

# Indecent Practices and Erotic Trance: Making Sense of Tantra

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## Seven

### Beyond Good and Evil

- Fluids of Immortality
- Ramakrishna
- The Hero's Erotic Trance
- The Dragon of Soul-Energy
- Heroic Assimilation
- Non-Attachment
- Dangers on the Path of Scandal
- That All May Be One

The image of Trighantika, grotesque, feces-smearred, and exalting, thrusts itself upon us, archetypal in its primitive power, uncannily disturbing if not outright horrifying, an apparent contradiction of psychotic form wedded to claims of superior achievement. Mark Dyczkowski (1987) cites this alarming story from the eleventh century in Kashmir in which the genial founder of the "Doctrine of Vibration" (*Spanda*), Abhinavagupta (born, ca. 950 c.e.), presents a "biting satire" concerning the primitive form of Shaivism which he wishes to systematize and elevate. His reforming vision takes sex seriously as the engine of consciousness-changing. But he seeks to give it a serious tone and avoid the corruption and rank primitivity that had been long associated with the devotees of Shiva. In doing so, he reveals the depths of his earnest concern. The whole project of going beyond good and evil is constantly in danger of succumbing to the lowest of instinctual compulsions.

Trighantika is a problem for us as much as he was for Abhinavagupta. Our horror of deviance is probably much greater than his. When we contemplate going "beyond good and evil," we cannot help but remember the pitiful end of Nietzsche, who preached so vigorously and eloquently against the leash of our traditional notions of religion and morality and urged us to go "beyond" them with that disturbing prophet, Zarathustra [ 1 ] -- or perhaps Dostoyevsky's anti-hero from *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov, who axed two old women to death in hopes of proving to himself that, like the Napoleon of his disturbed ideology, he had reached a point beyond and outside of conventional morality.

The portrait of Trighantika, although reportedly satirical, by no means suggests a one-sided tract. For the Trighantika of Abhinavagupta's portrait has his wits about him sufficiently to have mastered "the Mantras" as well as "alchemy, magic, and ritual intercourse." Furthermore, he observes silence, composes hymns, and "knows the nature of lust." Despite

his hideous appearance and primitivity, he has not neglected his intellect. He has embraced every impurity deliberately and exalts. He has not lost his senses but cultivated them. Even if his portrait is exaggerated, he presents us with the problem of understanding how such disgusting activities can be undertaken by one who is clearly superior in his discipline and mental accomplishments.

His foul and demented appearance is evidence of an altered state of consciousness wherein he views everything on the subtle plane, where the feel and smell of feces takes on the holiness of costly oil running down the beard of Aaron, a divine blessing redolent of everlasting life.[2] We can obtain a preliminary hint of what this change in consciousness must be that makes feces an unguent suitable for ritual anointing if we think for a moment about that wet spot in the bed, the result of our lovemaking. In profane consciousness, it is a disgusting and uncomfortable distraction which we do our best to avoid as we compose ourselves for sleep. In erotic trance, however, it takes on a numinous quality. It is the mingled fluids which miraculously well out of us, their quantity in direct proportion to the state of our arousal, glistening and slippery with the magic of eros itself, a testimony to the brink of oneness we have shared, a sacred substance, disappointing only in the fact that it is not copious enough. The wet spot is too small. It will dry too soon. We cannot anoint ourselves head to foot. To lie upon it is small but gratifying compensation.

Just as the eternal Vrindavana, the forest where Krishna plays eternally with Radha, can be seen only with the eyes of divine love (prema) (Dimock, 1989: 169), so the eyes of erotic trance "transubstantiate" our partner and the fluids of our bodies. Although this possibility was seen as natural and indisputable for the ancients, it has become an illusion for us, "a psychological phenomenon devoid of reality" (Evola, 1983: 186). In the ancient India of the Vedas, for example, the gods were worshipped at a ritually constructed fire pit which represented the cosmos, and clarified butter (*ghee*) was poured into it as an oblation. Hatha Yoga (the discipline of bodily postures) internalized this process so that, "One's bodily fluids, and semen in particular, became identified with the oblation, the heat of inner austerities with fire, and breath with the dynamic element of wind" (D. G. White, 1996: 13). By the time of Trighantika, the tradition of employing the body as the organ for erotic consciousness-changing through a discipline of postures was perhaps 3000 years old.[3] As a master of alchemy, Trighantika was disciplined in the confluence of Hatha Yoga with sexual practices and laboratory exercises involving sulfur and mercury in which each detail of the operation was perceived as effected by sexual fluids produced naturally by the body and represented symbolically in the minerals of the laboratory.

In tandem with his work in the laboratory, the Hindu alchemist also engages in the practice of *hatha yoga*, as well as a certain number of eroto-mystical tantric operations involving sexual fluids that he and his female laboratory assistant generate in order to catalyze reactions between divine sexual fluids in their mineral forms. In the end all is a continuity of sexual fluids (D. G. White, 1996: 6).

### **Fluids of Immortality**

Thus the modern, eros-filled lover who finds it a privilege to fall asleep on the wet spot has been introduced to a mythic form of consciousness which is not only very old but universally inspires imaginal perceptions of a divine character. Evola derives the term for the "heavenly

courtesans" that inspired Nanda, the Buddha's half-brother, *Apsarases*, from "running water" (*ap*, "water"; *sara* from *sri*, "to run"). Water is traditionally represented by a downward-pointing triangle which likewise suggests the shape of female pubic hair, and therefore characterizes woman in general. Mythologically, woman *is* water, and water is woman. "We should also remember the ancient licentious Syrian festival of the Waters, Maitumas, where women showed themselves naked in the water, thus provoking rapture in the participants" (Evola, 1983: 104). All of these traditions evoke the wateriness of the aroused woman's genitals. The *Apsarases* and other female apparitions that manifest before the eyes of the erotically entranced meditator are usually described as having "dripping genitals." Thus vaginal fluid is not merely a profane lubricant but a substance of sacred power that gives bodily and sacramental evidence of what Eliade calls a "rupture in plane," where the empirical cosmos suddenly is transformed into the sacred cosmos.

Semen is, if possible, even more important. Shiva's semen, identified with mercury in the alchemical tradition, is the ultimate force of creation and transformation. When retained during powerful sexual arousal and made to "flow upward" from the genitals to the brain, semen is converted into nectar, the medicine of immortality, in the crown chakra. Such a practice (the foundation of Vimalananda's vajroli contest) makes the yogin divine by transforming his mortal body into a superhuman immortal body.

