perceptible on the subtle plane, it is clear to see that bhava, rasa, and virya are specific forms of kundalini. Bhava is kundalini which rises up within me in the form of love-madness, an erotic intoxication with beings that manifest themselves on the subtle plane, for example as Krishna and Radha. My ego is overwhelmed by kundalini in the form of love. Rasa is a transformation of bhava. When the effects of bhava become so strong that I cannot avoid the conviction that the force that moves me is not at all "mine," no longer has anything personal in it, and reveals itself as the same energy that moves the cosmos and in fact gives rise to the empirical world as a limited version of a greater cosmos that is perceptible only on the subtle plane -- this is the energy that is called rasa; and it comes closer than bhava to the full nature of kundalini. For kundalini is not only an ego-alien force that arises in me; it is consciousness itself, the essential force that pervades both me and the cosmos.

Virya, the distinctive energy of the hero, is not necessarily characterized by love. What distinguishes virya is that it takes the hero outside the confines of the persona field. It constitutes the courage of an individual who listens within to a force that drives her beyond the confines of society's "leash." But virya is still an ego-alien force. It is something that rises up from the self, is incomparably greater than the ego, and impels the hero to dance to its drum. When this antinomian energy is also flavored by love, it is called virya-bhava. Regardless, however, of whether it is virya-bhava or simply virya, it is always kundalini, the life-energy of the body-soul, which is experienced as a drive to heroic opposition regarding the rules of the public consensus -- not merely to be contrary but to be faithful to a source of truth greater than the ego which surges forth from within.

All Aghoris are viras (heroes) in precisely this sense. They may scandalize and horrify the most narrowly "tethered" among those who encounter them. But they do not do so merely to gain notoriety. Kundalini appears in them as the force of virya and drives them to explore what is evil and "shadowy" for pashus. They are striving to get off the leash of ahamkara (ego) so as to be faithful to kundalini.

Aghora is the Path of the Shadow, the "shadow" being all those aspects of our lives that permit us to exist as individuals at the expense of other beings. . . . Aghoris are psyche explorers who go down into the blackness of their individual conceits to find their way to true freedom.

. . . *Aghora* literally means "non-terrifying"; an Aghori takes the most terrifying experiences possible and transmutes them into devotion to Reality (Svoboda, 1994: 22).

Although the vira might ideally be a loner whose conscientious attacks on conventional

morality isolate him from all those who find comfort in the persona-field consensus, his hostility to convention enables him to recognize others as fellow travelers. Vimalananda, for example, tells us very little about his life as a sadhu, living alone and naked in a mountain cave, leading us to believe he may have lived several years of absolute isolation. But Dolf Hartsuiker's photo essay, *Sadhus: India's Mystic Holy Men* (1993) reveals that these radical loners have a great deal in common with one another and even gather by the thousands on auspicious days to bathe in the Ganges. Furthermore, not a few pashus are driven to seek them out, for it is said that association with sadhus (sadhu-sangha) "removes the darkness in one's heart and [serves as a] lamp for the right path in the world" (Feuerstein, 1990).

Thus, while viras may sometimes be individualistic warriors, fighting a lonely battle with a persona field that would draw them into pashu-like conformity, religious heroism has also produced antinomian sects. Such countercultural communities can provide support and spiritual guidance. Indeed, the dangerous potential of indecent sexual practices renders the criticism and support of a guru all the more essential. India, indeed, has known a wide variety of sects that have distinguished themselves by linking antinomian behavior to spiritual initiation under the direction of a guru. The Kula, for example, make all things allowable -- particularly wine, sex, and forbidden foods: "Such a yogi lives in a way that causes worldly men to laugh, feel disgust, revile and avoid them" (McDaniel, 1989: 111). The Pashupata sect: "Should laugh and cry like madmen, make lewd gestures at young women and abuse those that approach them. The aim was thereby to overcome the ego and gain magical power through transgressions" (Dyczkowski, 1987: 8). In the tenth century, the Kapalikas were, "Fornicators with menstruating women, cremation-ground consumers of human flesh, worshippers of the female sex organ, brahman murderers[1] -- the Hells Angels of medieval India" (D. G. White, 1996: 306).

These are complicated snap-shots of antinomian cults. We may well wonder how much of their motivation was strictly "spiritual" -- if by "spiritual" we refer to a process of psychological transformation in line with the religious ideal of being "beyond good and evil." Surely the phrase "the Hells Angels of medieval India" suggests something less than "spirituality." We have every right to suspect that if the Kapalikas were terrorists, they were perhaps striving for power in a manner that may not differ all that much from that of a contemporary street-gang. Even the idea that "worldly men [should] laugh, feel disgust, revile and avoid" suggests to us moderns the traits of infantile grandiosity: "If I cannot attract attention through honorable efforts, I can surely get it by acting dishonorably."

### **Heroes and Charlatans**

As soon as we take up the theme of the antinomian hero, we enter a thicket of contradictory motivations that are difficult if not impossible to sort out. When the story-teller offers us an interpretive comment ("The aim was to overcome the ego and gain magical power through transgressions"), we know what he wants us to believe. We may even be ready to grant that the founder of the Pashupata sect[2] may have been an earnest and purely spiritual man, while harboring the suspicion that many Pashupata followers may be opportunists. If so, we will surely not be far wrong; for every band of antinomian saints has attracted the insane, the criminal, and the lazy. Indeed, the more sincere they are in their antinomianism the more tolerant they are apt to be regarding the throng of riffraff following in their wake.

When you are wandering as a sadhu, you run into all types of people. Many criminals masquerade as sadhus or fakirs in order to escape from the police, and the police in order to catch such criminals masquerade in the same way. Then there are men who ran away from nagging wives or heavy debts or some other responsibility. There are magicians, and men who cheat barren couples with promises of children, and the whole flotsam and jetsam of society. When you become a sadhu, you must be able to know who is genuine and who is not. And the best way to do that is with a chillum [pipe] of charas [tobacco and hashish] or ganja [marijuana flowers] because most sadhus are forbidden to drink.

Be sure and let that fellow light the chillum and take the first puff. You will be benefited in so many ways. First, he will get the fire going for you so that you don't have to inhale too hard. Second, by his technique of holding the chillum and inhaling you'll know whether he is an old crony, or a beginner, or just what. And as soon as he starts to get into his intoxication everything will come out: who he is, why he is moving about as a sadhu, where he is going (Svoboda, 1986: 133).

Another difficulty in interpreting this material is that antinomian movements may well arise as a form of political protest. In his history of Chinese sexual practices, Douglas Wile observes that political motives may well be entwined with spiritual intentions:

Mass religious movements, featuring sexual rites as a means to health and salvation, flourished during periods of popular unrest, but were generally stamped out with the reestablishment of strong central authority. However, whereas sex as a spiritual or religious practice always was on the defensive and often driven underground, the public ideal of the Emperor, the embodiment of *Ch'ien*[3] on earth, nourishing his *yang* energy through contact with countless ranks of wives and consorts, was a permanent institutionalized model of the efficacy of *coitus reservatus* and multiple partners (Wile, 1992: 13).

