

Indecent Practices and Erotic Trance: Making Sense of Tantra

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Although at this point we have little idea what Spontaneous Great Bliss feels like, several principles have been discovered. (1) Tantra aims to give a powerful boost to spiritual practice by drawing upon sexual arousal. (2) Arousal itself is taken as the object of meditation. (3) Meditation employs the imaginal construct of the subtle body to "distill" arousal into its emotional and imaginal components and have them "condense" in the separate chakras. (4) Retaining the arousal intensifies and transmutes it in two ways designated by mysterious images: (a) Rising kundalini is said to melt a drop of nectar which falls through the chakras bringing them joy and heat. (b) The nectar itself is augmented when it becomes "imprinted" with the vision of a blissful and precise orgy taking place in "Indra's Heaven." (5) Spontaneous Great Bliss is generated when the imprinted nectar is boosted with an internal orgasm.

Gyatso's inner fire meditation very clearly expresses the essential nature of yogic practice, the "de-conditioning" of the ego.[1] He takes our attention away from the object that would naturally rivet us in a mixture of terror and lust and has us focus on the emotion itself, on the whole field of awareness that is occupied by that trembling lust. Forget status, possession, and loss. That wanton goddess is bound to leave you in ruins before she turns tail and reduces you to a raving mad saint. Your attitudes about her are illusory, but what she does to you is real. Pay attention to that, for that is who you are.

Yoga -- whether it employs sexual practices or not and whether it is to be found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, or elsewhere -- is always intent upon stopping the socially construed world. Miranda Shaw calls Buddhism "a strategy for deconstructing the unenlightened ego," and *Tantric* Buddhism "a means for men and women to deconstruct their conventional selves *together*" (Shaw, 1994:203). This "deconstruction" amounts to eliminating the distinction

"between subject and object, between I and not-I" (Evola, 1992: 17).

Gyatso, like all the other sources we have considered, finds sexual arousal gives yoga an indispensable boost. Nothing reveals the mutual implications of physiology and awareness better than sex. Nothing is more effective at disorienting our ego and consensus assumptions than a mixture of terror and desire. This is where we live. Start here. Vimalananda is characteristically emphatic: "Rather than seek to extirpate their emotions as Yogic practitioners do, Tantrics magnify their emotions and transfer them entirely to a deity, a personified cosmic force" (Svoboda, 1986: 14). Shaw quotes the Tibetan master, Tsongkhapa (1357-1419): "Bliss is gathered by passion. Therefore, unite profusely. One attains [realization] by virtue of being passionate; otherwise, spiritual ecstasy will not arise" (Shaw, 1994: 169; Shaw's brackets). These texts make it clear that sexual arousal is being employed as a tool that provides a huge boost of energy to the deconstruction project.

The translator of Yeshe Tsogyel's adventures in eighth century Tibet, Keith Dowman, says, "Strip *yoga* of its arcane terminology and there is a simple meditation technique; stimulate desire and then use it as the object of meditation and it becomes Awareness" (Dowman, 1984: 249). Here is how the tool is used. Once consensus reality has been called into question by a strong arousal that sends us into erotic trance, the practitioner of sexual yoga directs attention away from merely bodily arousal to our erotic consciousness, our "desire." It is natural and naive for us to attend to the individual who has aroused us or to our bodily tension that seeks immediate release. These disturbances in our consensus-world functioning distract us from the proper object of meditation, our aroused consciousness. For only meditating on what is effected in us through the arousal will enable us to elevate mere human pleasure to "bliss." In tenth century Kashmir, the man who described the feces-smearing Trighantika, Abhinavagupta, scorned that exalting brute for thinking there was anything of truly transcendental power in sexual fluids and feces. He directed Tantra's gaze inward -- away from material manifestations of arousal -- to the consciousness itself that has been aroused (D. G. White, 1996: 136-8). Abhinavagupta says:

[As to those] who have not increased their virile efficacy within and do not leave any room to the pleasure of the God of love, they remain like rocks when facing a beautiful maid and hearing her melodious sound, deprived as they are of inebriation and bliss.

. . . Lack of virility is lack of life, lack of the power to wonder (Silburn, 1988: 161).

To counteract the male bias in Gyatso and Abhinavagupta, we might consider the teachings of a female guru from eighth century Tibet, Sahaja-yogini-cinta (Spontaneous Yogini Who is Like a Jewel). Her very name includes the word *spontaneous* (*sahaja*), the essential element in Spontaneous Great Bliss. Spontaneous Jewellike Yogini teaches that "ecstasy is inseparable from embodiment and embodiment is inseparable from gender" (Shaw, 1994: 183). "Spontaneous" bliss depends upon gendered sexuality:

In order that one may realize one's inner state,
Which is spontaneous (*sahaja*), naturally pure, and nondual,
The inner self manifests here as man and woman.
One's own self, creative by nature,
Enacts reality through bodily expressions

(Shaw, 1994: 183).

Sahajayoginicitina was the daughter of a noble or merchant family, possibly a court retainer, courtesan, or dancer, who had a Buddhist education. At some point, however, she left high society to become the consort of a low-caste pig farmer (*Ibid.*, 191). She relinquished the standards of consensus reality for a consort with whom she could transform arousal into bliss. The text she composed, "Realization of Reality through Its Bodily Expressions," was evidently taught to a group of Tantric women who were by no means novices (*Ibid.*, 193).

Like the jewel that is her namesake, the illustrious yogini has many facets. She is a visionary revealer of Tantric teachings received in a deep meditative state. She is a skilled rhetorician who dazzles her audience with a sensuous and exuberant vision of Tantric sexuality. She is a skilled homileticist who motivates her audience to religious discipline, exhorting them that worldly pleasures are impermanent and ultimately unsatisfying. She is a subtle philosopher who spins and unravels the theoretical intricacies of her position. The women in her audience were rewarded for their attendance at her discourse by a striking and perhaps unique portrait of how a Buddha responds to passion, expresses love and desire, and engages in the transcendental pastime of erotic play (Shaw, 1994: 192-3).

Spontaneous Jewellike Yogini describes the standard practice of yogic intercourse (maithuna) in which the male Buddha stands or sits unmoving as the female Buddha wraps her limbs about his body, kissing him "with a variety of kisses," and generating "intense bliss" through her constant movement. They gently scratch one another to prevent "drowsiness and ordinary passion." The goal is to overcome "the subject-object dualism of ordinary experience until "one ceases to know who is the other and what has happened to oneself." They are "mindful only of pleasure" (*Ibid.*, 186-7). This "human pleasure" or "bodily bliss" is taken as the "support" or "object" of meditation in order to elevate it out of the profane realm of experience and bring it to the transcendent sphere:

Human pleasure, with its identifiable characteristics,
Is the very thing that,
When its characteristics are removed,
Turns into spiritual ecstasy,
Free from conceptual thought,
The very essence of self-arising wisdom
(Shaw, 1994: 188).

Spontaneous Jewellike Yogini reveals the essence of Gyatso's practice. The sensual pleasure of sexuality and the spiritual goal of sadhana are only apparently opposed. The spiritual object can be reached through anything, but especially anything that arouses us and leads us by erotic trance onto the subtle plane. "The senses no longer desire to wander in the desolate cities created by hunger and desire when they can be opulently entertained in palaces spun of bliss and luminosity" (Shaw, 1994: 188).

