

Indecent Practices and Erotic Trance: Making Sense of Tantra

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The metaphor of a ladder of ascent, as ubiquitous as it may be, leaves much to be desired in articulating the nature of mysticism. Every ladder inevitably describes the author's own predilections and is valuable only insofar as it provides a useful set of distinctions between the various challenges and achievements required by the mystical path. The best masters, however, will be flexible with their disciples and reorder the rungs of their teaching so as to complement the natural talents and personal difficulties of each disciple.

The ladder outlined in the preceding chapters has this advantage and failing, and it may also come dangerously close to giving the impression that mystical achievement is entirely a matter of "internal work" which the individual practitioner can undertake more or less in isolation. It might be true enough, for example, that if Trighantika would only renounce his fanatical disciples, stop his exalting, and humbly take up the work of acquainting himself with kundalini through an exercise like the tubular palace meditation, he might achieve Spontaneous Great Bliss and open the way to emptiness. But would a madman like Trighantika be able to relate to a partner? The ladder metaphor will certainly have misled us if we have come to think that "internal work" is all that is required and that one's partner in maithuna is merely a necessary tool for one's own personal advancement and is never appreciated as an individual with a path of her own. Such a view appears to be supported by the male-authored texts emphasized by Eliade in which the ideal partner is described as an "untouchable," a polluted woman who gratifies the need for what is forbidden and serves only as an impersonal figure to make the *divine* relationship possible. Although she must be worshipped as a goddess, we may well wonder what this does to the woman herself. It appears from such texts that relationship and mutuality -- to say nothing of ordinary human respect -- play no role at all. The Sahajiya who bathes his dancing girls and Gandhi's "chastely" sleeping with female followers to test his own conquest of sexual attachment surely lead us to suspect that the female partner may have been abusively treated as an

object. The same suspicion applies to the Sufi who practices the "witness game" with naked, "beardless" youths.

Recently a woman told me the story of her relationship with an avid American Sufi who practiced an unbending form of carezza. In the beginning he seemed to her a wonderful partner insofar as his refusal to ejaculate and detumescere revealed her own capacity for multiple orgasms. Sex had never been so good. She said she had had "no idea my body could do these things." But eventually a resentment began to grow as she became convinced that he could not be budged from his own private accomplishments. He was unyielding and in a deep sense untouchable. She felt she was always required to submit orgasmically to his self-satisfied superiority. He never met her half-way, never joined her in the oceanic transpersonal moment of mutual orgasm. She began to feel that she was nothing but an object to him. The whole relationship began to feel "creepy," and she found it was not difficult to break off.

A story like this reveals the shadowy dimension of the ladder of sexual ascent when it is pursued as a personal indulgence. If such a private pursuit of excellence reminds us of the self-righteous attitude of fundamentalists who appear to have lost all sense of the human dignity of those whose ways of life they reject, our suspicions may not be ill placed. It brings to our attention an issue which has been mentioned from time to time in previous chapters but never given a ladder rung of its own -- namely that of mutuality, reciprocity, or interpersonal relationship. In fact, mutuality does not deserve a special place because it plays an integral role at every step. We did speak at some length, for example, of Vimalananda's eternal and spiritual love for his Bhairavi whom he left only because he had been "ordered" to begin a life of teaching. But if we down-played the role of mutuality at the rungs of scandal and the subtle body, we did so primarily in order to emphasize the great changes that have to be effected in the individual. It is, at bottom, our own awareness that needs to be changed. Whatever practices we undertake, their goal is not feats of prowess but the expansion of consciousness, freeing it from the limitations imposed by our neurotic fears and the narrowness of social conformity. Indeed, the ultimate reality in this work that takes us from the empirical world to the subtle plane and then to emptiness is consciousness itself.

But consciousness is not something locked away and isolated in our citadel self. Even if we live our entire lives without encountering the "crack in the self" and never cease to be Cartesian tourists on planet Earth, we fall under the influence of other people's consciousness every day. We may walk into a room, for example, and find the atmosphere thick with strife. If not a single contentious word is uttered, we find ourselves cautious, defensive, and on the look-out for an explanation. Perhaps we feel unwelcome as an intruder or that our sympathies are being silently demanded from all sides, even though we are unaware of the issues at stake. Similarly we can feel another person's anxious or erotic energy, sometimes without being able to pinpoint what it is about that person which stirs up anxiety or lust in ourselves. The story of the sexual therapist, Juliet Carr, who is able in a few hours to stir up enough eros in her client, Bill, that he can keep himself and his wife satisfied for weeks has given us a dramatic instance of interpersonal influence. The mystical path, whether it embraces sexual practices or not, is always founded upon the mutual influence of master and disciple or partner and partner.