This passage makes it clear that carezza with a variety of partners was universally accepted in China as a superior path and therefore required of the emperor. The practicalities of the everyday social order, however, kept the populace on a "leash" that they knew very well was artificially contrived. They acquiesced outwardly to superior organization and force, but reasserted themselves whenever possible. Such a story makes it impossible to determine whether the people's primary motivation was spiritual or political, or some combination of both.

A similar confusion has been observed in the United States. John Patrick Deveney, in *Paschal Beverly Randolph, A Nineteenth Century Black American Spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and Sex Magician* (1989) notes that before the American Civil War free love was "a necessary corollary of spiritualism": not all spiritualists were free lovers, but most free lovers were spiritualists (Deveney, 1989: 11). Deveney cites "an old spiritualist" from the late 1860's on the prevalence of "indecent" sexuality on the part of spiritualists. He speaks of the idea that each human soul corresponds to one other with whom it has an "affinity" pre-ordained by God and with whom a sexual relationship is cosmically enjoined.

Nine-tenths of all the mediums I ever knew were in this unsettled state, either divorced and living with an affinity, or in search of one. The majority of spiritualists teach Swedenborg's doctrine of *one* affinity, appointed by Providence for all eternity, although they do not blame people for consorting when there is an attraction: else how is the affinity to be found? (*Ibid.*, 12).

Here, it appears that the spiritualist doctrine which opposed the materialism and conventional Christianity of America in the nineteenth century did not require a deviant sexual practice, but certainly tolerated it. Furthermore, while it preferred to justify a spiritualist attitude

toward sexuality by binding it to a new form of monogamy (Swedenborg's doctrine of *one affinity*), it could also tolerate sexual experimentation by ascribing good intentions to the experimenter. Nineteenth century spiritualism, therefore, may have been somewhat deviant, but it was not antinomian at all. It did not seek to destroy the public consensus but to reform it.

The indecent practices of the true religious hero have to be far more radical than this. Viras profess indifference to contemporary social mores. They certainly do not want to change them. They only want to root out their leash-like influence upon themselves. Although they may be an affront to their neighbors, they have no desire to confront them. Their scandalous behavior has no other motive than to change their own consciousness. Thus Julius Evola, the Italian philosopher of eros, observes that the goal of "orgiastic promiscuity is the neutralization and exclusion of anything concerning the 'social individual.'" All prohibitions, differences in social status, etc., are abolished, in order to establish a condition of "almost total freedom" (Evola 1983: 102).

Evola's concept of "neutralizing the social individual," means that the vira's indecent practices have no other aim than the dissolution of his own persona. Paradoxically, although apparently obsessed with a social strategy of indecency, the vira really wishes to have no social strategy at all. In a world where some acts are admirable and other abominable, the antinomian hero simply *wants to act as though* such persona-field distinctions do not exist. To that end she<sup>[4]</sup> chooses in each moment of her life that act which will be dishonorable, disrespectful, indecent, and disruptive. From the profane point of view, she chooses to behave like a madman, but perversely; for she knows exactly what she is up to.

### **Taboo and the Sacred**

A violator of rules may of course be cowardly and not at all heroic, for it takes a certain courage to live up to the demands of conventional morality. Such an individual merely follows the path of least resistance and may be said to be "without principle." The participants who flock to the new-age "Tantra" workshops described in the *Wall Street Journal* article we considered in Chapter One may well be a step above such moral cowards. Very likely Ms. Giles, who both "served her goddess" and generated gossip for her friends, follows conventional morality quite consistently in her everyday life and has simply availed herself of an "exception" during the weekend she dabbled in Tantra. She required someone in authority to give her permission "just for this once." Because someone else set aside the principles that govern her everyday life, it required no particular courage for her to go along with the "program." Indeed, we may suspect that she sought out that workshop in order to be temporarily relieved of the burden of her everyday morality. Possibly a more advanced individual will have gathered arguments for why certain rules need not be followed, for example regarding abortion. Only when she actually has an abortion herself will she learn whether those arguments are truly valid for her. Many discover after violating such a rule that powerful feelings of guilt and disgust surge up from unsuspected depths, revealing the superficiality of their conscious attitude.

None of these compromises has anything to do with the indecent practices of an antinomian hero who, as Vimalananda says "follows the Path of the Shadow." Evidently the old

exaggerator agrees with C. G. Jung, who calls "shadow" the opponent of "persona." The persona we take on as a mask and a strategy for negotiating the social world requires us to consciously suppress and unconsciously repress all those tendencies in ourselves which are incompatible with the persona field. These contrary tendencies constitute our "shadow" and comprise everything in us which leads to guilt, shame, and the terror of running out of control. Pashus, who are tethered to conventional morality, do their best to keep their shadows unconscious. Viras, by contrast, must come to know their shadows and live those forbidden tendencies in order to break the leash that would otherwise keep them tied to conventional morality and the profane world. They take up scandalous behavior as a matter of principle to acquaint themselves with the wholeness of a self (atman) which cannot be confined within the rules and strategies of the persona field.

Since the missionary R. H. Codrington began sending reports back to England detailing his observations on the beliefs and practices of the Melanesians in the late nineteenth century, we have been using the word *taboo* to designate that which is absolutely forbidden. But its meaning is a bit more ambiguous than that. Fundamentally, it means "dangerously powerful." Those objects, people, times, places, or actions that are filled with cosmic power (mana[5]):

are called *tabu* (*tapu*). . . . It indicates "what is expressly named," "exceptional," while the verb *tapui* means "to make holy." *Tabu* is thus a sort of warning: "Danger! High voltage!" Power has been stored up, and we must be on our guard. . . . Among the Maori also *tapu* means "polluted" just as much as "holy"; but in any case it carries a prohibition with it, and therefore prescribes keeping one's proper distance. . . . For whoever is confronted with potency clearly realizes that he is in the presence of some quality with which in his previous experience he was never familiar, and which cannot be evoked from something else but which, *sui generis* and *sui juris*, can be designated only by religious terms such as "sacred" and "numinous." . . . The first impulse aroused by all this is avoidance, but also seeking: man should avoid Power, but he should also seek it (van der Leeuw, 1963: Vol. I, 41-8).

As an example of holy power working destruction, van der Leeuw mentions the biblical incident in which Uzzah reaches out with the best of intentions to catch the Ark of the Covenant as it falls. He is immediately struck dead by the Lord for breaching the taboo against touching the holiest of objects (2 Sam 6: 5-6).

The boundaries of safety that set limits to the profane world are always taboo. Georges Bataille observes that to submit to a taboo is to keep ourselves unconscious of the power it embodies. To violate it is to expose ourselves to "the anguish of mind without which the taboo could not exist" (Bataille, 1986: 38). Uzzah's touching the Ark of the Lord was unthinking and even generous, but good intentions count for nothing in the face of the impersonal boundary between the profane and the sacred. What lives on the other side of the boundary is dangerously powerful, regardless of whether it is popularly deemed "holy" or "polluted." We feel sorry for the tragedy of Uzzah but are outraged by those who deliberately violate the boundaries between the profane and the sacred. Those who wander unconsciously over the line appear almost excusable, but those who boldly transgress horrify us. Instead of trembling before numinous power, they boldly seek it. In the process they challenge the order that makes the profane world tame and threaten us with the chaos of madness or lawlessness.