Eight centuries later and thousands of miles to the West, Pico della Mirandola arrived at a very similar conclusion, which he referred to as the *mors osculi* ("death by kiss"). By "death," he meant "corporal extinction" in a state of erotic trance that he called "intellectual ecstasy." The partners' kiss enacts the ecstatic union by which they pass beyond profane existence and attain spiritual realization (Couliano, 1986: 57). There is another strange parallel between Tibetan Buddhist spirituality and the Italian Renaissance. Pico belonged to a tradition that employed imaginal mansions. The discipline of constructing and maintaining a complex internal building filled with rooms and passageways was used as an aid to superior feats of memory. Every item to be remembered was placed in a specific location

within a specific room of the mansion so that the practitioner had only to walk through the internal palace to recollect whatever was desired. "Lustful images" in those rooms were particularly efficacious (Couliano, 1986: 63). They gave an emotional and physiological boost to memory. One could perhaps clothe the lustful image with matters to be recalled at a moment's notice.

The Divine Feminine

Feminist scholar, Miranda Shaw (1994) gives us a Spontaneous Jewellike Yogini who appears to agree in all essentials with Gyatso and to articulate doctrines that are so typically human that similar practices have been discovered in other cultures and at other times. Shaw never reveals whether the great yogini employed the tubular palace meditation. Perhaps she employed a simpler variant. For the Tantric traditions are unshakable in their conviction that men and women are opposing forces; and men have different needs than women. We have already considered Eliade's observation that the naked woman, when seen in a ritual context, embodies cosmic mystery. Hinduism calls this Shakti, which is sometimes merely the name given to Shiva's consort, or the consort of any god, in which case Shakti is the god's power conceived as an other to which he must learn to relate. Thus the male god's relationship to his Shakti is analogous to our relationship with kundalini-shakti.

Shakti ("power") is the dynamic or creative principle of existence, envisioned as being feminine. This concept is intended to explain how the undifferentiated singular Reality can produce the multidimensional cosmos with its infinite forms. The transcendental static principle, personified as Shiva, is in itself incapable of creation. As a popular doctrinal maxim has it: "Shiva without Shakti is unable to effect anything." Shiva apart from shakti is likened to a corpse. The *Shiva-Purana* (VII.2.2.10) resorts to this poetic metaphor: "Just as the moon does not shine without moonlight, so Shiva does not shine without [the principle] of *shakti* (Feuerstein, 1990).

Thus the male is unmoving and impotent without the dynamism of the female. The male contemplates in stillness the dynamic female who arouses him. Without her spontaneous activity, he is like a corpse (shava). Without Shakti, Shiva is shava. On the ritual level this mythic doctrine is enacted by the male practitioner's remaining motionless while the woman moves with utter freedom. But the mythic doctrine is based in physiology; for when the man is active, he more readily arouses himself past the point of no return, precipitates an ejaculation, and loses his ability to maintain his arousal. When he takes the position of the unmoving Shiva and his consort moves freely like Shakti, arousal is heightened while the danger of an ejaculatory ending of the ritual intercourse is reduced. O'Flaherty (1973) makes it clear through an immense collection of mythic texts that Shiva's unmoving participation in intercourse with Shakti amounts to an alternate expression of his role as the God of Yoga. Whether sitting in a cremation ground smeared with ashes and meditating in isolation, or engaged with his consort in semen-retaining intercourse for a thousand years, the God of Sex and the God of Yoga are one and the same.

In his history of Chinese sexology, Wile notes that in the late alchemical texts male sexual energy, unlike that of the woman, is unstable and can only be usefully aroused when "fused with feminine essence" (Wile, 1992: 50). "Men must control both their passions and naturally active *ch'i*, whereas women also must still their desires, but stimulate their *ch'i* to overcome the natural stasis of *yin* [the feminine principle] and release the *yang* [male] principle" (*Ibid.*, 50). This seems to agree completely with what we have understood about

carezza. The male has to control his unstable arousal so as not to have it end prematurely in an "external" or "explosive" orgasm. Although women, too, are subject to external orgasms that sap their arousal and require a period of recuperation, women "implode" more easily than men and enjoy a seemingly limitless capacity for multiple orgasms. Control is necessary for women but more easily attained.

When the Chinese (and Indian) sexologists say that the woman has to stimulate her ch'i -- the "life energy" that is likened to breath, cosmic energy, and "the body's neurohormonal system" (Fischer-Schreiber, 1989) -- they imply that arousal itself is the means of consciousness-changing. Indeed, a series of internal orgasms not only sustains arousal but increases it.[2] For while the male stills himself like Shiva to gain control, the woman lets loose like Shakti. Making the transition from spasm reflex to eros much more easily, the intensity of the woman's erotic trance fans the fire of the man's arousal and guides it in the direction of eros. Her Shakti temperament, based in physiology but centered on the subtle plane, inspires her partner and draws him along in her wake. Indeed a man's progress in Tantra is marked by stages in his relationship with women (Shaw, 1994: 43).

The woman's superior emotional aptitude and sensitivity to the subtle realm is universally insisted upon. But in the Tantric tradition -- apparently the only one that permits them to function as gurus[3] -- women are acknowledged as specially equipped to lead the way. A popular story in the *Yoga Vashishtha* describes how Queen Chudala leads her husband to the highest states of awareness and back again: "Sometimes as she traveled through the other universes that co-exist with our own, she would see the women *siddhas* (perfected masters) moving through the sky on the way to rendezvous with their sage husbands" (Johnsen, 1994: 17). Not being bound by their physiology in the same way as men, women pass back and forth easily between the empirical world and the subtle plane.

Although Tantric literature offers only passing glimpses of women's (and men's) magic powers, these reveal a religious landscape in which women roamed freely and stepped lightly across the threshold between the world of ordinary reality and the realm of magic wherein thoughts are real, appearances are symbolic, and objects mirror the creative capacities of the mind (Shaw, 1994: 80-1).

Vimalananda says this female superiority is a function of the woman's closer relationship with her emotions which gives her a facility in achieving emotional ecstasy (Svoboda, 1986: 238).

Very likely it is this female trait that underlies a theme Miranda Shaw has identified. Men are required to honor and worship their consorts as goddesses, while women are to accept this worship and know that they themselves are divine (Shaw, 1994: 179). A number of tales describe how men gradually learn to shift their awareness so as to perceive the divinity residing in serving women, goat-herders, and the like (*Ibid.*, 43-4). Typically the man deconstructs his ego through entering an erotic trance in which his partner's divinity is unmistakable. His erotic trance gives him no choice but to worship her. Few texts describe a woman worshipping the man; and those that come close -- such as the story of Yeshe Tsogyel and Pema Heruka -- inevitably involve a man of higher attainment who serves as the woman's guru. Kinsley (1997: 247) says that worship of the woman as goddess is "persistent" in Tantra, and describes a ritual in which the man gradually converts his flesh-and-blood partner into a cosmic goddess.