The power of maithuna, indeed, is not to be sought merely in the complexity of the

detachments and "shepherding" described in the previous chapter, but in the mutual inductive effect of each partner's eros upon the other. We do not need to be mystics to know that our partner's state of arousal -- or disinterest -- has a direct effect upon our own erotic state of consciousness. Although we may suppose that in profane consciousness many couples remain ignorant of one another's real feelings during intercourse, physiological, emotional, and imaginal influences invariably play at least an unconscious role.

In maithuna, however, each party must be clearly aware not only of her own kundalini's arousal but also of that of her partner. Maithuna always aims for *samarasa*, "a 'unity of emotion,' or more precisely, the paradoxical, inexpressible experience of the discovery of Unity" (Eliade, 1969: 260). Samarasa, however, is obtained not merely through the conscious effort of "shepherding" by which our arousal is guided into a tandem relation with that of our partner. It is obtained above all through the "letting go" of a condition of mutual influence that takes place autonomously. Such an "alignment" of two beings in maithuna resembles the way that our internal monologues are "arranged" by the semi-conscious forces of the persona field, but at a much deeper and more unconscious level. We may well describe this phenomenon in terms of a "field of atman" that arranges our emotions, imaginal experiences, and even the raising of kundalini, as though it is the *atman* of each partner which mutually influences the other. The atman field[1] may even be said to operate as a kind of third agent which brings the two partners into alignment with one another at the level of *atman* or "self." [2] Mutual influence takes place autonomously, much as the atoms of a piece of iron are "aligned" by the influence of a magnetic field. "If one of the partners fails to enjoy a permanent awakening, he or she may receive it from the other" (Silburn, 1987: 160). In this way samarasa simply comes to be in its "suchness" when intercourse takes place on the field of emptiness.

Mutual Hypnosis

A dramatic example of this deep sort of influence is described in a series of experiments designed by Charles Tart to explore what he calls "mutual hypnosis" (Tart, 1972: 297-315). Tart started with the question of how to "deepen" the hypnotic trance and theorized that the *rapport* between hypnotist and hypnotized subject may be the deciding factor. Believing that the rapport is more powerfully felt by the subject than by the hypnotist, he expected that if the hypnotist were also in a state of hypnotic trance, both the rapport and the depth of trance would increase. To test this hypothesis, he selected two of his students who had already demonstrated moderate talent both for hypnotizing and for being hypnotized. Both were in their twenties. Tart refers to them as Bill and Anne. He had one hypnotize the other and then had them switch roles without leaving the trance state. The procedure worked. Bill hypnotized Anne and instructed her to hypnotize him. With urging from Tart, each then worked to deepen the other's state of trance, wherein they reached subjective assessments of trance depth that went beyond the agreed-upon scale. In the hypnotic state, they both learned to be far more dramatic, forceful, and imaginative practitioners of the hypnotic art.

But an unexpected development occurred when they employed hypnotic "dreams" as a means for imaginatively deepening their respective states. Bill took them both into a sloping tunnel whose depth was to parallel their mutual state of trance. In that dream it was discovered that they were in full communication, even when their eyes were closed and they were not speaking to one another. Back in ordinary consciousness, their separate reports of

the adventure in the tunnel not only agreed in all respects but "possessed complete experiential reality," although it was "unworldly" and was possibly "God's house," the "heaven of the Greeks, . . . a heaven without finality" (*Ibid.*, 309). They felt they had heads and faces but often no bodies and occasionally "walked *through* each other" (*Ibid.*, 310).

It also came out in conversations some weeks later that this passing through each other was accompanied by a sense of merging identities, of a partial blending of themselves quite beyond the degree of contact human beings expect to share with others (*Ibid.*, 310).

This seemed like a partial fusion of identities, a partial loss of the distinction between I and Thou. This was felt to be good at first, but later the Ss perceived this as a threat to their individual autonomy (*Ibid.*, 312).

Because of the sudden and unexpected intensity of these feelings the couples [Bill and Anne, as well as several similar cases of couples who took LSD-25 together] had a great deal of difficulty in their emotional relationships to each other for several months afterwards, all centered around feelings that they had seen too much of each other's real selves, more than their previous relationship had prepared them to handle comfortably (*Ibid.*, 314).

There were two other results of interest. The first was that in one of the sessions a third student, Carol, had entered the room unexpectedly while the mutual hypnosis experiment was in progress. Although she sat in the corner and was subjected to no induction procedure, she, too, entered into trance and found herself in the tunnel with Bill and Anne, a fact that the two principals perceived immediately. Bill ordered her out, but she tagged along guiltily and seemed to have experienced precisely the same tunnel as that traversed by Bill and Anne. Furthermore, all agreed that this was "Bill's tunnel," and had the sense that they were encountering a private dimension of Bill's psyche. Bill was extremely uncomfortable about this self-exposure and subsequently lost all interest in hypnosis, while Anne went on to explore hypnosis avidly on her own.