Divine semen transmutes base metals into gold and transforms human semen into nectar by which the mortal practitioner is rendered an immortal superman, a second Siva, whose bodily secretions, like Siva's own, transmute base metals into gold (D. G. White, 1996: 188).

Such claims cannot be understood if we take them to be mere theological propositions. They are rather conclusions drawn from direct experience during the arousal of kundalini, where the "involuntary belief" of the trance state reveals a sacred meaning residing in ordinary appearances. Indeed, the *vajroli mudra* (vajroli practiced not as a "contest" but as a co-operative act of worship on the part of the yogin and yogini) involves the mingling of prostatic fluid and semen with vaginal secretions -- the same liquids that produce the wet spot in the bed. If both parties then absorb these mingled fluids through vajroli back into their own bodies, it is not mere biological secretions that are drawn up. It is rather a fluid of immortality that opens our eyes to the heavenly plane:

The way to becoming a "second Siva" -- for this has always been the goal of tantric practice in its various forms -- was, in early tantrism, realized through the conduit of a hoard of wild goddesses (which the tantrikas identified with their human consorts), generally known as *yoginis*. These "bliss-starved" goddesses, attracted by offerings of mingled sexual fluids, would converge into the consciousness of the practitioner, to transform him, through their limitless libido, into a god on earth (D. G. White, 1996: 4).

Thus the difference between the wet spot as a disgusting source of discomfort or as a potential unguent of holy anointing -- now unfortunately lost to the absorbency of cotton sheets -- describes the opposition between the outer appearance upon which profane consciousness focuses and the inner meaning available to enhanced consciousness. In Islam, the "outer," with which the literal-minded puritanism of the orthodox concern themselves, is called *zahir*; and the "inner," which is opened up by the intensely erotic consciousness of the mystic, is called *batin*. Based on a verse from the Qur'an (57:3), "[God] is the First and the Last, the Outward [*az-Zahir*] and the Inward [*al-Batin*], and He is All-knowing of all things," the Sufis have made a point of paying attention to the inner (Glassé, 1989). The outer and the

inner reflect two styles of religious consciousness: the outer form (exoterism) is leashed to a codified law of moral conduct and definitions that can be labeled "orthodox" or "heretical"; the inner form (esoterism) can be appreciated only by those with a heightened state of consciousness whereby the inner meaning of ordinary objects and actions can be directly perceived by an individual in erotic, religious trance.

The keynote . . . in esoteric propaganda . . . [is] the cultivation of *taste* both as working-on-the-self and as a propaganda for the esoteric "cause." To awaken in others the *desire* for that which can scarcely be spoken of at all except in booming clichés or divine names -- the desire for Eros son of Chaos -- the taste for life itself and none of its cheap representations or lying substitutes: the desire to *be* art, spontaneously and absolutely (Wilson, 1993: 78).

In Hinduism, "taste" is also *rasa*, the fluid that animates the cosmos, and the esoteric meaning of vaginal secretions. To have a "taste" for God and not merely to have heard of Him, not merely to believe in Him, is a universal expression, as well, of the Christian mystics. Those who are erotically aroused to the point that their vaginal and prostatic fluids begin to well out of the body, sanctifying everything they wet -- those who remain in that arousal without vanishing into tension-releasing spasms -- enter into an erotic trance wherein the outer form reveals its esoteric meaning. Only a change in consciousness like this is able to explain to us how the grotesque and obscene Shiva-worshipper, Trighantika, has been able to combine discipline and mental achievement with disgusting impurity. Impurity is the exoteric form of an esoteric reality which those who are leashed to profane appearances will never guess.

The impurity of genital secretions or even saliva and urine is one thing. But feces is surely something different. The esoterist would admit the difference, but tells us it is a difference in degree not in kind. In fact, the quantity and degree of the impurities we can contemplate while seeing through them to their esoteric meaning actually constitute a yardstick to measure the level of our erotic trance. Vimalananda is uncompromising on this point:

A good test for an Aghori is this: When you can eat your own feces with real love for it, you have achieved a tiny bit. . . . Feces is just as much a part of Atma [Atman] as your body and your consciousness are; who is feeding what to whom? The Atma is feeding the Atma to Atma: It is all the play of Atma. When an Aghori reaches this stage, he eats whatever he finds: dead dogs, offal, slops from the gutter, his own flesh. He finds whatever he eats equivalent to the tastiest dishes, all because he doesn't falsely discriminate. He sees everything as One; no attraction or repulsion (Svoboda, 1986: 183).

### **Ramakrishna**

Not forgetting that Vimalananda is the "Sun among exaggerators," we might be skeptical of this flagrant claim. Very possibly he himself has not eaten his own feces. But the principle he articulates stands. As long as feces is disgusting and to be avoided, all is not yet "One" for us. Furthermore, the historical record is clear. Not a few of the antinomian heroes of India have tested the sublimity of their awareness with feces. Ramakrishna (1836-1886, Bengal) is one:

One day I saw that *consciousness is one -- nondifferent*. At first it was shown to me that there were many people and animals -- within that there were babus,[4] Englishmen, Muslims, myself, a cremator, and dogs. Moreover, a bearded Muslim man was standing there with a plate of rice in

his hand. He gave the mouths of everyone a little of this rice from the plate. I also tasted a little. [Food from Muslims is impure for a Brahmin.]

And another day it was shown to me -- feces, pee, food, and cooked dishes -- all sorts of food. All were lying there. Suddenly from within [me] the personal soul came out and tasted all of these things as if it were a tongue of flame. It was as if a lolling tongue were tasting everything! Feces, pee -- it tasted everything! It was shown to me *that all things are one -- nondifferent* (Kripal, 1995: 268).

Kripal explains that Ramakrishna had held sandal-paste in one hand and his own feces in the other, "pondered their two natures," realized they were the same, and then proved it to himself by touching both handfuls to his tongue. But because only Aghoris were known to use feces in their spiritual practice (*sadhana*), Ramakrishna's feces experience became controversial among his followers. At one point, someone who is not named in the biographies came forward with an challenge: "I have heard that you took your own shit in *sadhana*. Everyone can be called this kind of knower of *brahman*. Who does not touch his own shit? Unless you are able to touch another person's feces, you cannot be called a true knower of *brahman*" (*Ibid.*, 269). Ramakrishna took the challenge to his beloved goddess Kali, who possessed him with her lolling tongue,[5] and he went to the latrine by the river bank and took some clay smeared with a stranger's feces and touched it to his tongue without feeling disgust (*Ibid.*, 270).