Another physiological reality underlies these mystical doctrines. With youth, the male's potency is at its height and he is able to ejaculate several times a day -- perhaps three or four times in succession with a recuperative interval of only ten to twenty minutes. His youthful ability to retain his semen, however, is generally quite limited. He may in fact be liable to premature ejaculation. Meanwhile the young woman generally requires a fairly lengthy period of arousal before being capable of orgasm. This situation gradually changes, so that by middle age women are more easily aroused and more capable of multiple orgasms. At the same time, the man's arousal has slowed down, and he is less able to ejaculate several times during a single episode of intercourse. [4] Thus the practices of sexual yoga are more naturally employable by middle-aged partners than by youthful ones.[5] Such changes in physiological function correspond very well to the psychological differences between what Jung calls the first and second "halves" of life. He argues that in the first half of life, we are all required to develop a strong and flexible ego that is capable of dealing effectively with the empirical world. However, around the age of forty the central concern of life shifts and it becomes necessary to explore the spiritual dimensions of human existence. The merely personal ego has to be transcended through developing a conscious relationship to the self.[6]

This amounts to a Western formulation of the standard Hindu expectation that after we have acquitted ourselves of the duties of "householders," we should relinquish the concerns of the empirical world in order to pursue spiritual advancement as *sannyasins*:

[The *sannyasin* is] one who has renounced the world and lives totally without possessions solely for the realization of liberation (*moksha*). The *sannyasin's* lack of possessions consists not only in total material poverty but also in what Christian mysticism calls the "poverty of spirit," that is, freedom from such dualistic notions as good and evil, desire and repulsion, fear and greed (Fischer-Schreiber, 1986).

Vimalananda says *sannyas* literally means "coma," and that *sannyasins* are "comatose to the world" (Svoboda, 1997: 29). A pair of sexual yogic partners are *sannyasins* insofar as they have renounced the profane world as the center of their interest. But unlike the picture of *sannyasins* we encounter in an introductory text on Hinduism, such partners do not renounce sexuality altogether. What they renounce is the propagation of children that would entangle them again in the work of householders. They take up sexuality as the engine of consciousness changing, learn *carezza*, and practice "amatory" intercourse as a means of entering an erotic trance that leads them to the subtle plane. Then, taking their aroused consciousness of the subtle plane as the object of their meditation, they work to transform bodily pleasure into bliss.

The Nature Of Nectar

Such is the foundation of all sexual yoga, including that of Gyatso. But when Gyatso describes the attainment of Spontaneous Great Bliss, he tells us that there are three stages in the work. The first is what we have just considered: redirecting our focus from bodily tension and excitement to aroused consciousness. With this move, awareness occupies the center of our attention. The second stage involves transforming this initial blissful awareness with "nectar"; and the third stage "imprints" the nectar with a vision of blissfully coupled divinities. Gyatso employs vague and obscure images to describe the second and third stages. It will now be our task to examine these one by one, beginning with nectar.

The only dependable information Gyatso gives us concerning nectar is (a) that it resides naturally in the crown chakra (sahasrara), and (b) that it contributes a new experience of "joy" to the throat and heart chakras and additional "heat" to the navel center. The crown chakra, therefore, adds something perhaps ineffable that intensifies and transmutes our experience of the other chakras. Since each chakra represents a specific "level" of attainment in erotic trance, our most reliable approach to understanding the nature of nectar will begin with a differentiation of the several trance states.

If we consider the levels of trance in terms of how we see our consort, we can distinguish first between profane consciousness and erotic trance. In profane consciousness, when kundalini sleeps in the muladhara, we may find our consort attractive, interesting, and fun to be with. She or he is an exceptional individual but very much a human personality and denizen of consensus reality. The large transformation that occurs when kundalini awakens transforms our consort into an earthly Venus or Adonis. Now we are in erotic trance and dwelling on the subtle plane. But erotic trance is not a single thing, for it manifests differently at each of the chakras. The consort who arouses our navel chakra inspires terror in the face of an ego-destroying adventure that we may not be up to. At the solar plexus, we are no longer paralyzed in fear but have broken through to an important vision of "essential" significance. What we know of our own essential being is something to build upon; and our familiarity with our partner's essential being gives our relationship stability. At the level of the heart a much more sublime experience occurs, and we experience ourselves and our partner as airy beings, bodies of mist capable of thoroughly interpenetrating one another and becoming one. At the throat center we perceive various dimensions of this oneness and become able to conceptualize it for ourselves. This capacity to think and articulate is now directed to "ethereal" realities -- more basic, true, sublime, and lasting than those of the empirical world.

Placing the brow chakra on an extension of the central channel, Gyatso's tubular palace meditation takes us directly from the throat to the crown. We can only think that the leap in level of erotic trance between the throat and crown must be analogous to that between the navel and heart -- a vast transformation. The alchemical notion of nectar (amrita) in the crown chakra that is caused to drip downward and affect one's whole being through the arousal of kundalini is by no means unique to Tibet:

In the literature of *hatha-yoga*, the word *amrita* . . . refers to the nectar of immortality that trickles down from an esoteric center in the head and is wasted by ordinary mortals because they do not know its secrets. The intrinsic connection between this nectar and immortality is succinctly captured in the *Kaula-Jnana-Nirnaya* (XIV.94), which poses this question: "How can there be immortality (*amaratva*) without [the flowing of] the nectar [*amrita*]?"

. . . The *Hatha-Yoga-Pradipika* (IV.53) states that the whole body should be flooded with this ambrosia, which produces a superior body endowed with enormous strength and vigor and which is free from disease. This practice also prevents aging and bestows immortality as well as the eight magical powers (Feuerstein, 1990).

In the epilogue to his book on medieval alchemy, D. G. White (1996) describes his search for a living, practicing alchemist in India. He had two possible near misses. One turned out to be a man who had died twenty years before at the age of seventy-five -- by no means immortal but remembered as having appeared no older than twenty-five at his demise. The reality of nectar is taken seriously -- even literally -- by many. White says that India is filled

with stories and rumors of "semen-headed yogis" (D. G. White, 1996: 483). For semen is the usual source of nectar -- semen that has been raised by kundalini to the cranial vault for transformation:

In her rise through the yogic *cakras*, the *kundalini* serpent is said to dance with the yogin. And, at the end of her rise, it is the yogin's own sexual fluid which, carried upward through her body, is transformed into immortalizing nectar. As a conduit for the yogin's semen, the female *kundalini* may be likened to the female sexual organ; . . . (D. G. White, 1996: 309).

Gorakh (or Goraksha), whom we saw earlier as the disciple and savior of his guru Matsyendra who had fallen into deathly sleep in the Forest of Women's Thighs, was "one of the greatest masters of *hatha-yoga*" (Feuerstein, 1990). Gorakh lived in the ninth or tenth century and has left us several Tantric scriptures. His remarks about nectar reflect the common mythological doctrine that nectar is produced by the mating of the Sun of Shiva (semen rising from the blazing fire at the navel) with Shakti, who resides in the Moon of the cranial vault. The upturned mouth of the interior Sun in the navel chakra, "whose essence is fire," hungers for the nectar dripping from the moon (D. G. White, 1996: 482). In the *Goraksa Sataka*, Gorakh speaks "of a pool (*dhara*) of lunar water in the cranial vault, which the yogin is to drink, lest it fall into the sun in the lower abdomen" (D. G. White, 1996: 481). In another passage, jauntily translated by White, Gorakh says:

Now that you've pierced [*bedhya*] the lotuses six,
Go and drink that nectar mix . . .
Semen is yoga, semen is what pleases;
Semen averts the sixty-four diseases.
The rare dude who pierces semen's mystery,
He's the creator, he's the divinity
(D. G. White, 1996: 320-1).