Shiva "teaches man to disregard human laws in order to discover divine laws" (Daniélou,

1992: 15). He wants us to embrace "reality without illusions." Because the world of the public consensus is filled with illusions, pretense, and hypocrisy, the antinomian hero violates the rules in pursuit of a more dangerous reality. Only the *vira* embraces the whole -- seeks the strength to dominate both the tame empirical world and the dangerous subtle world of the spirits (*Ibid.*, 109). Daniélou goes so far as to say, "There is no other true religion" (*Ibid.*, 10). In the *Linga Purana* (I, chap. 33, 3-10), the reprobate god, Shiva says:

No one shall condemn a naked ascetic who is my follower, and who expresses the principle of things, but acts like a child or a madman. None shall mock him, nor call him unpleasant names, if he desire his welfare now and later on. The stupid man who condemns him condemns the Lord himself (Daniélou, 1992: 103).

The antinomian heroes are not out to change or abolish the laws. They require the laws to be immutable but also open to transgression, for only crossing the boundary gives us access to the sacred *as it is*, as the powerful and dangerous reality that defines ultimate meaning (Faure, 1998: 143). Thus Buddhism has always been divided between uncompromising moral rigorism and the subversion of all ideals in the name of a higher truth -- the transcending of good and evil:

Mahayana Buddhism, in particular, argued that ultimate truth can be described only by those who awaken to the reality of desire and are able to transmute it. . . . Traditional morality, as it is found in the canonical scriptures, must therefore be transcended -- or rather *transgressed*, that is to say, both violated and preserved as law (Faure, 1998: 5).

The bodily and emotional power of eros make it the most self-evident and easily available source of power for preserving and violating the boundary between the profane and the sacred. The world of the public consensus is clear that our sexual powers are to be used only for horizontal purposes, the propagation of the species and the orderliness and safety of our everyday social existence. In recognizing its vertical dimension, the diamond ladder of sexual ascent, Tantra builds its foundation upon erotic transgression. "Eroticism always entails the breaking down of established patterns . . . the patterns of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence of defined and separate individuals" (Bataille, 1986: 18). To shun the propagative function of sex in favor of the amatory, to violate the monogamy laws by seeking out forbidden partners, to reverse the ejaculatory law of nature in favor of ever higher and more sustained states of arousal: all these erotic practices reek of excess. All court madness and criminality in the pursuit of a power that fills us like a cosmic fluid and transcends the natural condition. They dangerously open our eyes to the tame, paltry, and hypocritical boundaries that would make our lives safe and powerless.

The emblem of sexual transgression is the courtesan . . . a woman who, in a sense, has "left the world" and can see through its vanity. She is awakened to the (conventional) truth, because she can see behind appearances, through the veil of illusion. She is no longer bound by social ties and conventional norms, because she can see through men's games. She is not impressed by their social distinctions -- priests, commoners, or nobility are all the same to her -- and she can, like a true teacher, manipulate them through her own "skillful means" (Faure, 1998: 131).

The profane world is characterized by its discontinuities, not only the borderline that cuts it off from the sacred but also the absolute separateness it ascribes to each individual. In the world of the public consensus we are each separate, inviolable, and endowed with personal dignity. Eros, in its divine excess, obliterates these limits. Above all it dissolves our

separateness, our proud personal identity in being just who we are and no one else. The draw into the oneness of the *we* threatens to dissolve our personal identity and grant us an "impossible" oneness with our partner. The drive behind eros is nothing less than the subversion of everything that sustains the tame world of every day. Individuality is dissolved in favor of an impersonal oneness with our partner and with the cosmos. Eros seeks "to substitute for the individual isolated discontinuity a feeling of profound continuity" (Bataille, 1986: 15). In this regard, it "opens the way to death" (*Ibid.*, 24), for only in death do we become indistinguishable from the cosmos at large, the ultimate state of continuity. Eros, and especially the crisis of orgasm, calls our being into question and opens us to a larger and more dangerous reality. The antinomian heroes are those who play on this boundary, courting destruction in order to become superhuman through developing a living relationship to sacred power. They live the larger reality of the shadow so as to destroy the limitations of the persona. By transgressing the rules that define good and evil, they seek to transcend them and embrace the whole of reality without illusion.

### **Drukpa Kunley**

As we saw in Alexandra David-Neel's story of her meeting with a pair of ragged and dirty anchorites with blazing eyes, it is sometimes difficult to determine whether a particular antinomian figure is a hero or only mad with longing. Those who are out of their minds with longing are also disreputable and have no regard for traditional rules. But they are unconscious of their excesses and suffer no guilt because their egos have been shattered. The hero's apparent madness, however, is deliberate. The *vira* retains and even strengthens the ego in the sense of holding sufficient conscious tension so as remain aware of the boundaries while transgressing them. Instead of being obliterated by the power of *bhava*, the hero rejoices in the triumph of mastering that power and integrating it. The exploits of heroes have given rise to several narrative genres, the most entertaining of which describe crazy-wise adepts who often pose as simpletons or madmen. But the significance of the stories turns on the fact that the protagonists know very well what they are doing. They are subverting the rules of propriety to enlighten their followers and critics. "The Buddhist 'madman' is basically a hyperbole of the ascetic; whereas the latter rejects the rules of profane life, the crazy monk, in a typical Mahayanist move of double negation, rejects the rules of monastic life" (Faure, 1998: 101). Thus Japan's antinomian monk, Ikkyu, says, "Those who keep the rules are asses; those who break the rules are men" (*Ibid.*, 98).

The favorite antinomian trickster of Tibet is Drukpa Kunley (1455-1570), "the Perfect Good Dragon," the most popular folk hero "amongst all the Himalayan peoples" (Dowman, 1988: vi).<sup>[6]</sup> Keith Dowman's book, *The Divine Madman* (1988), was translated from a Tibetan text assembled from fragmentary legends in 1966 by a learned authority on Kunley and then edited by his scholarly colleagues. Dowman therefore accepts, "reasonably," the authenticity of the stories (*Ibid.*, xxxv), although he also says the stories vary in their degree of "literal truthfulness" (*Ibid.*, xxii). Undoubtedly legend has enhanced biography in a world where "emotional truth" is more important than "historical accuracy." Furthermore, the tales of Drukpa Kunley constitute a "secret" biography, meaning that they "cannot be understood unless one holds the 'key,'" that is "by one who himself or herself enjoys the same condition" (*Ibid.*, xxi). Those who understand will have passed beyond the bounds of convention and discovered a larger reality through erotic trance.

The only structure to be found in *The Divine Madman* is that Drukpa Kunley systematically travels the length and breadth of Tibet and Bhutan with an eye to trying out all the accomplished and beautiful women those lands have to offer. At the beginning of the story he has mastered "the arts of prescience, shape-shifting, and magical display" and returns to his mother. She does not recognize his accomplishments but only wants to know whom he will marry. He brings home a hundred-year-old hag and is rejected, so goes to the marketplace to demand of the people where he can find the best chung (Tibetan wine made from grain) and the most beautiful women. Following the people's contradictory advice, he goes East, West, North, and South, carrying his walking stick tipped with the head of a penis and flourishing his own fleshly organ, called his "Flaming Thunderbolt of Wisdom." It is the vajra (Sanskrit) or dorje (Tibet), the adamantite or diamond thunderbolt that symbolizes "the immutable strength and consistency of the ultimate transcending awareness of mind" (*Ibid.*, xxxiii). At the end of his journey, he summarizes his research, criticizing all the women he has enjoyed. One relies too much on the renown of her family and not enough on the "bliss-waves" generated in intercourse. Another has a beautiful vulva (lotus) but no skill in the "pelvic thrust." A woman with a beautiful body has no "skill or style in bed." One who has great skill in "milking" the penis with her vaginal muscles has neglected "kissing and foreplay." Still another has "great faith" but no "thick rice chung" (*Ibid.*, 139).