No doubt seeing "all things are one" was profoundly important for Ramakrishna. But Kripal's discussion of the Bengali holy man gives us no sense of the heroic vigor regarding feces and its flavor that cannot be missed in Trighantika and Vimalananda. Furthermore, Ramakrishna stands as one of three paradigmatic illustrations of the madness of Bengali saints (McDaniel, 1989). In Kripal's account, *Kali's Child* (1995), Ramakrishna comes across as a sharply divided individual whose conflict is reflected in his name, Ramakrishna Paramahansa. The first name (Lord Krishna) reflects the madness-loving and Tantric-inspired devotional religion (*bhakti*) of his Bengali village. Paramahansa, by contrast, means "highest swan," and refers to the loftiest state attainable by one who has renounced the world according to the orthodox tradition of Vedanta.

In his conscious mind, Ramakrishna was a heterosexual Brahmin whose renunciation of the world took the form of strict observance of dietary restrictions. The sorts of food and styles of preparation that he could tolerate eating were clearly defined in the purity code. Meanwhile, in his unconscious mind, he was a homosexual Tantrika. There was a strong dissociation between the two halves of Ramakrishna. His ego did not know and did not want to know what his antinomian half was up to. He heard reports that when he went into *samadhi*,[6] one of his feet would shoot out and come to rest in the lap of one of his boy disciples. But he had no explanation for it, claimed not to remember it, and did not want to discuss it.

It is the split in Ramakrishna that makes him a "mad saint." Although wholly out of his mind during one six-year stretch, Ramakrishna had his wits about him most of the time. Furthermore, some of his Tantric experiences did percolate through the barrier between the two Ramakrishnas. Otherwise he would not have remembered his lolling tongue and the feces and Islamic rice it had lapped. His rational mind observed only what it was capable of tolerating from the scandalous world of his Tantric half. The story of his prissiness in touching tongue to feces contrasts so strongly with those of Vimalananda and Trighantika

because he lacks their psychic integrity. Ramakrishna may be the best example of a severely divided man attaining a level of spirituality that seems to have been self-evident to most of those who met him. Vimalananda calls him the model of a holy man, "Everyone who came into contact with him became truly spiritual." [7]

Vimalananda and Trighantika have no such barriers of dissociation in their psyches. They seem to go into everything consciously and deliberately, aware of their every move, their emotional reactions fully accepted and well understood. Erotic, religious trance, for them, involves no split in consciousness. It is not a dissociative state. The mad saints and the antinomian heroes are alike in that they enter another domain of experience, radically distinct from the persona field, in which numinous realities alter their view of the world and of themselves. In the mad saints, this activity is cut off from the ego, "dissociated," and they have no idea what they are doing or saying in the public world. They have lost their senses. By contrast, the antinomian heroes stay sufficiently oriented in the public world and know exactly what they are up to on the subtle plane. Ramakrishna appears to be a hybrid of these two types.

### **The Hero's Erotic Trance**

Clearly dissociative trance is a valuable adjunct to sexual and religious attainment as far as the rung of longing. Beginning with the heroic rung, dissociation becomes a liability. From the heroic rung onward, vertical progress requires psychological integration in which the experiences had in the altered state are available to the conscious ego. Furthermore, there must be a degree of voluntary control while in the altered state. The ego continues to be an observer while wandering the subtle plane and also serves as a deliberate investigator who rises to the challenge of numinous figures and events, meeting them as worthy opponents rather than simply being carried away by them.

Thus we can say that religious trance for antinomian heroes, although it includes utter conviction regarding the reality of what is encountered on the numinous plane, is characterized by four distinctive elements. First, such trance is distinguished from ordinary consciousness by its imaginal quality. Whether one has entered entirely into an imaginal world and interacts with enchanted beings and gods or whether one views the empirical world with esoteric eyes, the imaginal component of the experience overwhelms and re-organizes whatever remains of empirical perceptions. Second, eroto-religious trance is marked by powerful emotional elements: divine love (prema), possibly terror in the face of uncanny beings and events, exaltation that one has embarked upon a "superhuman" career, and the like. Third, the altered state involves the body of the mystic being charged with energy; the mobilization of sexual arousal with engorgement of the sexual organs and the production of fluids, often in copious quantities; and sensations of bodily ecstasy leading, as we shall see in the chapters immediately following this one, to the recognition and discriminative investigation of a "subtle body," a physio-imaginal body related to but strangely different from the physical body. Fourth, a significant component of voluntary control remains available to the ego during the period when consciousness is shifted to the numinous domain.

The difference between the mad saints who remain on the rung of longing and the

antinomian heroes, who experience longing well enough but press beyond it to achieve a more conscious integration of their erotic trance, is often described by the mystics and their interpreters as *assimilation*. [8] The antinomian hero proceeds boldly into a domain of psychological experience that would be too much for the ordinary individual. Powerful emotional and imaginal forces are evoked that would disorient and corrupt the average person, leading to fragmentation, dissociation, obsession, compulsion, even psychotic interludes. Heroes use these potentially overwhelming forces to strengthen their own will. Whatever fails to overwhelm the mystic becomes a force to be used. Thus the employment of feces as a holy ointment or a food requires a greater assimilation of "power" than a similar usage of mingled sexual fluids. Vimalananda tells us Aghoris use intoxicants freely -- not to lose their senses in a euphoric haze of irresponsibility -- but to master them, to contain their potentially disorienting effects so as to be better prepared for the emotional, imaginal, and physiological forces unleashed within themselves when they embark upon adventures on the subtle plane. "The purpose of intoxicants is to stimulate your nerves to be able to withstand the force of Kundalini Shakti" (Svoboda, 1994: 121).