Here it is clear that the six chakras (lotuses) constitute a set and that the crown chakra stands above them, not only in empirical space through its placement at the top of the head, but also in significance. The cranial vault is the place where semen, retained in carezza and made to flow upward by the rising kundalini, is itself transformed. On its way up to the crown, it effects real changes in the lower six chakras; but these are nothing in comparison to what *nectar* can accomplish. Nectar brings "immortality" -- makes us the "divine creator" -- and introduces a host of secondary but related changes such as strength, vigor, and immunity from disease. No doubt many take this claim of immortality in a literal and empirical sense. Certainly that old exaggerator, Vimalananda, seems to do so when he says that his Bhairavi was able to appear as a fifteen-year-old girl even though she was actually so old she had to lift her eyelids with her fingers. She "had made herself immortal" by ingesting mercury. D. G. White makes it clear that the "mercury" which brings immortality is semen transformed through the "sulfur" of menstrual blood: an alchemical procedure that may take place either in the laboratory or in the body of the yogin-chemist. The two processes are parallel in all respects and symbolize one another.

Because there appear to be no historical figures who attained literal immortality -- or lived even four hundred years -- we have to take such stories symbolically. Real immortality means release from samsara, the eternal round of birth, death, and rebirth. It means leaving the empirical and profane world forever. It describes a state of erotic trance. When kundalini has risen to the cranial vault and either melted the drop of nectar or else brought the semen

of Shiva into union with Shakti's "pool" of sexual fluids, erotic trance undergoes its most profound augmentation. Whether or not the yogin actually feels or imagines a liquid dripping into his throat, the activation of the crown chakra so transforms the nature of erotic trance that Indians, Tibetans, and others have for centuries resorted to the imagery of nectar and ambrosia to account for it.

Dakinis

But what can we point to in the experience of even a single yogin who has drunk nectar to make this process intelligible for ourselves? What happens when an individual forsakes the empirical world and becomes immortal? We get some hint of the beginning of this journey in the many stories about kings who have been converted to the Tantric path by a pair of lewdly dancing dombis, who awaken him to sexual practices that lead to immortality (D. G. White, 1996: 308-9). Dombis are the most skillful and desired of Tantric consorts, initiatrixes who appear to be as "enchanted" as Vimalananda's Bhairavi. They are superhuman beings capable of shape-shifting, and they are terrifyingly indecent, alluring, and challenging. In Tibet, dombis are called dakinis; and "the Dakini principle" describes the ever-changing flow of kundalini (Allione, 1986: 32). The dakini (masculine: daka) changes our lives by transforming all of our experiences, by appearing "at crucial moments to destroy the fixed ideas of the practitioner" (Allione, 1986: 37). Trungpa Rinpoche describes the dakini as a dangerous challenger:

The playful maiden is all-present. She loves you. She hates you. Without her your life would be continual boredom. But she continually plays tricks on you. When you want to get rid of her she clings. To get rid of her is to get rid of your own body -- she is that close. In Tantric literature she is referred to as the dakini principle. The dakini is playful. She gambles with your life (Allione, 1986: 38).

Dakinis are, in fact, so fearsome and indecent that the uninitiated in Nepal use the cognate word *dankini* "as an expletive or slur on a vile woman, a witch, enchantress, or manipulator of the spirit world and a seductress who abuses her sexual powers" (Dowman, 1984: 258).

The positive value of a dakini is that she can awaken in us "the universal urge to enlightenment" whereby we penetrate "to the true meaning of doctrines too profound to yield their secrets at the everyday level of consciousness" (Blofield, 1987: 114). But the dangers are considerable, as Vimalananda insists regarding the Hindu category of seductive beings called yakshinis (masculine: yakshas):

There is a type of spirit [Yaksha] who comes to a woman and makes her fall into a stupor, what we call the state of *Tandra* in Sanskrit, and then enjoys sex with her. If you were to watch it, and I have watched it, you will see her lying on the bed, twisting and turning, oozing, enjoying orgasms, and what-have-you. In fact, she will find it much more satisfying than physical sex, because he has no body to tire out, and he makes her enjoy much more than any man could. . . .

. . . And believe me, a Yakshini can make you enjoy sex. If you do this five or six times the Yakshini will come to you on her own and force you to copulate with her and extract all your energy. And you can't get free of her; It's next to impossible. When you die, you become one of the fraternity of spirits, of an order lower than even the Yakshini, and you will have to work your way up from there, roaming about. You don't even have to copulate with her; just kiss her -- once only -- and you are finished, done for (Svoboda, 1986: 195-6).

Beings of this sort would seem uniquely qualified to build a fire in the navel chakra. We need the challenge a wrathful heroine with the wiles of a dakini if the fire at our navel is going to boost us all the way to the cranial vault and make nectar. Thus when Yeshe Tsogyel masturbates to awaken kundalini, she enters an erotic trance in which her guru Pema Heruka appears to her as a daka (male form of dakini). A wrathful daka would surely be able to turn any heroic meditator into an intensely writhing snake. A mad saint would simply writhe helplessly. The heroic saint, however, becomes conscious of the serpent as "other." Yeshe follows Jung's advice: "It is wise not to identify with these experiences, but to handle them as if they were outside the human realm. That is the safest thing to do -- and really absolutely necessary. Otherwise you get an inflation" (Jung, 1996: 27). As the serpent power rises to possess her, another dragon surges forth from within, the life energy of her soul. It gives her the strength and spontaneity to engage with that daka-conjured serpent. Not merely to stand up to kundalini but to dance with her. As Yeshe writhes, the kundalini of her soul is racing like lightening up the staircase of her tubular palace.

Next the Sun of Splendor lights up the sky. The drop of nectar has melted. The semen of Shiva has penetrated Shakti's lunar pool. The wrathful daka, whose abusive and rapacious vajra sits within her writhing lotus throne unmoving as a god in a sand painting, and whose scornful laugh just moments before ruptured them through onto the sublime plane of the heart chakra, now unites with Lady Kundalini in the cranial vault. Bliss supervenes.

The Nature Of Bliss

Unfortunately *bliss* is a very abstract word. It connotes an experience of very pleasant but ineffable sublimity; and although in this context it is a bodily experience, it is not merely a physical sensation but carries with it a large component of something vaguely transcendental. We who live most of our lives in the empirical world cannot be sure we have ever experienced the sort of bliss the mystics speak of. If we have been fortunate enough to have felt the fans of the heart chakra spin and have been led to refer to this experience as "bliss," the substantial augmentation deriving from the crown chakra suggests a body-mind state that exceeds the bounds of our experience. In fact, the only indication we have regarding the content of nectar's bliss is the imaginal appearance of the mystic's consort, before and after nectar's contribution.

Once nectar has dripped slowly down to the region of the throat and heart, the consorts find they are sharing a sublime oneness no longer with a wrathful daka or wrathful dakini but with a blissful consort of superhuman power, wholly unanticipated spontaneity, and timeless significance. Dowman defines the dakini according to the following lines of the *Great Paramita Sutra*:

Indescribable, unimaginable Perfection of Wisdom,
Unborn, unobstructed essence of sky,
She is sustained by self-awareness alone:
I bow down before the Great Mother of the victorious ones,
past, present, and future

(Dowman, 1984: ix).