As he goes about violating wives and favorite daughters, riding them over the boundaries of the rules of propriety into the sacred space of erotic trance, Drukpa Kunley never forgets the mundane and bawdy realities of delight in seduction and skill in the techniques of intercourse -- not to mention the joy of intoxication with chung. He recalls to our minds Noyes' critique of John Skinner's failures in the cunning of love and the *Kularnava Tantra's* praise of drunkenness:

Drinking and drinking again,  
falling down and rising to drink.  
This is how to attain liberation  
(Daniélou, 1992: 154).

In Bhutan, most of Kunley's exploits concern the destruction of demons -- most of them female. Generally he vanquishes them by beating them with his penis or by thrusting it into their mouths. In one case, he transforms a demoness into a Guardian of the Tradition. After an initial exchange of threats, Drukpa Kunley offers her the instant attainment of Buddhahood. Her reply reminds us of Vimalananda's description of the Aghoris. She notes his birth (a reincarnation of previous sages), his ash-covered body, the arrows of one-pointedness he carries in a quiver on his back, the dog that accompanies him "to destroy all emotion." She points out the beauty of her own breasts and vulva and claims that their "milking" and "up-thrust" muscles are well trained. "For you, a Naljorpa [yogin] who delights in love making, And I, a serpent with fervent lust, This meeting today augurs great joy" (Dowman, 1998: 103). All ends well as he purifies her "through divine sexual play."

In the very next story he teaches a "refuge prayer" to an old man, a reference to the Buddhist formula, "I take refuge in the Buddha, I take refuge in the Sangha (community). I take refuge in the Dharma (law, truth)." Drukpa Kunley's version is of course more interesting:

I take refuge in an old man's chastened penis, withered  
at the root, fallen like a dead tree;  
I take refuge in an old woman's flaccid vagina, collapsed,  
impenetrable, and sponge-like;  
I take refuge in the virile young tiger's Thunderbolt,  
rising proudly, indifferent to death;  
I take refuge in the maiden's Lotus, filling her with rolling  
bliss waves, releasing her from shame and inhibition  
(Dowman, 1998: 104).

To the shame and desperation of his family, the old man pronounces this prayer aloud constantly. When he passes away, his body is nowhere to be found. Under the quilt on his bed is found "a sphere of rainbow light with the syllable AH in the centre of it, shining white and radiant" (*Ibid.*, 106).

It is clear that at least one of the "keys" to understanding the legends of Drukpa Kunley is to have realized in one's own life that erotic trance, heightened through a sort of vajroli contest of strenuous activity, is an ever-available means for crossing the boundary of the profane world and ascending the diamond ladder toward the sacred space of "Indra's Heaven." The almost slapstick nature of many of Kunley's adventures together with his irreverence for established religious forms -- as in the bawdy refuge prayer -- asserts a Buddhist impatience with pretense and hypocrisy. Ultimate realization is never to be found within the profane forms, however lofty their intentions or venerable their history. Furthermore, it is not to be missed that Drukpa Kunley's merry pranks only begin *after* a qualified initiation and training. This hero has mastered the forms of traditional religion before taking up his life of transgression. Indeed, how may we expect anything less of a real religious hero? Without prior discipline -- or perhaps a judicious rebirth (which Kunley also has) -- sexual excess is merely sinful.

### Trighantika

A contrasting but fragmentary picture of an antinomian hero from the Kashmir region of India in the eleventh century has been translated for us by Mark Dyczkowski:

The Shiava master Trighantika, [disfigured] like the root of an elephant's ear, his eyes wrathful, throat swollen with goitre and nose severed, he performs the Great Vow [*mahavrata* of antinomian behavior] and his face [withered and distorted in appearance like] the female sexual organ. Naked, he attends to the vow of observing the auspicious times [to perform ritual intercourse -- *velavratin*], both silent and a composer of hymns, his knees [are rounded and swollen like] balls. Exalting, surrounded by dogs and mad women, his body smeared with faeces he knows the Mantras, practices alchemy, magic, and ritual intercourse. Full of wisdom, he knows the nature of lust (Dyczkowski, 1987:16; quoting an eleventh century text from Kashmir; all brackets are Dyczkowski's).

Grotesque, offensive in every imaginable way, this vira wears the psychotic emblem of feces without losing consciousness. No doubt his eyes are open to the subtle plane; he is no stranger to trance. But he "knows all the rituals"; he "observes the auspicious times" (probably by keeping track of the moon and stars); he is "full of wisdom" and "knows the nature of lust." The text makes it clear that, although his behavior suggests madness, the scope of his consciousness has not been reduced. He is no mad saint. He has expanded his

consciousness. He has mastered the dividing line between orientation in space and time on the one hand and the subtle plane of trance on the other.

Trighantika knows precisely what he does. Most importantly, "he knows the nature of lust." This implies that he is not driven by lust compulsively like Trachtenberg. He has seen through lust (kama), knows what it can do for him by way of sexual arousal and longing, and knows that it is not the goal but only the starting point, the engine of consciousness changing. Apart from the smearing of feces, "orgiastic promiscuity" may be the most flagrant sort of affront to the persona field. It surely serves that function for Trighantika. But the vira does not undertake scandalous sexual behavior merely because it insults his neighbors. The main reason for taking it up is that sexuality constitutes the most personally arousing and trance-inducing sort of activity he can cultivate. Because his goal is to change his own consciousness, he wants to take hold of the most potent source of psychic energy he can find.

Just as the female ass or mare [in orgasm], enters into [the delight of her own] Abode, the Temple of Bliss repeatedly expanding and contracting and is overjoyed in her own heart, so [the yogi] must establish himself in the Bhairava couple, expanding and contracting, full of all things, dissolved and created by them again and again (Dyczkowski, 1987: 100; quoting the *Tantraloka*; Dyczkowski's brackets).

Antinomian heroes, like Vimalananda's Aghoris, harness the ass of their lust. No other steed can carry them where they need to go. But they do not ride bereft of their senses, like the knights of the Holy Grail or the madmen of Bengal: they have explored their bodies and their minds and know the nature of their lust to its last detail. They have taken the poison of lust, and by plumbing its depths in themselves, have converted it into a medicine of immortality. Buddhism knows this principle, too:

The sage Vasistha . . . enters the great country of China and sees the Buddha surrounded by a thousand mistresses in erotic ecstasy. The sage's surprise verges on indignation. . . . He approaches the Buddha and receives from his lips this unexpected lesson: "Women are gods, women are life, women are adornment. Be ever among women in thought" (Eliade, 1969: 264).