The *vira* also uses scandalous practices to weed out disciples unprepared for the dangers of heroic mysticism:

The ordinary seeker feels revulsion when he hears about using wine in rituals or seating a naked girl on the left thigh with a hand on her left breast and her hand on his penis. That is how Dattatreya [9] got rid of all his so-called disciples except one, who became the *Adi Nath*. [10] Dattatreya was the guru of Lord Shiva himself, the Lord of Aghoris (Svoboda, 1986: 158)

What sets heroes (*viras*) apart from ordinary seekers and mad saints is that distinctive aspect of kundalini, called *virya* -- a disciplined energy that keeps them stable amidst forces that would upset, confuse, and lead astray all lesser individuals. Evola (1992: 72) is clear on this point: "*Virya* [is] strength in an eminent sense, which is capable of establishing a continuity in one's behavior and action. The texts say that two factors seriously undermine *virya*: fear and desire (including hope)." What leaves us unstable is our very reasonable and well-grounded feelings of inferiority in the face of intoxicants, sexual beings of formidable power, and objects of overwhelming disgust. We either fear them and accept our inferiority immediately and without question, or else we think that we *need* them so badly that we place ourselves at their mercy.

### **The Dragon of Soul-Energy**

Vimalananda's reflections on the use of intoxicants by an Aghori articulates the viewpoint of one who is filled with the heroic energy and sober confidence of *virya*. He says Aghoris are "exhilarated" by the dual between their own will and the power of the intoxicant to undermine their conscious control. When they find that they are able to stand up to the intoxicant's debilitating power, they find that it "magnifies the force of their consciousness" (Svoboda, 1986: 175). No doubt the same could be said of any disturbing influence: that which our persona field defines as evil, impure, or disgusting, and above all that which would unhinge us by exposing us to a sexual arousal that could easily get out of control.

Antinomian heroes test and cultivate their *virya* by exposing themselves gradually to substances and individuals of stronger and stronger disturbing power. If they should

overreach and find themselves in a situation they cannot handle, they require an escape hatch, as Vimalananda indicates when he outlines a ritual for attracting an imaginary Bhairavi filled with wild sexual power and nearly irresistible seductiveness. He urges Svoboda to spurn the advances of such an enchanted woman and stand firm so as to attract the attention of a sexually aroused goddess. Then, if you sincerely believe you are competent to tangle with the goddess, take *her* for your Bhairavi -- otherwise steer clear of sex and treat her as a mother (Svoboda, 1994: 168). "You must work at your own rate of speed toward your own goal; no one is required to do anything" (Svoboda, 1986: 168).

Each time we are able to stand firm against a powerful challenger, we have risen to the level of the corresponding threat to our stability and converted a potential enemy into a worthy opponent. To know when to rise to the challenge and when to gracefully retreat requires self-knowledge. This is the meaning of Trighantika's knowing the nature of lust. He knows lust as a power in himself, surging up out of the depths of his unconscious. He knows what he can take on and meet with the stability of his virya and what he cannot. He is by no means a young man. His grotesque appearance (disfigured like the root of an elephant's ear, throat swollen with goitre, nose severed, face withered and distorted as a vulva) suggests a history of formidable struggles that were very nearly lost. His growth in stability has required decades of discipline, no doubt cultivated through a series of encounters with potential worthy opponents of ever greater power -- each testing his ability to stand firm against a more powerful stirring of lust. Each victory in this stepwise process is understood as having "absorbed" or "assimilated" the power of the opponent, for we can only stand firm when the level of our own power is equal to that of the challenger. In Vimalananda's terms, the goal is to acquire enough power that one can take on a fierce and destructive goddess as a worthy opponent. He says Aghoris want to "self-identify with Shiva, the Lord of the Aghoris" (Svoboda, 1986: 175). For only a god can successfully tangle with a god.

Rumi makes this point with characteristic poetic economy and force:

To change,  
a person must face the dragon of his appetites  
with another dragon, the life energy  
of the soul.

(Barks & Green, 1997: 74)

These lines make it clear that what faces the opponent and assimilates its disturbing power is not at all the conscious ego. Rather the ego must call onto the field of battle "another dragon," one that has a fierceness and strength by no means identical with one's own conscious identity. From all that we have seen, it is clear that Rumi is referring to what Indian culture calls kundalini. The hero's virya has the alien and enchanted quality of kundalini and belongs as much to the domain of the unconscious as the appetites stirred up by the seductive Bhairavi and threatening to get out of control. The only force able to stand up against the formidable power of our own concupiscence is kundalini, "the life energy of the soul," the power of atman or brahman sensed physiologically, felt emotionally, and seen imaginally.

We do not possess and dispose of our soul's energy as we do the ego-centered will-power which turns down dessert at the end of a meal. The appetites mobilized by an enchanted seducer are too much for our conscious will alone. We have to call up forces that are not

wholly ours but which constitute that "greater being," the self or soul. Standing alone, the ego is no match for Apsarases with wild eyes and dripping genitals. To the isolated ego, the fierce and seductive gods are dragons too powerful to oppose. But virya, kundalini in its heroic aspect, is something else. It can be equally fierce and ruthless, a dragon itself.

Therefore, when the mystics say that we must "assimilate" that which would disturb us, they are referring to our growing knowledge and familiarity with our own dragon, kundalini. Before setting out on the heroic path, we know ourselves only as our ego. But when we find, through carezza, that we can invoke the power of eros to hold our spasm reflex stable, we have had our first acquaintance with the life energy of the soul. It may, in fact, become too powerful for us. The erotic force that Rumi calls the life energy of the soul and that India calls kundalini can overwhelm us, driving us into symptoms of pathological insanity, immobilizing our ego for perhaps decades while the self learns to re-organize itself with no input from us. Such is the path of longing.

To rise to the rung of scandal, we have to establish a conscious relationship with kundalini. Instead of retiring into madness or the comforting banality of the persona field, we acquaint ourselves with that life energy gradually. We observe, for example, that kundalini has the power to move us into an altered state of consciousness, lending emotional, imaginal, and physiological power to our arousal. Our genitals begin to flow with substances that are no longer messy and distasteful but numinous with mythic power. The wet spot in the bed becomes sacramental in its significance. Here is perhaps our second piece of evidence that we can be in touch with a life energy belonging to our soul and that it is capable of meeting the dragon of disgust on equal terms. To reach the point that feces has this significance requires a nearly unimaginable gain in familiarity with the dragon of kundalini.

### **Heroic Assimilation**

Evola says, only the *assimilation* of what disturbs us can bring about "the collapse of the illusory world," i.e., the world constructed by ego-consciousness in co-operation with the persona field. When the illusion collapses, we are moved to a point beyond good and evil. What we find disturbing is not merely "out there." It engages with our own unconscious, calling forth the dragon of concupiscence and disgust. Ultimately, it is our own psyche which disturbs us and is disturbed. Therefore, the cultivation of virya amounts to "becoming conscious of the supernatural forces taking place in our own soul" (Evola, 1992: 62-3).