Dowman comments, "Desireless, blissful wisdom is the essence of all desirable qualities, and unobstructed going and coming in endless space." This is a very "Buddhist" formulation, reminiscent of the Buddha's own title, *Tathagata*, which may be translated, "Thus come, thus gone." Such phrases reflect an unimaginable subtlety and a spontaneity that implies transcendental intentions. If we have been able to stretch our language to suggest something intelligible about the experience of the heart chakra, nectar from the crown challenges our capacity to find words. We have to begin to speak in comparative analogies: if the sublimity of the heart chakra seems to transcend everything we associate with corporality, then the nectar of the crown transcends sublimity.

The *dakinis* leap and fly, unfettered by clothing, encircled by billowing hair, their bodies curved in sinuous poses . . . enlightened women who can spark a divine experience of reality with a precisely aimed word or gesture . . . their exuberant air of passion and freedom communicate[s] a sense of mastery and spiritual power (Shaw, 1989: 3).

The best type of *dakini* is one whose awareness is so transcendently lofty that her mind is free from worldly thoughts and flows in a natural and spontaneous stream, a level of attainment known as *sahaja* realization, or "enlightened spontaneity" (Shaw, 1989: 170).

The blissful *dakini* (and *daka*), therefore, represent the "ever-changing flow of energy with which the yogic practitioner must work in order to become realized" (Allione, 1986: 25). The absolute spontaneity which these beings make possible is often compared to the open and unobstructed space of the sky -- hence the frequent description of the blissful *dakini* as "sky dancer."

All *dakinis*, whether blissful or wrathful, are to be found on a distinctive level of the subtle realm, what we might call the *dakini* plane. The difference between them -- that is whether we see them as full of bliss or wrath -- depends upon the admixture of nectar to our erotic trance. Their appearance as blissful or wrathful depends upon us, upon the level in our subtle body to which kundalini has risen. If we have been privileged to encounter a *daka* or *dakini*, kundalini is awake. If the spirit beings appear wrathful, kundalini has not yet risen to the cranial vault. If blissful, we have experienced the ineffable augmentation of nectar's bliss.

Objectively speaking, we can say that *in themselves* there is no difference between a wrathful *dakini* and a blissful one. It is the same *dakini*, whose appearance reflects the state of our consciousness. She is wrathful when her spontaneity strikes fear in us. Everything that she is and stands for challenges the stolid illusions of the empirical world and the persona field. When we see her as wrathful, we are feeling a challenge to the comfortable realities of our habitual existence in conventional reality. She puts our ego's point of view in crisis. When she becomes blissful, we have dropped our dependence on *ahamkara*, our memory of what constitutes "me and mine." We have entered the *dakini* plane without presuppositions -- without the safety net of what we have dependably come to know. We have embarked upon a subtle-plane sojourn without reserve, without fear, in total acceptance and spontaneity.

Spiral Progress on the Left-Hand Path

When we consider the more conventional saints, the ones who say nothing of any indecent sexual component in their spiritual practices, we are led to think that they proceed on an ever-upward path: perhaps from profane consciousness directly to the plane of blissful dakinis and dakas and then onward and upward to the blissful gods and goddesses. Tantra's left-hand path aspires to the same ascent, but it does so by first dipping downward into the realm of the disturbing shadow, where a rush of sexual arousal and terror gives the practitioner a powerful boost of energy. By way of analogy, we may consider how earth-born space vehicles are given a boost from the gravitational field of a planet or the sun. The gravity -- or "eros," as Isaac Newton called it in his notebooks (Berman, 1981) -- of the heavenly body threatens the vehicle with final destruction if it should succumb entirely and crash upon the surface or burn up in the furnace of the star. But by skillfully employing that erotic gravity and maintaining a precise balance of nearness and distance, the space vehicle increases its acceleration by swinging around the danger in a half-arc that propels it onward with the force of a celestial sling-shot.

Such is the technique of the Tantrikas. They make no attempt to deny or circumvent the disturbing and potentially destructive effects of the wrathful dakini or daka. Instead, they enter directly into the disorienting realm of the shadowy spirit beings so as to build a roaring conflagration in their navel center. It is a dangerous practice, for they risk being shattered or burnt to a cinder in the heat. But when used skillfully, when employed as the most natural and straight-forward source of psychological and physiological boost, they use the wrathful dakini's disturbing power to propel themselves into the region of nectar's bliss. Like gravity-employing space vehicles, they calculate the danger in full consciousness. Instead of succumbing to the wrathful dakini's power helplessly and unconsciously, and thereby losing their awareness in a shattering crash, they redirect their attention to the dragon of their soul's life energy. Riding the serpentine head of kundalini as she streaks up the central channel of their interior palace, they attain the cranial vault where nectar transmutes their arousal to bliss. At this point the dakini is no longer a wanton and dangerous challenger. Her unfettered spontaneity ceases to be a threat and becomes an invitation to the dance. Nectar gives us the freedom of the open sky. We have dropped all presuppositions. We have ourselves attained the spontaneity of the daka or dakini.

The left-hand path generally describes itself as "the most natural," "the fastest" and "the most immediate" course to enlightenment. It argues that the dragon of desire is not to be overcome, extirpated, or rendered harmless. Rather it is to be engaged and redeemed. In effect the left-hand path urges us to begin where we are. If we find something exciting or disturbing, we are not to ignore it or attempt to vanquish it with ascetic practices such as fasting and self-flagellation. Rather we are to see what that disturbance does to us and direct our attention specifically to the consciousness it induces. For that aroused consciousness is the first appearance of kundalini. It is the source of a boost which we can ride into higher levels of erotic trance.

The tubular palace meditation of Gyatso lays out for us a path in several stages by which we: (1) leave profane consciousness by means of an emotional and physiological disturbance which takes the form of a wrathful daka or dakini; (2) engage with the wrathful one by directing our attention to the flame induced in our navel chakra; (3) ride kundalini in her first

upward climb to release nectar and transform the wrath into bliss; (4) descend the central channel with the nectar to gain a new boost of wrathful energy and leap from the dakini plane to the divine plane at the navel chakra, where a wrathful god or goddess is encountered; (5) ride kundalini up to the observation deck of the ajna chakra to obtain a vision of blissful gods and goddesses in sexual embrace on the strength of the nectar-augmented flame in the navel; (6) achieve Spontaneous Great Bliss on a final trip through the tubular palace when the impressed nectar is boosted by an internal orgasm.

Omitting the last of these, I have diagrammed this "Spiral Progress on the Left-Hand Path" in Figure 10-1. In the center of the chart are Yeshe and Pema, two human individuals, each with a personality, a history, and a persona-field identity in the profane world (#1). As their consciousness is aroused to the dakini plane by the fire at their navel, Yeshe loses her human personality and becomes a wrathful dakini engaged with Pema's wrathful daka (#2). Remaining on the dakini plane, represented in light gray, they employ a boost of navel fire to attain nectar and become blissful daka and blissful dakini (#3). When they ride the descending nectar to the navel's fire, the dakini plane is ruptured; and they break through to the divine plane, where they become wrathful god and goddess for one another (#4). Finally, a boost of nectar-enhanced fire takes them back up through the tubular palace to the brow chakra, where they obtain the vision of nectar impressed with divinity and become blissful god and goddess (#5).



The wrathful gods and goddesses resemble the wrathful dakas and dakinis but are immeasurably more powerful. We have revisited Vimalananda's advice to Svoboda many times: the strategy is to attract an "enchanted woman," presumably a dakini, and then resist her advances so as to attract a wanton goddess. Now that we have Gyatso's structure to sort

out the five stages running from ego-consciousness to the encounter with blissful deities, we can better appreciate what the old exaggerator had in mind.