Indecent sexual practices function in at least three ways for the antinomian hero. In the first place, they radically exclude her from any place of honor in the persona field of her society. What is the central concern of the average citizen and the never-changing topic of his internal monologue is placed effectively out of reach by the vira's notorious reputation. In the second place, scandalous sexuality employs eros to stir up psychic energy from the more primitive and instinctual layers of the psyche. This intensifies erotic trance for the purpose of consciousness-changing. With notoriety blocking her retreat and physio-psychic arousal driving her forward, she is as surely set out from the paths of normalcy as is the madman. But the vira's awareness and will-power are not compromised.

Jelaluddin Rumi established his order of "whirling dervishes" (the Mevlevi) by violating the orthodox prohibitions against song, dance, musical instruments, and wine. Wine intoxicates like sex, and in the Islamic environment is equally effective:

If he wanted us to work, after all,  
He would not have created this wine;  
With a skin-full of this, Sir,  
would you rush out to commit economics?  
(Wilson, 1993: 160).

The translator, P. L. Wilson, clearly took liberties with that last line, but it makes the antinomian attitude unmistakable. What seems sinful within the context of the public consensus is whatever changes our perspective so much that the values of society are undermined and appear foolish. Today's economists are the experts who adjust and tinker with the financial engine that drives our hectic and ephemeral life in the persona field. To see economics as a sin we might "commit" is to name social conformity as that which "leashes" us to a lesser reality. When the crowd roars its disapproval ("But economics is no sin"), Rumi has his reply ready ("Nor is wine. They are equally intoxicating."). It is a matter of which intoxication we choose. A vira like Trighantika has chosen his: wine, sex, and feces.

There is a third reason for the antinomian hero's choice of indecent sexuality; and that is suggested by the phrase describing Trighantika, "He knows the nature of lust." Lust is a difficult matter to know. It is rooted deep in our animal instinctuality and twisted into countless shapes by our self-deceiving consciousness. Lust is really something to work on. Announcing itself with the divine call of eros, it suggests spirituality and transcendence, even as it refuses to relinquish its bodily hunger and greed. It calls us to blind sexual indulgence and makes us think there is no use in resisting. It clothes every person in our environment with seductiveness and tawdry promise, suggesting there is more, insinuating lofty intentions that it later laughs at.

To know lust, therefore, is to know oneself, to know the depths of our potential depravity, to know the animal that would defeat our spirit. Lust divides us in two: introducing us both to our aspirations and our shame. To know our lust is to know something of the darkness within that conventional morality glosses over with platitudes about will-power and the nobility of being human and not merely a beast. Lust may be our darkest secret. No wonder we hide it from ourselves by speaking of the propagation of the species, "social cement," and the nuclear family -- as though there were not individuals who cannot resist the pull into incest and compulsive promiscuity -- as though we do not feel these pressures in ourselves.

To know lust from the inside as our own -- and not merely as a vague proposition about humanity in general -- is to know the roots of our compulsions, grief, and insanity, the mad joy of yielding to what is stronger than we are, a drive that would overwhelm what little sense of honor and integrity we have. Freud refers to sex as the secret that dwells between piss and shit. Trighantika acceded to that knowledge 1000 years ago in Kashmir with his disciples, "a motley crowd of low caste reprobates including shoemakers, butchers, fishermen, fake ascetics, old prostitutes, pimps, liquor distillers, and drunken Brahmin bards" (Dyczkowski, 1989: 15-6). The feces that coats his naked body reeks of this knowledge.

The antinomian hero of religious attainment cannot merely act *as though* there is no distinction between what society calls pure and what it calls polluted. She has to know both sides fully. She has to know them in herself. She has to have seen *through* the distinction; and that means she has to have acquainted herself with her own tawdry depths, as Rumi implies:

How will you know the difficulties of being human  
if you're always  
flying off to blue perfection?

Where  
will you plant your  
grief-seeds?  
We need  
Ground  
to scrape and hoe  
not the sky  
of unspecified desire.

(Barks & Green, 1997: 75).

Rumi makes it clear that a spiritual life requires the hard work of tilling the soil of our own being and nurturing the seeds of our grief. Romanticizing our stratospheric hopes for perfection will never get us there. We have to take seriously the difficulties responsible for our many failures, compulsions, and depressions: everything that makes up our madness and depravity. This disturbing nature is ours, the dark shadow of what we aspire to, the necessary soil of our future self. It is what pours out unexamined in the symptoms of the mad saints and what must be dealt with in all seriousness by those who would take the heroic path. Denial of our shadow cuts us off from ourselves, specifically that part which comprises the future garden where our grief seeds will bear fruit. Progress on the heroic path of conscious spirituality sets us two unpleasant tasks: the hard and unyielding ground of our shadow has to be broken up and loosened with sweaty, back-breaking work, and our failures and grief have to be valued as the germs of our future spiritual growth.

When the text says that Trighantika "knows the nature of lust," we have to look to ourselves to figure out what this means. We can only think that obscene master must have found in his lust a powerful force that refused to be denied. The mere will to be good and chaste amounts to wishful thinking. The only earnest attention that will bring results requires us to turn over that lustful ground, isolating the stones and roots that have made it impenetrable, fertilizing it with manure, garbage and, everything polluted and disgusting we find in our nature. In smearing himself with his feces, Trighantika ritually enacts a symbolic statement concerning the psychological work he has had to do to become aware of his lust in its every detail.

### **The Assassins**

Individual antinomian heroes impress us with their personal achievements in the sacred sphere. Their anti-social attitudes destroy the tame order of the world around them for those who possess the "key" of understanding. The rest may overlook them as of no account. Their scandalous behavior accomplishes more good through inspiring us than evil to their contemporaries. Successful communities based on antinomian heroism may, however, be less benign than the Oneida community.

Probably the most successful, long-lived, intellectually vigorous, and spiritually motivated movement of antinomian heroism was the reign of the so-called Assassins (1090-1256). Their very name suggests terrorism to us today, although our word "assassin" was derived from a pejorative term applied to their community, meaning -- not "killers" -- but

"consumers of hashish," from the Arabic *hashshashin*. Nevertheless, they were reputed to be ruthlessly ready to drive daggers into the hearts of their enemies; and not a few of their own met the same fate (Glassé, 1989).

Belonging to the Isma'ili sect of Islam's Shi'ite branch, [7] the Assassins attempted to re-establish the spiritually inspired state they had enjoyed in Cairo under the Fatimid dynasty. There were, of course, political and theological motives behind their new "state," which was actually comprised of a string of mountain strongholds separated from one another by thousands of miles. Although the Assassins would have been glad to continue ruling a large chunk of the world from Cairo, it was their lifestyle based on a vision of the world and God's place in it that drew them together in castles too impregnable for the troops of orthodoxy. They were left alone for some 166 years to pursue science, philosophy, and their antinomian brand of spirituality.