When Evola uses the expression "supernatural forces," he is trying to stick close to our subjective experience. The dragon of the self appears "supernatural" from the viewpoint of the ego -- just as "supernatural" as the seductive demon before our entranced eyes. But kundalini is not at all "supernatural"; it belongs to the wholeness of our body-mind and appears to be based in "entrained oscillators," beginning with a standing wave generated in our aorta. The difference between antinomian heroes and the rest of us is that heroes have become acquainted with that in themselves which most people shun. In striving to surmount the conventional dichotomy between good and evil, heroes come to know themselves. To learn the nature of lust is a formidable accomplishment in self-knowledge.

Rumi and Evola have given us two alternate ways of viewing the process of heroic

assimilation. Evola, although a European who writes in a philosophical language accessible to the West, has steeped himself in Tantric texts and is doing his best to represent for us the Indian perspective on heroic assimilation. His Hindu-influenced approach focuses our attention on the fierce and seductive being who faces us. We cannot deny that our challenger has far more power than we have ever thought ourselves able to command. But if we engage with that enchanted or divine being and arrive at the point of worthy opposition, we can say that we have "assimilated" the power of the challenger. What formerly intimidated us as belonging to another has become "ours." The Hindu approach says that by standing up to a threatening seducer who confronts us on the subtle plane, we absorb its power. We need a graded set of such imaginal "enemies" -- each time taking enough power from the last to stand a chance against the next. The source of the power we assimilate seems to be outside of us.

Rumi, by contrast, speaks out of a Middle Eastern sensibility and focuses on that "other dragon," the life energy of our soul. In this case, when we are faced with a being of seemingly overwhelming power, it is not *we* (in the sense of our ego) that stands up to the challenger. Rather our ego "stands aside," as it were, and allows the dragon of our soul's life energy to rise to the challenge. An inner dragon meets an outer dragon, and we are inclined to say that we have assimilated nothing from our opponent. Rather, opposition has enabled us to become familiar with a power in ourselves that we had not known we had. We have "assimilated" some of the power of kundalini. Our ego has become familiar with unconscious resources it had not known existed.

These contrasting positions of Evola and Rumi can be reconciled when we realize that our opponent's power is derived from ourselves, "the dragon of our appetites." The imaginal Bhairavi, or the enchanted woman we see with the eyes of erotic trance, disturbs us because she stirs up an instinctual response from the depths of our own unconscious. Even though we cannot doubt her reality, she has power over us because she unleashes energies in ourselves which we do not know how to control. From this perspective, everything belongs to psyche. The seductive demon is our own "projection," and the life energy of the soul is the integrative power of the self. An encounter with a demon of "superhuman power" reveals a dissociation in our psyche between the "good" that belongs to our ego and the unconscious "evil" (projection) that threatens it. Calling forth kundalini so as to convert the wild sexuality of the Bhairavi into worthy opposition, no longer stronger than my resources can handle, amounts to healing the dissociation. It is the hallmark of psychological integration to familiarize ourselves with the containing and balancing function of the self. In doing so we discover that we are a more powerful personality than we had thought, as we overcome the splits that had weakened us. This process of realizing that the Bhairavi's power is actually my own, and that I had been projecting it, is what C. G. Jung calls "withdrawing the projection":

"Through this process the anima [read "Bhairavi"] forfeits the daemonic power of an autonomous complex; she can no longer exercise the power of possession, since she is depotentiated. She is no longer the guardian of treasures unknown; no longer Kundry, daemonic messenger of the Grail, half divine and half animal; no longer is the soul to be called "Mistress," but a psychological function of an intuitive nature, akin to what the primitives mean when they say, 'He has gone into the forest to talk with the spirits' or 'My snake spoke with me' or, in the mythological language of infancy, 'A little bird told me'" (Jung, *CW* 7: ¶374).

This same process of assimilation is to be found in myth. For example, the god Shiva is a

mountain ascetic who destroys Kama, the God of Lust and Concupiscence, with a single glance from his "third eye," the opening of his brow chakra which is the locus of divine vision, the ability to see the realities of the subtle plane. A single ray of light blasts forth from the brow of the God of Yoga, Sex, Destruction, and Death, and reduces Kama to cinders. Psychologically this means that when our erotic trance opens our eyes to the realities of the subtle plane, mere lust can no longer exist. Lust is the outer form of an esoteric reality: namely an emotional and physiological force that belongs to the life energy of the soul. Opening our eyes to the subtle plane enables us to see that physical-emotional force in its imaginal form, as an enchanted or divine component of our soul's life. To see lust with the eyes of imagination reveals its potential divinity, its spiritual possibilities.

The pashus among Shiva's followers, those who are leashed to conventional definitions of good and evil, may pray to Shiva to intervene on their behalf and incinerate *for them* the demon of lust that would lead them astray into dereliction of their marital duties and beast-like slavery to their appetites. They hope to remain unconscious of the whole process. The Shiva they pray to is an exteriorized ("projected") manifestation of kundalini; and the Bhairavi who stirs their lust is another. They want the *integrating* power of kundalini to destroy the *disturbing* power of kundalini without ever knowing how it happened.

The viras who follow Shiva, however, perform vajroli mudra, ritual intercourse involving the absorption of mingled sexual fluids through their genital organs, and with a partner to whom they are not married. Calling forth kundalini through physiological arousal and the subtle plane through japa (the recitation of mantras that brings the words to life), they self-identify with kundalini and effectively become a "Second Shiva," destroying Kama with the light of their own erotic trance. What the vira does is impure and evil in the eyes of the pashu; but as an earthly slayer of the God of Lust, the vira is familiar with a loftier form of holiness that can only be seen with esoteric eyes.

### **Non-Attachment**

Vimalananda says: "Aghora teaches you to embrace the world, embrace impurity, embrace darkness, and push through forcibly into light. You must catch Shakti [i.e., kundalini] by the hair and drag her to you" (Svoboda, 1986: 169). Hundreds of miles away from Bombay's Banganga Smashan, where Svoboda cremated his guru, and about a hundred years earlier, Alexandra David-Neel's journeys through Tibet brought her into conversation with a naljorpa ("one who has attained perfect serenity"). She asked him if he was, indeed, "free from all defilement." His answer could have been given by Vimalananda: "He who tries to get out [of defilement] only sinks in deeper. I roll in it like a pig. I digest it and turn it into gold dust, into a brook of pure water. To fashion stars out of dog dung, that is the Great Work" (David-Neel, 1971: 7).