Wrathful Goddesses

The main wrathful god in Hinduism is Shiva, whom we have described in some detail. McLean says the Shiva of folklore is an old reprobate who "spends all his time high on bhang and datura," chasing prostitutes and young girls (McLean, 1998: 62). He delights in overturning all the distinctions between the moral and immoral, the pure and polluted. He loves cremations grounds (a place of transit between the worlds), smears himself with ashes, and is generally to be found naked, with matted hair, wild eyes, and an erect penis.

Wrathful goddesses, however, are much more numerous. Most are consorts of Shiva. In *Tantric Visions of the Divine Feminine* (1995), David Kinsley has done the spade work in assembling pictures of the "Ten Mahavidyas," each a symbol of defiant female independence in a society that severely restricts women's freedom (Kinsley, 1995: 70). Although there are always exactly ten goddess of "Great Knowledge" (Maha-Vidya), their names are not always the same in every list. We shall briefly mention four of them.

The best known of these wrathful goddesses and never omitted from any list is the Black One, Kali. Kinsley says that she is primarily a woman who "deconstructs" the categories of cultural consciousness, "inviting all those who would learn from her to be open to the whole world in all its aspects" (*Ibid.*, 83).

Although [Kali] may be said to serve order in her role as slayer of demons, more often than not she becomes so frenzied on the battlefield, intoxicated with the blood of her victims, that she herself begins to destroy the world she is supposed to protect. Thus, even in the service of the gods she is dangerous and likely to get out of control (*Ibid.*, 74).

Kali's nakedness displays her sexual readiness, her unbound hair implies a state of pollution, very likely menstruation (*Ibid.*, 84); her necklace of skulls and skirt of arms characterizes bloodthirstiness and her dismemberment of our ego. Her black color "represents transcendence over any manifested thing" (*Ibid.*, 30). Often her blackness is covered in sparkles, representing "the gods [that] arise from her like bubbles from the sea, endlessly appearing and passing away, leaving their source unchanged" (*Ibid.*, 76). Thus her shameless and indecent appearance is merely a wrathful illusion behind which lurks the eternal and unchanging (blissful) reality. Although this profound mystical significance is widely known, Kinsley reports that a great many Hindus are uncomfortable "with her outrageous, shocking features" (*Ibid.*, 91).

Chinnamasta, another naked and shameless goddess, is generally pictured with a knife in one hand and her own severed head in the other. Three streams of blood fountain up out of her neck and fall into the mouths of two naked woman disciples and into the mouth of the head Chinnamasta holds in her hand. According to one tradition, she becomes so intoxicated drinking the blood of her victims that she loses control and cuts off her own head (*Ibid.*, 149). In another she blows her head off by absorbing the sexual energy of copulating human couples whom she stands upon or straddles. Kundalini rises up within her so forcefully that it cuts the knots in all the chakras -- something she can do for us -- and tears off her head, rendering her egoless (*Ibid.*, 159).

Dhumavati is a widow sitting in an unhitched chariot, therefore, "a woman going nowhere, the ultimate symbol of all that is unlucky, unattractive, and inauspicious" (*Ibid.*, 182). But sometimes she is presented as attractive, in which case she embodies the most threatening of women in Hindu society, for widows are believed to be driven by unsatisfied sexual longings they have no reason to resist (*Ibid.*, 190). The goddess Bhairavi, after whom sexual initiatrixes are named, loves anger, jealousy, and every form of selfish emotion and activity. Righteous behavior by humans weakens her power (*Ibid.*, 170). Two of her titles refer to her favorite indecencies: She Who is Fond of Semen and Menstrual Blood, She Who is Worshipped by Those Who Worship with Semen (*Ibid.*, 172).

Nangsa Obam

Tsultrim Allione, an American woman who is an initiate in Tibetan Buddhism, illustrates the achievement of wrathful divinization with her detailed account of a Tibetan folk drama that depicts legendary events from the eleventh century, a time of Buddhist revival in Tibet (Allione, 1986: 66-128). The story of Nangsa Obam displays many typical features of Tantric stories from India and Tibet in that it concerns itself with a woman whose predilection for mystical attainment, evident from birth, was temporarily thwarted by an early marriage. In Nangsa's case, her parents were themselves devout Buddhists who "did extensive practice without interruption, and without thought of personal gain" (*Ibid.*, 66). They resisted all Nangsa's suitors until the King of Rinang insisted upon marrying her to his son, Dragpa Samdrub, and threatened Nangsa's parents with death if they did not accede to his request. Thus she was married against her will but eventually found a way to escape from court to become the mystical consort of the Great Lama Sakya Gyaltsen, who recognized immediately that Nangsa was a great dakini.

Soldiers were sent to Gyaltsen's monastery to seize Nangsa and bring her back. They found the pair in ritual sexual embrace. Their accusation that the great lama had "sullied" the king's wife was cut short when they themselves suddenly entered erotic trance and saw the two mystic partners flying off from the earth in the form of yab-yum, sexually coupled divinities. The highly attained mystic consorts had become the dark-blue wrathful god, Cakra Sambhava and his consort Vajra Yogini. The soldiers' minds were opened, and the report they brought back to their king inspired him to give up his worldly life and practice dharma.

This is clearly a story of lust and the spiritual attainment that may be based upon the fire sexual arousal generates in the navel chakra. The worldly figures of the king and his son have experienced a peculiarly compelling sort of lust whereby the object of their attentions, the saintly Nangsa, stands out above all women. Thus far, their judgment agrees with that of Lama Gyaltsen. But being tethered to the world of social and political gain as well as bodily pleasure of an "attached" and purely instinctual sort, they are incapable of properly valuing the beautiful and graceful adolescent woman who has so powerfully won their admiration.

The soldiers, therefore, are brought in by the story-teller as rude and wholly believable witnesses. Nothing in their prior experience prepares them for a physiological and emotional atmosphere of such spiritual power that their brow chakras are opened and they see the adulterous liaison of their once esteemed princess and a raunchy guru on the plane of wrathful deities. According to this wide-spread literary device, what appears merely immoral and polluted to the eyes of the profane ego is in reality a sublime and holy event. The

spiritual reality of ritual intercourse is so compelling that even the lowest of the uninitiated cannot resist its influence, and they themselves undergo a rupture of plane as their consciousness is elevated in a moment from the profane level to the divine stratum of erotic trance. The break-through they experience is far more abrupt than that of Promode Chatterjee, when he was privileged to witness an Aghori chakra ceremony in a smashan during a thunder storm. For Chatterjee had evidently been a sympathetic by-stander from the start, and his testimony that what he had witnessed was not lustful but sublime indicates that his heart chakra had been open during most of the night. Thus in that stoke of lightning, when he saw the Aghoris in the form of a sexual mandala on the divine plane, kundalini had only to rise from the fourth chakra (heart) to the sixth (brow). The soldiers of Rinang, however, shifted abruptly from a condition in which kundalini was asleep all the way to the observation deck of the brow chakra.