Unfortunately their extensive library at Alamut was burned by the Mongols in 1256. Even the Mongols knew where the center of their community lay, and that they could not be conquered unless their books were destroyed. The Assassins, therefore, have left us no official scriptures, and their beliefs are described rather vaguely by historians. Nevertheless, they are given a lot of credit for their influence on the Western esoteric traditions. D. G. White (1996) believes that the larger Isma'ili tradition which the Assassins followed was responsible for the transmission of Tantric sexuality from medieval India to the European alchemical tradition, through the mysterious figure of al-Jabir, known as Geber in Latin texts. [8] Deveney (1997) draws a line from the nineteenth century Isma'ilis to Madame Blavatsky through the Black American self-educated spiritualist, Pascal Beverly Randolph.[9]

There is a numinous aura about the stories of the Isma'ilis. What we know about their "Assassin state" is that in 1164, less than half way through their defended seclusion in the mountains, their intellectual, spiritual, and military leader at the castle of Alamut, in Persia, Hasan II, declared "The Great Resurrection" (Qiyamat[10]) had occurred and that henceforth there was no difference between good and evil. From that moment on, Alamut became an avowedly antinomian community. The very fact that this "resurrected" condition did not bring them to chaos and confusion but that Alamut lasted another ninety-two years and then had to be destroyed by an attacking army commands our respect.

The idea behind The Great Resurrection was that eternity had begun. The old world ruled by the Law (*Shari'ah*) of the Islamic persona field that kept people on leashes of respectability had come to an end. The Assassins were now at one with the cosmos. Their Beloved dwelt within their breasts. For when on August 8, 1164, Hasan II "realized the Imam of his own being," he declared, in effect, that spiritual leadership was not to be found outside oneself in some sort of guru, but that the principle of divine revelation dwelt within. Properly understood, an Imam is not merely a sort of Islamic guru, but "a human incarnation of the unknowable God" (Glassé, 1989). Until Hasan II made his revolutionary declaration, his Assassins had had a series of human Imams, spiritual leaders who were revered as spokesmen of the divine principle living within them. After August 8, 1164, no such outer Imam was needed; for each of the Assassins had an "Imam of his own being" and looked within rather than without for direction.

Because the good/evil distinction no longer held sway, Hasan II invited his followers to participate in the pleasures of paradise on earth (Wilson, 1988: 36-41). "The Chains of the Law" were broken, and all were enjoined to drink wine, which is forbidden in Islam. Intoxication was a higher state than sobriety: indeed they declared, "Reality itself is intoxicated." "The *Qiyamat* simply states that you can behave as if Reality were One because such in fact happens to be the case . . . so why behave as if it were not?" (Wilson, 1988: 46-7).

Such is the essential stance of all antinomian religious heroism. It is almost identical to that of John Humphrey Noyes. The fully self-realized mystic has seen through the good/evil distinction upon which all exoteric religion is based. A "divinized one" does not stop at the outer form but sees through it to its inner (esoteric) meaning. Seeing, as it were, with the eye of God, the religious hero recognizes that the universe and everything in it is God's -- not just "owned" by God, but a reflection of God, a manifestation of God. A state of Oneness has been revealed which is perceived in religious trance as the way things really are. Reality is One; therefore, act in the knowledge of this unity. Because at bottom all is God, nothing is evil. Hasan II claimed to have reached the place of those who have *divya-bhava*; he was beyond good and evil. The "sober" perspective in which we "commit economics" no longer had value.

Not much is known about Hasan II or his style of life beyond the fact that he was murdered shortly after declaring the *Qiyamat*. But he seems to have been too politically astute to have been a madman in the style of the Bengali ecstasies. He might have been a charlatan, possibly sincere enough in his charlatantry to fully believe what he proclaimed. Perhaps he was a real religious hero, filled with what the Bengalis describe as *divya-bhava*, the love of God which opens one's breast to the eternal Vrindavana where Krishna dances with his Radha. Even if he was, however, it is hard to imagine that the majority of his wine-intoxicated followers had achieved so much. We assume that their unique style of spirituality flourished, that wine did not turn them all into drunkards, for the Assassin stronghold of Alamut became a "haven for scientists and philosophers" (Wilson, 1988: 51). Their learning was apparently quite remarkable. Visitors to Alamut who read the inscription on the library door ("With the aid of God, the ruler of the universe destroyed the fetters of the law") brought back reports of their many books and scientific instruments. So great was their thirst for learning, in fact, that they were not above kidnapping proven scholars so as to learn from them (Glassé: 1989).

Peter Lamborn Wilson, who does not shy away from the Assassins' ruthlessness ("fedayeen-terrorists [who employed] bribery, and propaganda") nevertheless concludes that their abrogation of the Law was a "benign inversion of symbol, not a demonization but an angelification" (1988: 63). Wilson is not only an expert in Islamic mysticism, particularly its Iranian forms, but is also an initiate in Bengali Tantrism and several forms of Sufism.[11] He takes a hard-eyed view of the "tethered" morality of our persona field -- questioning whether in the end we are any better than the Assassins. Surely our aspirations are lower: "Our society . . . has a *code* of transcendence and a *discourse* of 'freedom,' along with a social praxis of horrified rejection of all deviance and even of all pleasure" (Wilson, 1993: 106).

We can hardly expect antinomian saints who deny the distinction between good and evil to impress us with their virtue and honor. Regardless of what they may have attained in

spiritual consciousness, there can be no doubt that they will always be invalidated by the "devil's advocates" of a Roman Catholic canonization process. Indeed, to appreciate that they may have accomplished anything at all, we observers have to free ourselves from the pressures of a persona field that is "horrified of all deviance." Even if we choose to live in that public consensus, we cannot arrive at a fair judgment regarding the antinomian saints unless we find a way to bracket our culturally enforced views at least for the few minutes we sit in our armchair with the data of their lives spread out before us.

What are we to think of the Assassins? They seem to resemble our contemporary Mafia. They are a "state" without territory, spread across several national boundaries, and more or less indifferent to the laws of those nation states. Guided by a well-defined worldview, they have developed a ruthless code of self-preservation. Instead of "fedayeen-terrorists," the Mafia has "hit men"; it bribes and lies ("propaganda") its way past obstacles, keeping its own doings secret, murders those of its own whom its "courts" determine to be guilty of betraying secrets and exposing its operations. It is involved in drugs and prostitution.[12]

Considering the Assassins as an Islamic medieval Mafia, we would have to say the difference between the two "shadow states" lies in Wilson's distinction: demonization versus angelification. For what motivates the Mafia is greed, whereas the Assassins were gripped by a spiritual vision. The Mafia "kidnaps" businessmen, lawyers, and government officials who will further their financial aims, while the Assassins kidnapped scholars to further their learning.

If asked to choose which of these two subversive entities it would prefer to have in our midst today, I rather suspect the American public would elect the Mafia, hands down. If so, the reasons would not be hard to discover. The disreputable religious intentions of the Assassins would surely remind Americans of the Reverend Jim Jones and the mass suicides in Guyana; the Branch Davidian disaster in Waco, Texas; Charles Manson and the Sharon Tate murders; stories of armed enclaves of Christian fundamentalists; and the *mujahideen* terrorists of the Middle East. The Mafia is more like us. We understand its motives because they are only a minor variation on the ideals of our own persona field. In the end we will surely fall back on our "social praxis of horrified rejection of all deviance."

Also disturbing about both the Mafia and the Assassins is their ruthlessness. They pursue their aims and murder their enemies without ruth or rue -- neither compassion for their "mark" nor second thoughts and guilt over their own actions. In contrast, we like to believe we are compassionate. Yet we have few doubts that -- if convinced that the existence of the United States and the "freedoms" to which we devote so much "discourse" were in immanent jeopardy -- we would fight single-mindedly. We cannot be sure that we would avoid using nuclear weapons. Indeed, the Cold War called into being a Central Intelligence Agency that freely employed bribery, propaganda, terrorism, manipulation of foreign governments, and assassination. It appears, in fact, that the Assassins operated in much the same way we would expect a modern state to behave if threatened with obliteration from without or within.