Paradoxically, what the antinomian hero achieves by "rolling in impurity like a pig" is ultimately no different from what the orthodox mystic strives for: "non-attachment." "Non-attachment" or "detachment" is a universal precondition for mystical attainment, as much fundamental to Christianity as to Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam, as Richard P. O'Brien indicates in his massive compendium of Roman Catholic theology:

Such union [of the soul with God] is impossible, however, apart from complete abandonment of, and detachment from, all creatures and worldly realities. This orientation was most pronounced in *The Cloud of Unknowing* (O'Brien, 1981: 1065).

Orthodox mystics attempt to achieve non-attachment by conscious disciplines that emphasize self-denial: penance, fasting, observing silence, and the like. They hope to directly remove themselves from the impure and evil forces that would corrupt their spiritual intentions by engaging their natural propensity for instinctual gratification. The antinomian heroes, by contrast, roll in those impurities "like a pig." Instead of shunning the sources of disturbance, they seek to familiarize themselves with them as thoroughly as they can. They seek not to avoid their lust but to learn its nature.

By calling up the dragon of kundalini to meet the dragon of their appetites, they neutralize the effects of the challenger. The dragon of their concupiscence becomes incapable of disturbing them. In this way they become non-attached. For it is always our attachments that disturb us. We are attached to our safety and therefore disturbed by our terror, attached to our chastity and therefore disturbed by our lust, attached to our goodness and purity and therefore disturbed by evil and impurity. These disturbances are conquered and turned into non-attachment when the antinomian hero confronts the challenger with the dragon of the soul's life energy. Kundalini under the aspect of virya does the work of facing down the disturber, and the ego is "detached" from what disturbed it.

Achieving non-attachment through antinomian confrontation, however, provides an additional benefit. The energy-level or arousal of unconscious forces is raised to very high levels, fueling an erotic trance which transforms the profane world of exoterism into the mythic world of esoterism. Antinomian heroes acquaint themselves with the forces of a greater cosmos which they feel in their own bodies as participants in the Oneness of all that is. In doing so, they detach themselves from the profane outer form and familiarize themselves with the sacred inner substance which they feel as an "energy" that floods their body-mind. They perceive that the impure harbors the pure and evil harbors the good. They avoid the defilements of lust, desire, hope, and repugnance by a non-attachment which "works through" the disturbance and does not merely avoid it.

In India there are traditionally five sorts of defilement:[11] wine, meat, fish, parched grain, and ritual intercourse. All five are considered "impure" by orthodox Hindus. If Westerners wish to practice such a religious heroism, they might need to substitute something far more disturbing than meat, fish, and parched grain. But we ought to be suspicious of all attempts to slavishly imitate the practices of those whose consciousness was formed in a foreign cultural environment. The most natural form of heroic sainthood would avoid such artificial constructions. It is enough -- indeed quite a lot -- to face up to those substances, forces, situations, and individuals that are a danger to *me*. If we look into our hearts, we will see that our most disturbing opponents are those that cause "uncertainty, dilemma, scruple, and doubt"; for the most fundamental form of impurity is our inner division (Silburn, 1988: 163). Wilson (1988: 213) says, "Anything -- even including religion -- can act as a poison against perception, or as a support for contemplation of the Reality."

These observers have recognized the essential point, namely that an advance beyond conventional prejudices on the one hand or divine madness on the other can only be made by those with genuine psychological integrity. We all have a sufficiently intimidating array of

uncertainties, doubts, and confusions to provide us a lifetime of material for heroic struggle. The true religious heroes work with what their fate has provided them. They meet the splits in their psyche head-on and call up psychic energy that has been cut off and alienated from ordinary consciousness. Their own psyche sets them the challenges and provides just the right worthy opponents in optimal sequence to guarantee a spiritual practice (*sadhana*) precisely designed for their own soul.

### **Dangers on the Path of Scandal**

I do not mean to suggest that the average individual should set off on her own without any guidance or supervision. The heroic path of the antinomian saints is always a dangerous undertaking. All spokesmen for the path of the *vira* insist that it must not be pursued without the guidance of a guru who knows both the nature of the path and the strengths and weakness of the disciple. "Without the guru, the *sadhaka*<sup>[12]</sup> is apt to slip, and when he slips he falls all the way to hell" (Dimock, 1989: 196).

According to legend, even the great Matsyendra fell. Matsyendra (ninth century, c.e.) is the founder of the Natha sect, a Shiva-oriented Tantric system which strives for the "transubstantiation of the body." According to the legend, Matsyendra failed a test set for him by an enraged goddess. When she unveiled her sexual charms, he lost his yogic consciousness and became aroused with lust. The outer object of lustful desire caused him to forget the resource of kundalini, and he saw the goddess as a potential sexual partner in the profane sense. The erotic trance of yogic consciousness was destroyed by the dragon of his lust. The terrible goddess seized her opportunity and she cursed Matsyendra to fall asleep in the Kingdom of the Women, also called the Kingdom of the Plantain Forest.

He had been unconscious for some time and was only three days away from death at the hands of sixteen hundred women, when his disciple, Gorakh, learned of his plight and disguised himself as a woman, a drummer with a female musical troop, to gain entrance into the Plantain Kingdom. When the music began, Gorakh's drum sang out, "Awaken Matsyendra, Gorakh has come!" This brought Matsyendra to ordinary consciousness. But Gorakh had to restore his guru to *yogic* consciousness, i.e., awareness of his kundalini, before they both could escape. D. G. White, who relays several versions of this legend, comments on its psychological meaning:

Matsyendra's Kadali<sup>[13]</sup> [Plantain] Kingdom was undoubtedly a forest of women's thighs [cf. the banana-like shape of plantains, growing close together in bunches], in the midst of which he nearly lost his life -- albeit through a form of tantric practice -- but where he in the end realized yogic immortality through Gorakh's intervention. . . . A woman's thighs can lead to the death of a yogin, but they can also constitute a "boat to immortality" (D. G. White, 1997: 239).