Sufism tells similar stories about the awakening of observers who are prepared to condemn indecent sexual practices until their own consciousness is suddenly elevated. One of the most famous of these incidents concerns Ahmad Ghazzali, the brother of the great philosopher who justified Sufi practices through rational argument based on the Qu'ran, Abu Hamad Ghazzali (1058-1111). Ahmad Ghazzali was therefore a contemporary -- albeit geographically and culturally far removed -- of the events in the folk drama of Nangsa Obam. According to the story, Ahmad Ghazzali was a practitioner of what Sufism calls "the witness game," in which a naked "beardless youth" is employed as the object of meditation in order to elevate the meditator through an emotional and physiological boost to the divine plane of consciousness.[7]

[His friends] found [Ahmad Ghazzali] seated in his cell-retreat, staring at a young boy, with a single rose on the floor between them. "Have we disturbed you?" they asked. Ghazzali replied "Ay w'Allah" ("By God!") -- and all the company thereupon fell into a "state"[8]; that is they attained some measure of non-ordinary consciousness or ecstasy (Wilson, 1995: 95).

When profane witnesses[9] see through the appearance of an adulterous affair between lama and princess to its hidden divine reality, the story seems to provide "objective verification" that the liaison between Nangsa and Gyaltsen transcends the good/evil distinctions of the persona field. If this seems to constitute an exaggeration worthy of Vimalananda, the reader is asked to withhold judgment until we address the issue of mystical influence from one individual to another in Chapter Thirteen. At this point in our argument, it is enough to agree that the soldiers' witness serves as a testimony from the Buddhist community of faith that it is not only possible but expected that accomplished practitioners can attain a subjective identity with their deities when erotic trance carries them to the divine plane.

In fact Vimalananda himself agrees with Ibn al-'Arabi that if you think you see "the Reality Itself" you have no gnosis; the mystic with real gnosis knows that it is his own essential self that is seen: "What you will see is not the real deity; it is your own creation, from your own astral body" (Svoboda, 1994: 124). This means that Nangsa and Gyaltsen, when they experience themselves as a wrathful yab-yum, encounter the divine dimension of their own subtle body, as it manifests through the medium of their navel chakra. At the same time, their svadhithana arousal induces a similar stirring in the navels of the soldiers. What the soldiers see may not correspond in all respects with what the consorts themselves experience. The two experiences are alike only in the fact that it is a wrathful yab-yum that is enacted by Nangsa and Gyaltsen. Their limited personalities have been "effaced" in favor of the

wrathful divine dimension of their own being (Svoboda, 1986: 16).

He forgets who he is, and she forgets who she is. He says, "I am Lord Shiva in the form of Bhairava (the Fearful Lord), and this is my Shakti, my Bhairavi." She thinks, "This is my Lord Shiva, and I am His Grand Consort, His Bhairavi (the Fearful Goddess)" (Svoboda, 1986: 271-2).

The central issue in the Tibetan folk drama hinges on the meaning of lust. The profane consensus, which thinks it knows what lust is, is confounded by a vision of lustful deities. The king and prince believe they have "normalized" their lust by bringing it into conformity with society's horizontal value system, "till death do us part." Nangsa and Gyaltzen also manifest lust in the sense that their mutual erotic trance demands carnal expression, and pursuing that mystical impulse appears indecent and scandalous to profane eyes. Although we have subtle-plane testimony that their "sexual acting out" achieves divinization, it is still lustful insofar as the activation of their respective navel chakras predominates. The lustfulness of their encounter persists in the image of intercourse between wrathful god and wrathful goddess.

As a wrathful yab-yum they ascend into the sky and disappear from the soldiers' view. Wrathful god and goddess ascend to the blissful sector of the divine plane, and the soldiers' gaze is incapable of following. For the soldiers, we have to assume, are familiar with the terrifying and seductive nature of sex but not yet of its blissful potential. Thus the wrathful yab-yum disappears before their eyes as Nangsa and Gyaltzen are transformed in their own experience into blissful god and goddess.

Blissful God And Goddess

Gyatso's inner fire meditation does not address the stage in which the partners become wrathful deities. He speaks only of the intensification of the navel fire when the slowly falling nectar reaches it. In his account, we do not encounter divinization until the penultimate moment of the meditation, when the nectar-enhanced fiery winds carry us to the observation deck of the ajna chakra. There three events take place in succession: (1) we witness a mandala of yab-yums; (2) one by one these yab-yums melt into a drop of blissful light; and (3) the many drops condense to a single one which we absorb through our third eye. In the stage of witnessing, those deities are not yet me and my partner. The potential divinity of our own being is still projected. At the second stage, the image becomes extremely abstract -- mere drops of blissful light. But the fact that we can know those drops *as bliss* implies that the vision has done something to us. Like the soldiers witnessing the wrathful yab-yum of princess and lama, our witnessing the bliss of the deities in the mandala effects an emotional change in us. It elevates our erotic trance to the point that we have an implicit awareness of bliss within our own bodies -- much as the soldiers attained an implicit awareness of spiritualized lust. They themselves did not become mystics, but they were so affected that the report they brought back to their king persuaded him to embark upon the mystic path. Finally, in the third stage, when we absorb the condensed drop of divine bliss and fuse it with the nectar in our cranial vault, divine bliss is within us and has become a component of the fiery winds that climb the central staircase of our subtle body.

The fact that one actually becomes a blissful deity united with a blissful divine consort is declared in unmistakable terms by Yeshe Tsogyel when her union with Pema Heruka reaches this stage:

Out of the bliss-waves of the forehead center of our union, in the sphere of intense experience of Awareness of joy, arose a white paradise divided into thirty-two lesser pure lands. In each of these pure lands was a white Heruka in mystic union with his Consort surrounded by hundreds of thousands, an incalculable number, of Herukas and their Consorts identical to the principal. In the centre of this vast *mandala* was the Master of all the Herukas, the principal Heruka and Consort into whose Awareness of joy I received initiation. Through this joy the passion of anger was purified, the body cleansed of all traces of habitual action and reaction patterns, insight was gained into the elements of the path of application, and I was enabled to act for the benefit of the seven worlds of the ten directions. At this level I was conferred the secret initiatory name, Tsogyel the White Goddess of Pure Pleasure (Dechen Karmo Tsogyel) (Dowman, 1984: 40-1).

In Yeshe's account, the paradise vision is recognized as a projection of the "bliss waves" she shares with Pema Heruka. It has been an unconscious component of the intense awareness of joy they share, and first becomes known in projected form as a vision. She sees a mandala divided into thirty-two parts, each part ("pure land" or "Buddha paradise") is itself a mandala with countless yab-yums.[10]

Thus she clarifies the nature of the brow-chakra vision. It is an image to describe her bliss. Gyatso's nectar of unspecified bliss unfolds its contents as a mandalic vision when the brow chakra opens. This is the witness stage of the inner fire meditation. It is followed by awareness of the joy that is experienced by the principal heruka and consort. This corresponds to Gyatso's second stage of appreciating the bliss of each of the couples and combining them into a single drop of bliss. Evidently Yeshe absorbs this awareness, for she says that it initiates her. It reforms her into its shape, much as Gyatso's nectar is "imprinted" with the divine vision. When "the body is cleansed of all traces of habitual action and reaction patterns," *ahamkara*, the memory of "me and mine," is abolished. She loses her personal identity and becomes the White Goddess of Pure Pleasure.