Ruthlessness is a problem for us Americans. Debate over ruthlessness is a dominant theme in our public discourse. We like to think that we are compassionate, high-minded, and fair. But precisely what these things mean is not at all clear. It has become impossible for our government to act decisively and with a "coherent foreign policy," not only because the

world is so complex, but even more importantly because we who elect our officials are undecided about what we want. The Vietnam War exposed our inner divisions and revealed that no foreign military "entanglement" can be successful unless the public is behind it -- or perhaps more practically said -- unless a victory can be achieved without American casualties and quickly enough to be completed before public discussion undermines it. Meanwhile public opinion polls show a great admiration for General Colin Powell, who has a reputation for a ruthlessness we can accept in the abstract: begin no operation without a well-defined objective, certainty it can be achieved, and with sufficient fire-power to overwhelm the enemy. Undoubtedly the Mafia and the Assassins horrify us precisely because they have applied this principle consistently.

If we say Trighantika was ruthless in his lust, we open the way for distinguishing two forms of ruthlessness. On the one hand, ruthless individuals may act without regard for the implications of their actions. It is not merely that they take no account of what they are inflicting on others -- but more significantly they fail to confront their own feelings about what they are doing. They leave their values and motives undetermined. Their ruthlessness expresses a probably deliberate state of unknowing in which they silence their conscience so as to act in spite of it without suffering the guilt it would surely inflict upon them. Such an unconscious form of ruthlessness does not describe Trighantika, the man who "knows about lust." For as we have seen, to know the nature of lust means to have loosened and turned over the soil of one's own being; to have confronted the shadowy motives lurking behind our apparently good intentions; to have saved and treasured the seeds of our grief, humiliation, shame, and compulsion; and to have planted and nurtured them with care. Trighantika ruthlessly overturns the values that guide the social consensus in a wholly conscious manner.

Unconscious ruthlessness is truly immoral, for it acts without integrity. But conscious ruthlessness manifests an integrity that disturbs and horrifies us because it brings us face-to-face with the uncanny edge of an "enchanted" world, where the denizens of our deep unconscious move with a ferocity and unpredictability we cannot hope to match.

### **The Qalandars**

The Assassins established a "shadow state" in which to practice their antinomian spirituality and then fell into the vices of all states, including those like our own with moral-imperial pretensions. They might be contrasted with the so-called Qalandars: the lowliest of the low, whom many refuse to call a sect at all. Qalandars are wandering dervishes, mostly to be found in India, Afghanistan, and Iran. They dress in robes sewn with colorful patches, carry axes and begging bowls, and either grow their hair and beards very long or else shave themselves completely. They are remarkably indifferent to the charlatans, criminals, self-deluded, and insane that travel with them. Glassé has nothing but scorn for them, "[They] are in reality a class of social outcasts, pariahs, and the mentally incompetent, who would more accurately be described as unbelievers" (Glassé, 1989).

No doubt Glassé is right to observe that the term *qalandar* is a "catch-all expression" used to describe a ragged band of dubiously religious mendicants. Nevertheless Wilson, who has sought them out personally, reports that a small but impressive minority of Qalandars, "are -- by any fair standards -- genuine mystics." He found some of the most convincing to be

"devoted cannabis users" -- an insult to responsible Sufis, who say that a true mystic cannot be a drug user. "A few were con-men and drug salesmen. The majority were amiable lazy wanderers of slight spiritual pretensions, very much like some of the young Westerners on the road in the Sixties" (Wilson, 1988: 202-3).

Rumi who, like Ibn al-‘Arabi, attempted to diminish his antinomianism behind what the Sufis call "permissible dissimulation" (*taqiyya*), praises the Qalandars as ideal practitioners of antinomian spirituality:

There are wild  
wandering Sufis  
called *qalandars*  
who are constantly tickled  
with life.

It's scandalous how they love  
and laugh at any small event.  
People gossip about them,  
and that makes them daft,  
in their cunning, but really  
a great God-wrestling goes on  
inside these wanderers, a flood of sunlight  
that's drunk with the whole thing  
(Barks & Green, 1997: 66).

Probably the greatest praise for the Qalandars, however, comes from Fakhruddin ‘Iraqi (1213-1289). Seyyed Hossein Nasr, in his "Introduction" to ‘Iraqi (1989: x-xi), says, "‘Iraqi was at once a metaphysician of the Ibn ‘Arabian school of Sufism and an artist of the Persian school of Sufism that was to culminate in Rumi." He pursued a life of antinomian love based responsibly in initiation and spiritual discipline and belongs to that group of Sufis who are known as the *fideli d’amore* of Islam. *Gnosis (al-ma‘rifah*, direct knowledge of God) was to be obtained through a love that began with a human beloved.

‘Iraqi was born into a family of learned Sufis, is reputed to have memorized the entire Qu’ran at the age of five, and by seventeen had "learned all the sciences, both ‘transmitted’ and ‘intellectual’ [13] and had already begun to teach others." It was at seventeen that the crucial turning point in his life occurred. He encountered a wandering group of Qalandars: "And the flame of love caught at the haystack of his reason and consumed it. He tore off his turban and robe (the dress of the theological student) and gave them to the Kalandars"[14] (‘Iraqi, 1982: 34). After the disreputable "God-wrestlers" had left town, ‘Iraqi was overcome with longing for them -- very likely for one in particular -- and ran after them. When he caught them, he said:

I've been to Mecca, to circle the Kaaba  
but they refused me entrance  
saying "Off with you! What merit have you earned  
outside, that we might admit you within?"  
Then, last night, I knocked  
at the tavern door;  
from within came a voice: "‘Iraqi! Come in!  
for you are one of the chosen!"  
(‘Iraqi, 1982: 37).

The Qalandars received him with joy, shaved his head (an offense against pious custom) and made him one of themselves. He continued with them on their wanderings, eventually reaching India.

### **Sympathy for the Devil**

Being "amiably lazy wanderers of slight spiritual pretensions," the Qalandars do not insult our "horror of deviance" or our ambiguity regarding ruthlessness like the Assassins. They have no doctrines at all to offend our theological prejudices but resemble more closely that "Sun among exaggerators," Vimalananda, who "shopped the metaphysical mall, donning and doffing assumptions" until he found one that fit, exchanging it later when his experience had out-grown it. One of the antinomian ideas the Qalandars surely don from time to time, as it is a favorite metaphor for all Sufis, is the notion that Lucifer (Iblis) is the highest model for all who love God.

Iblis (derived from the Greek *diabolos*, devil) is the name of the devil in Islam, whose tradition states that God set Iblis a test in commanding that he bow down before Adam. According to the orthodox version, Iblis refused out of pride, just as our own Judeo-Christian tradition holds. One of the earliest and most influential Sufis, however, al-Hallaj (857-922), had a different view. Al-Hallaj is famous for his blasphemous declaration, "I am the Truth" (*Ana al-Haqq*), by which he meant that he had had the experience of God dwelling in his breast and that he and God were one. *Al-Haqq*, the Truth, is one of the ninety-nine Names of God in the Qu'ran. Therefore, "I am the Truth" means "I am God," a claim that so horrified the orthodox authorities that they had him crucified. He met the same death as Jesus, and ostensibly for the same offense.