The great danger along the path of the antinomian hero is always losing consciousness. Matsyendra falls into sexual lethargy when he meets the sexually endowed goddess whose charms overwhelm his own power to "step aside" and allow kundalini to surge forth and meet her as a worthy opponent. Furthermore, he falls not only to the level of ordinary consciousness in which he might have turned aside his gaze or perhaps summoned his powers so as to view her as a mother rather than as a sexual challenger. He has fallen all the way to a life-endangering sleep. Lost in a forest of women's thighs, he has fallen victim to

his lust and can regain the psychic integrity that Toomer calls "the seed that outgrows its pod" only with help. Gorakh, we are led to believe, although only a disciple and not yet the Nath Siddha<sup>[14]</sup> he is destined to become, is prepared for the Plantain Forest. He never loses his yogic consciousness and therefore has his lust under control. Because he is Matsyendra's disciple, we are encouraged to believe his attainments are not greater than those of his guru. He simply has the advantage that he was not caught unawares by a hostile goddess. Those who remember this tale are thereby forewarned that no degree of attainment on the heroic path leaves the vira invulnerable to surprise. The antinomian path is dangerous for everyone.

The "yogic consciousness" the legend speaks of is what we have called non-dissociative erotic trance, a state of kundalini arousal which is more than physiological and emotional. It is an imaginal state as well, in which the eyes are opened to subtle realities which reveal the esoteric meaning in such mundane but disturbing objects of desire as the thighs of a potential partner. Vimalananda has given us a hint of what this form of consciousness must be when he speaks of the Aghori's ability to eat his own feces "with real love for it": "Feces is just as much a part of Atma as your body and your consciousness are; who is feeding what to whom? The Atma is feeding the Atma to Atma: It is all the play of Atma" (Svoboda, 1986: 183).

What is true of the object of our disgust must also be true of the object of our desire. Muktananda discovered this truth during a period of his training when his guru had ordered him to spend an indefinite length of time continuing his practice in an isolated location. In the beginning all went well, but eventually Muktananda was seriously disturbed by sexual arousal and an uncontrollable erection whenever he sat down to meditate. His whole body "boiled with lust," and "the agony of [his] sexual organ" was beyond description (Muktananda, 1978: 92). Then, while trying to meditate despite his arousal, he began to see a red circle. Finally -- and worst of all to Muktananda's way of thinking -- a naked woman appeared in the circle and began dancing with sexual abandon. Muktananda examined his life from every perspective without determining the source of the lust that had so disturbed his yogic consciousness. He tried to control it with meditation and fasting but found that, like Gopi Krishna, he could not sleep. Images of the naked woman plagued him day and night. He thought the dragon of his sexual desire was the fruit of his sins. "Tearing my loincloth, my generative organ dug forcibly into my navel, where it remained for some time. Who was raping me like this?" (*Ibid.*, 95).

In the end, he required the guidance of others. The third one, a rather disreputable-looking holy man, the avadhuta<sup>[15]</sup> Zipruanna, interpreted the experience for him and explained that sexual arousal during the practice of meditation portends a very high level of attainment. As for the Bhairavi of his visions, Zipruanna said:

Why do you worry about whether a woman is naked or clothed? The Goddess takes all forms. When you saw that woman, you should have remembered the Goddess Chit Shakti [the Goddess of the Power of Consciousness] and looked at Her. . . . It is your attitude that bears fruit according to your conviction. From now on, you should understand whatever forms you see, good or bad, to be forms of Chiti [Consciousness] (Muktananda, 1978: 106).

Muktananda, not being an antinomian saint, a follower of the so-called "left-hand path" (*vama-marga*), was completely unprepared for the shadowy dimension of sex. Evidently he had thought that meditating on his "Sadguru," the esoterically divine Nityananda, would be

sufficient in his quest for enlightenment. He thought he could eschew "impurities." But clearly his exposure to the greater cosmos of the subtle plane could not be so conveniently limited. Whether we say that the goddess of cosmic consciousness (Chit-Shakti) had other ideas or whether we take a more psychological approach and say that when his ego was exposed to kundalini the disturbing shadow-dimension of his psychic wholeness had to be confronted, in either case he had to contend with the same dangers that the antinomian saints have accepted as their starting point.

He had to apprentice himself to an antinomian saint in order to convert the obstacle of his autonomous lust into the spiritual strength that would make him a great guru. Zipruanna was a sort of modern version of Trighantika:

The first time I visited him, he was defecating in a corner; as I approached, he began to rub his faeces all over his body. I sat down quite close to him and found that he emitted a sweet fragrance -- he didn't smell bad at all. The next time I went to see him, he was sitting on a rubbish dump. Even then the filth would not touch him. I didn't have the courage to go up close; so I stood at a distance. After a little while, he came down off the rubbish heap. I washed his feet. A fragrance like the *ashtagandha* (a fragrant herb) was coming from his body. Zipruanna had a great love for me. Even now I still wonder at the attainments of that great soul. I once asked him, "Anna, why are you sitting in that filth?" He replied, "Muktananda, the filth that's inside is far worse than this. Think about it. Man's body is just a bag of shit and piss. Isn't it?" I fell silent. Zipruanna was a great *avadhuta*, the crown jewel among saints (Muktananda, 1978: 104-5).

Obviously, Zipruanna had, like Trighantika a thousand years earlier, mastered lust and feces. Although great yogins are sometimes said to have sweet-smelling feces, it seems more likely that Muktananda's nose found the feces-smearing *avadhuta* to be "sweet-smelling" because it was under the influence of Muktananda's "attitude": "It is your attitude that bears fruit according to your conviction." Muktananda's conviction included the view that Zipruanna was a "jewel among saints." He approached Zipruanna with esoteric eyes and nose; and the fact that feces can smell as sweet as costly ointment is closely linked to the central message Zipruanna had to impart: namely that the lascivious maiden of Muktananda's visions was the outer form of the goddess of cosmic consciousness who is none other than kundalini.

### **That All May Be One**

The perception that good and evil are the same, that it is "Atma feeding Atma to Atma," is based on the very high-level subtle-plane recognition that every entity, situation, action, and relationship of the empirical world is a disguise behind which vibrates the ultimate reality which is sometimes called atman, sometimes brahman, and sometimes chit (consciousness). The divine lurks behind and within every profane reality. Feuerstein (1989:117) places this realization at least 3000 years ago, at the writing of the Brihad-Aranyaka ("Great-Forest")-Upanishad, where the sage Yajnavalkya says: "He who breathes with your inhalation (*prana*) is your Self (*atman*), which is in everything. He who breathes with your exhalation (*apana*) is your Self, which is in everything" (III.4.1). Attending to the Middle Eastern tradition of Sufism, Wilson (1988: 71) has reached the same conclusion, "In effect the mystic sees God in all things, but is told by Law that some of these things are prohibited: their 'inner' is divine, but their 'outer' is forbidden."