Gyatso presents the inner fire meditation with economy of expression. He wants us to know exactly how it is done and what we are to take as the object of our meditation at each stage of our ascent and descent through the tubular palace. He evidently assumes that his disciples are steeped in Tibetan Buddhist teachings and familiar with the sorts of stories the great saints of the tradition have left us, like Yeshe Tsogyel's autobiography. For this reason, he does not dwell on the imaginal stages the practitioner employs to identify with her deity. His attention is directed exclusively to the subtle body and the rise and fall of kundalini within its central channel. To understand more fully what he is teaching us, we have to round out his account with complementary material from the Tantric tradition.

It is important to recall the gender differences stressed by Shaw -- that men must worship their consort as a goddess and women must accept that worship and their own implicit divinity. Nevertheless, it is not possible for the man genuinely to worship nor for the woman to accept worship unless both parties are in a very high state of erotic trance. We find our consort worshipful not by some trick in a ritual that is manipulated by our ego. Rather we do so by cultivating erotic trance, retaining our aroused consciousness, and bringing it deliberately or by accident to the level of the brow chakra. When the third eye opens onto the divine plane, our consort simply *is* divine, regardless of our conscious intentions; and we have no option but to worship her.

In illustration of this principle, we might consider a myth wherein the goddess Parvati succeeds in redirecting Shiva's yogic attention. Neither her voluptuous beauty nor divine

wiles has any effect upon the disreputable God of Yoga until she relinquishes her aim of rousing him from meditation and decides to join him on the subtle plane. She leaves him in his smashan smeared with ashes and returns to her mountain home,[11] where she covers herself in ashes and enters meditation, remaining as unmovable as Shiva for many years.

Deep in his meditation, Shiva began to sense an extraordinary shakti, a divine energy more powerful and sublime than anything he had ever experienced before. To his shock he realized that it was a growing field of consciousness as perfect and extensive as his own. What could possibly be the source? He opened his three eyes and there on a distant peak he saw a yogini sitting immovable as the mountains themselves, covered with dust, her mind merged in the absolute. In that instant the great renunciate and lord of all yogis fell madly in love (Johnsen, 1994: 92).

This myth implies that even a goddess has to enter erotic trance if she is to attract the attentions of her deity and bring about divine union. Shiva is inaccessible on the plane of mere pleasure. If distracted for a moment by Kama, the God of (ordinary) Lust, Shiva incinerates him with a single glance from his third eye. Only an erotic trance as profound and extensive as his own can catch his attention and fascinate him. The union of Shiva and Parvati that follows takes place on the plane of blissful god and blissful goddess and results in a thousand years of semen-retaining dalliance in which yoga and maithuna (ritual intercourse) are one and the same.

Thus when Vimalananda instructs Svoboda in the practice of *avishkara* (the worship of deities called into one's own body), we have to follow the neat steps he lays out without forgetting the central importance of the divine plane of erotic trance. The old exaggerator says we must start by "losing" our personal identity, so as to create a "spiritual vacuum" into which the god may enter. This already implies a level of erotic trance at least as far from profane consciousness as the wrathful dakini plane. Then we are to identify with the deity in an outward manner by donning the god's garments and accessories. Surely this is an imaginal activity that will bear no fruit if performed on the plane of ordinary awareness. To properly appreciate Vimalananda's teaching, we have to be able to stabilize an imaginal construction of ourselves clad and accoutered as an icon of our deity -- a feat that might be compared to Tibetan mandala meditation. But this imaginal exercise is only preliminary to the next stage, in which we identify directly with the deity "with no thought for physical details." We have enabled our deity to acquire a living presence through our mastery of imagination. Then we drop the subject/object distinction between ourselves and the god. Gyatso's depiction of this stage provides a useful detail; for in directing our attention to the bliss attained by each visualized yab-yum, he makes it clear that what unites us with our deity is an emotional reality that can be attained exclusively through a very high level of erotic trance. In Vimalananda's last stage, one has become so familiar with the deity that the god comes at our "merest thought." Although at first the god comes when he or she wishes to do so, our increasing mastery of erotic trance brings us to the point where the deity comes and goes as we desire (Svoboda, 1986: 213-4).

If read cautiously, Vimalananda's instructions make a good deal of sense. In mysticism nothing is possible unless we first become familiar with erotic trance. Further progress requires mastery of the trance state in all three of its dimensions: physiology, emotion, and imagination. The method outlined to Svoboda assumes that the practitioner has already accomplished a great deal in the realm of bodily and affective arousal before taking up imaginal exercises. For the subtle body is discovered through physiology and emotion. It is

mastered through imagination. The work of imagination takes us beyond the rung of scandal to the subtle-body rung. Further mastery of imagination employs the subtle body to effect apotheosis, our own divinization.

1. "With a vigor unknown elsewhere, India has applied itself to analyzing the various conditionings of the human being . . . in order to learn how far the conditioned zones of the human being extend and *to see if anything exists beyond these conditionings*"(Eliade, 1969: xvi-xvii).
2. Indeed, the copious welling up of prostatic and vaginal fluids may even be an index of an arousal that has become more erotic than spasmodic, as Paschal Beverly Randolph seems to have believed (Deveney, 1977). Evidently the feces-smearred Trighantika, who knew the nature of lust, had arrived at the same conclusion -- although he valued the fluids themselves as magical substances, rather than as a physiological by-product of a change in consciousness.
3. "The permission that a woman become a guru is, as far as I know, peculiar to the Tantric tradition" (Dimock, 1989: 98).
4. In my psychological work with middle-aged men and women, I find it not uncommon for women to complain that they have become sexually "insatiable," believing that something is wrong with them, and for men to express great fear that their potency is gone and that they will never be capable of satisfying partners whose new-found sexual aptitude intimidates them. Such individuals are fighting their physiology as well as their psychology.
5. It is no accident that sexual initiatrixes are generally women in their middle years. Although they are not likely to attain their distinctive skills and wisdom without years of practice, their ability to initiate others requires a lengthy physiological, emotional, and imaginal maturation. It appears that the best Bhairavis are between the ages of forty-five and sixty-five. This fact was clearly recognized by Noyes' Oneida community in their initiating of the young by elders with spiritual and physiological attainment.
6. "In the second half of life, the accent shifts from the interpersonal or external dimension to a conscious relationship with intrapsychic processes. Dependence upon the ego has to be replaced by relationship to the self; dedication to outer success modified to include a concern for meaning and spiritual values. Jung's emphasis for the second half of life is on consciousness of a sense of purpose" (Samuels, et.al., 1986).
7. The three great poets of the Witness Game are Ahmad Ghazzali, Fakhruddin 'Iraqi, and Ahwhadoddin Kermani (Wilson, 1993: 57).
8. The ladder of divine ascent in Sufism is described in terms of well-defined "states" of mystical consciousness and "stations" of attainment. "State" and "station," therefore, are technical terms.
9. Lest the reader be confused, it should be noted that the "witness" of the witness game is the beardless youth who bears witness to the Reality of God that resides in every created being. My use of *witness* in this sentence refers to the ordinary meaning: the soldiers and Ghazzali's friends are witnesses of transcendent realities in this ordinary sense.
10. The herukas of the vision are not necessarily Pema Heruka, for a heruka is simply "the male personification of yogic power" (Evans-Wentz, 1967: 174). Shaw (1994: 28) says herukas are wrathful deities, but in one place Yeshe says the herukas banished the wrathful deities (Dowman, 1984: 2). In any event, it is clear that the passage in question deals with a vision of blissful divinities.
11. *Parvati* means "Goddess of the Mountains."