As one executed for forthrightly declaring his gnosis (direct knowledge of God), al-Hallaj has become a prototype for all Sufis, representing at once the highest attainment possible in mysticism and the need for prudent dissimulation (*taqiyya*). Indeed, because the highest truths have to be dissimulated, he also exemplifies the difference between outer form and inner mystic meaning. In his book *The Tawasin*, [15] al-Hallaj tells a story about Moses meeting with Iblis on the slope of Mount Sinai. The Hebrew prophet asks about that great sin of disobedience and pride that distorted Iblis' face and made him the Prince of Darkness. Iblis responds that God had not issued him a command but tested his love; and he passed the test by refusing to pretend that his love was less intimate and fierce than that of Adam. Iblis, therefore, becomes an archetypal model for the antinomian Sufi like al-Hallaj, whose spiritual experience takes him beyond the good/evil distinctions of the leash of orthodoxy. Al-Hallaj says:

There are various theories regarding the spiritual status of Azazyl (Iblis before the fall). One said that he was charged with a mission in heaven, and with a mission on earth. In heaven he preached to the Angels showing them good works, and on earth preaching to men and jinn showing them evil deeds.

Because one does not recognize things except by their opposites, as with fine white silk which can only be woven using black fabric behind it -- so the Angel could show good actions and say symbolically "If you do these you will be rewarded." But he who did not know evil before cannot recognize good (Wilson, 1993: 89).

Al-Hallaj reveals the two sides of Iblis that make him an object of veneration for the antinomian hero. In the first place, he stands up for his love and refuses to diminish it. His consequent banishment from God, therefore, becomes the obstacle that increases and refines his love through longing. Unable to enjoy God's presence, he becomes the prototype for the lovers of God who are condemned to the world of space and time, longing for God without becoming pathologically insane. Iblis treasures his distance from God, knowing that the intimacy they share has already made them one. Oneness amid distance is the fate of all of us confined to bodies. In the second place, Iblis, as the master of longing, is also the supreme teacher of distance and difference. He preaches darkness and evil to the antinomian hero, because only the mystic who truly knows evil is capable of recognizing good.

Here is perhaps the most solid teaching we can take away from our preliminary overview of the scandalous way of the hero. Only those, like Trighantika, who "know the nature of lust" -- and indeed the nature of all that is called "evil" by those who remain tethered to the distinctions of the persona field -- can hope to know what is good. Those who accept traditional moral maxims unthinkingly and without exploring them can only hope to make spiritual progress if they are deprived of their senses so that they can glide unconsciously from a state of being leashed to the madness of divine union. The higher path is that of the heroes who consciously plumb the depths of their own lust, their own darkness, until it is grasped and recognized as their own. For only those who have penetrated evil are in a position to know the nature of what is good.

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1. The context of this quotation implies that it was brahmanic priests who were murdered.
  2. The founder of the Pashupata, "the earliest and most influential sect of Shaivism," was Lakulisha (first century, a.d.). They worshipped Shiva in the form of Pashupati, the "Lord of the Beasts." Lakulisha himself, "The Lord of the Club" (the Pashupata carried clubs) "is remembered to have had four main disciples and to have been seated on an 'altar of ashes' [of human cadavers?] when instructing his followers" (Feuerstein, 1990).
  3. *Ch'ien* : In the *I Ching* , *Ch'ien* represents "pure *yang* , Heaven, and the creative principle" (Fischer-Schreiber, 1989).
  4. Although the authors cited speak almost entirely of male *viras*, the existence of Bhairavis (the female initiatrixes who typically appear naked, with matted hair, and flaunting all social conventions) and their importance in the initiation of male heroes makes it clear that however much a minority they may be, female *viras* play a significant role in the culture of antinomian spirituality. Hartsuiker (1993: 62) says, "Less than ten per cent of all *Sadhus* are female and most of them are widows." It is also to be noted that there is a good deal of transsexual identification among antinomian heroes and mad saints. Caitanya, for example, was primarily identified with Radha rather than Krishna.
  5. *Mana*, a Melanesian word for the fundamental power of the cosmos. It resembles Shakti in her terrible aspect, inspiring terror as well as awe.

6. The name Drukpa Kunley is Dowman's slightly Anglicized contraction of a name that is popularly contracted. His full name is Kunga Legpa'i Zampo, usually shortened to Kunga Legpa, or just Kunleg. Drukpa is a title which indicates he belongs to the Drukpa Kahgyu school of Buddhism in Bhutan (Dowman, 1988: xxxiv).
7. The Shi'ites are distinguished from the orthodox (Sunnis) in that they revere a series of Imams, or spiritual leaders, who are descended from Muhammad through his nephew, Ali'. The two divisions of the Shi'a, called Seveners and Twelvers, accept as valid a series of Imams, respectively seven and twelve in number. In both cases, the last of the series is believed to be "hidden," i.e., to have ascended to heaven whence he continues to guide his community on earth (a parallel to the Christian notion of the ascension and second coming of Jesus). Living, bodily Imams are secondary and tertiary figures whose role is to interpret the intentions of the hidden Imam. Although clearly in sympathy with the Twelver tradition, Isma'ilis profess a form of Gnosticism which makes them less than typical representatives of the Shi'a (Glassé, 1989).
8. Jabir Ibn Hayyan (721-776), not a Muslim but a Harranian, i.e., from the town of Harran in North Mesopotamia, a "pagan" people who resisted conversion attempts by both Christians and Muslims. They were known as "spirit worshippers" and had temples dedicated to "intellectual substances" (Glassé, 1989). Clearly for al-Jabir matter contains spirit, a fundamental doctrine of Isma'ilism, alchemy, and sexual yoga.
9. Blavatsky denied this claim vehemently, referring to Randolph as "that Nigger."
10. Also spelled *Qiyamah*.
11. Biographical paragraph on Wilson as translator of 'Iraqi (1982: viii).
12. According to Marco Polo: "As part of their initiation, novices destined to become self-destructive *fiḍa'iyyun* [hit men] were drugged; they awoke to find themselves in a garden of delights complete with fountains flowing with wine, milk, and honey, and *houris*, the maidens of paradise. After a heady taste of this "afterlife," the new recruits were drugged again and when they returned to their normal state were told that they had indeed visited paradise, which would be theirs without fail if they obeyed." ("Hitmen" were "erased" after a successful kill, presumably so that the authorities of the recognized governments would have no one to prosecute.) Such "unveiling of 'hidden truths' [of a mythic nature] . . . has a psychological impact which, once experienced, changes one's perceptions forever" (Glassé, 1989). This aspect of the Assassin "state" is treated in greater detail by Lewis (1970).
13. "Transmitted" truths are those that are known through the scriptures and other definitive books in a tradition; "intellectual" truths are known directly by personal inspiration.
14. Kalandar: an alternate spelling of the more common Qalandar.
15. *The Tawasin of Mansur al-Hallaj*. Translated by Aisha at-Tajumana. Berkeley: Diwan, 1974.