What is the criterion of purity? asks Abhinavagupta [the Kashmiri Tantric reformer who told us the story of Trighantika]. That alone is pure which is identical to Consciousness, everything else is impure. No distinction between pure and impure exists for him who regards the entire universe as identical with Consciousness (Silburn, 1988: 164-5).

It is still a stretch for us to realize how it is that "consciousness" may be identical with God -- and how it is that this mysterious no-thing of consciousness can describe the esoteric substance of feces, a plantain, or a woman's thigh. Whatever experience we may have had concerning the slimy mess of mingled genital fluids momentarily taking on sacramental significance, however, does give us a hint as to how things are "transubstantiated" through an erotic trance. What is important at the rung of scandal is to see how it is that antinomian practices strengthen and integrate the psyche through "assimilation" or "familiarization" with the power of kundalini that is alien to the ego. And that when this integration process has proceeded far enough, one steps beyond good and evil by recognizing that at bottom good and evil are equally the play of a cosmic energy that some call consciousness and some God.

At the level of the rung of scandal, the central experience is "assimilation." Antinomian heroes experience thereby an increase in "power" or "energy," the life energy of the soul. Kundalini surges forth in them -- not to destroy the ego and bring them madness, but to face down the opponent that disturbs them. Their observing ego remains conscious throughout and observes the integrating dragon of kundalini as it confronts the disturbing dragon of their appetites. Precisely what it is that they have realized remains unconscious to them. For those standing on the heroic rung of the diamond ladder, the force that has taken them beyond good and evil is still unexamined. Claims that it is consciousness, kundalini, God, or "the Reality" are still lost in the mists of theological speculation -- something to be taken on faith. Explicating the stages by which that mysterious energy surges forth will be the task encountered on the rung of the subtle-body.

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1. Although the madness that marked the end of Nietzsche's life has been attributed to syphilis, the presence of the infectious disease that has been our foremost symbol of sexual indiscretion before the arrival of AIDS, has never been enough to silence those, like Jung, who have found the form of the philosopher-poet's madness to lie in his overly intellectual denial of the body and instinctuality, a kind of wishful-thinking that the shadowy demons of our psyche have ultimately no reality. For Jung this is symbolized in a dream Nietzsche reports in which he has to overcome his repugnance and swallow a toad (Jung, *CW 5*: ¶47n, ¶585n). Trighantika is our "toad."
  2. Ps. 133: "How good it is and how pleasant for brothers to live together! It is fragrant as oil poured upon the head and falling over the beard, Aaron's beard, when the oil runs down over the collar of his vestments. It is like the dew of Hermon falling upon the hills of Zion. There the Lord bestows his blessing, life for evermore."
  3. The earliest teacher of the tradition known as Hatha Yoga, Goraksha, lived perhaps a century and a half before Trighantika. The earliest written reference to yoga as a spiritual discipline of mind and body dates from the Taittiriya-Upanishad in the sixth or seventh century, b.c.e. (Feuerstein, 1990). But a figurine of a Shiva-like god, sitting in apparent yogic meditation with erect phallus, wearing animal masks and surrounded by animals (Pashupati, the Lord of the Beasts) shows that the tradition of yogic bodily discipline and sexual arousal reaches back as far as the Harappan Age (2700-1900 b.c.e.) (Feuerstein, Kak, & Frawley, 1995: 61-76).

4. Babu: Hindi for "lord," also a country squire or distinguished man; a title of respect (Fischer-Schreiber, 1989).
5. Kali, the black goddess, resembles the Smashan Tara whom Vimalananda designed for the cover of Svoboda's *Aghora* (1986). She is naked, usually standing on a corpse, dressed in a necklace of human skulls and a skirt of human forearms, and has a tongue lolling far out of her mouth, sometimes even to her knees. Kripal's thesis is that the lolling tongue of Kali is an erotic non-discriminator between the pure and the impure and that Ramakrishna is internally identified with Kali. The title of his book on Ramakrishna is *Kali's Child*.
6. Samadhi: "a state of consciousness that lies beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep, and in which mental activity ceases. It is a total absorption in the object of meditation" (Fischer-Schreiber, 1989).
7. Vimalananda's model of an unspiritual man was Ghandi, "Everyone became truly materialistic, greedy, for fame or money or both" (Svoboda, 1997: 302).
8. The parallel construct in Jung's psychology is the rather vaguely described process of "withdrawing the projection," which refers to recognizing that the imaginal forces that confront me are not, in the final analysis, "out there," but are a function of my own unconscious. Withdrawing the projection means consciously to "make them mine" and integrate them into a psyche centered in the "self," within which the ego is a crucial participant but by no means the center of activity.
9. Dattatreya, an historical individual (fifth century c.e.?), the teacher of "post-classical yoga," involving the confluence of the teachings of the Upanishads, Tantra, and Hatha Yoga. Legends celebrate him as a "crazy-wisdom adept." He is claimed by both Shaivites and Vaishnavites as an incarnation of their favorite god (Feuerstein, 1990).
10. Adinatha or Adi Nath, the original teacher of the Kaula tradition (possibly as early as the fifth century c.e.) which teaches enlightenment as a bodily event. The agent for transformation is the *kundalini-shakti* which is also known as *kula*, hence the name "Kaula" for the sect (Feuerstein, 1990).
11. *Pancha-tattva*, "the five elements"; or *pancha-ma-kara*, "the ritual of the five *m*s," as each of the forbidden substances begins with the letter *m* (Evola, 1992: 118).
12. *Sadhaka*: one who follows a *sadhana*, or spiritual practice.
13. White points out that Kadali or *Kajjali*, is the alchemical name for the black substance, mercuric sulfide, which is "a poison for the uninitiated [but] an elixir of immortality for the consummate alchemist."
14. Nath Siddha: an adept of the Natha lineage. Traditionally, there are nine Nath Siddhas, legendary founders of the sect. Their names are given variously; but the two historical figures, Matsyendra and Gorakh, are nearly always among them (Feuerstein, 1990).
15. Avadhuta: one who has "cast off" all worldly things and concerns and bows to no social convention (Feuerstein, 1990).