Although Tart's hypothesis of mutual hypnosis bears faint relation to Eastern meditation practices, and indeed Tantrism, it certainly seems that the subjects stumbled upon a degree of mutuality they found "holy" and completely outside their expectations or prior understanding of what might possibly occur between human individuals. They appear to have entered the field of atman in which the boundaries of the citadel self were completely lacking. For both of them -- especially Bill -- the experience seemed to come very close to discovering the "crack in the self," and provides a highly suggestive hint regarding the state of samarasa or "emotional unity" defined by Eliade.

If a similar loss of I and Thou is regularly experienced when a couple practices maithuna, the mutual effect is likely to be greatly heightened when ritual intercourse is performed by a circle of couples, as in the story told by Promode Chatterjee. In his account of an Aghora chakra ceremony, Chatterjee noted two facts which belong to the realm of mutual influence. One was that he himself -- like Carol in the mutual hypnosis experiment -- was brought into a profound state of erotic trance so that when the scene was illumined by a flash of lightning the imaginal eye of his brow chakra was opened and he saw "light figures of naked gods and goddesses in the midst of their divine play, surrounding a large statue of Hara and Gauri, as still and profound as the Himalayas." If the participants had this effect upon Chatterjee, an unprepared observer, how much stronger must have been the effect they had upon one another, sexual mystics who had trained their sensitivities toward the "emotional unity" of samarasa? The other piece of evidence lies in the contrast Chatterjee observes between the

"play" of the couples making up the circumference of the circle and the stillness of the central couple. He even says that those on the outside acted "intoxicated and lustful," while the Bhairava and Bhairavi in the center remained "absorbed in trance." The couples on the periphery were arousing themselves to the utmost so as to effect by mutual influence a powerful energetic boost to the couple in the center, whose wedding of Spontaneous Great Bliss with emptiness might be shared by all.

This "division of labor" based upon mutual influence represents a universal principle, equally applicable to the cosmos at large, to the participating couples in the maithuna circle, and to the individual human body. For here, again, we observe the homology of macrocosm and microcosm through the enactment of a mesocosm in the form of a mandala or yantra. In a hymn by Ksemaraja, one of Abhinavagupta's disciples, this whole process is described as taking place in the heart chakra, the locus of sublime influence between individuals. Dyczkowski summarizes it as follows:

[Ksemaraja] portrays the goddesses of the senses as seated on the petals of the lotus of the Heart [i.e., the traditional mandalic representation of the heart chakra] arrayed around the Divine Couple, Anandabhairava and Anandabhairavi, Who are in the calix. The goddesses move restlessly hither and thither in search of the most pleasing sensations to offer in worship to the Couple in the Center (Dyczkowski, 1987: 145).

Abhinavagupta, himself, salutes each in turn, beginning with the Bhairava and Bhairavi of bliss (ananda) in the center, and then the goddesses on each of the petals, naming what they contribute to the experience of unity. Finally, he concludes with these words:

I venerate in this way the circle of deities eternally active (*satadodita*) in my own body, ever present in all beings and the essence of the radiant pulsation of experience (*sphuradanubhava*) (*Ibid.*, 146).

We are familiar from "mob psychology" with the fact that the larger the group that is moved by a common emotion, the baser its actions will be, as though each mob is reduced to its "least common denominator." Less ominous examples of mutual influence can be given by anyone who has participated in a group meditation or a training workshop to develop our innate ability for intuition or entering imaginal scenes. In all such cases, our habitual ego-defenses are weakened when five, ten, or a hundred individuals participate in some exercise in non-ordinary consciousness. I have observed the same tendency when leading dream-interpretation groups or conducting group supervision sessions for psychotherapists. It seems clear that the group very readily enters a participatory space where the dream or case material gathers us together almost as though we become the several pairs of eyes and mouths of a single reflecting psyche. We are often surprised by our capacity for cooperation and by the unexpected insights that we voice.

Yeshe Initiates Her Rapists

When these sorts of experience are applied to the practice of ritual intercourse by groups of Tantrikas, it is easy to imagine that the group very quickly and powerfully reaches a state of mystical participation, where the energy of each couple has an effect upon the whole. If less trained and disciplined individuals were involved, we might expect that the whole procedure would degenerate by way of "mob psychology" into a chaotic orgy. The fact that it does not is based upon the Tantric principle of "involution." Ordinary mob interaction devolves

toward the basest of gratifications; but by reversing this natural tendency and drawing all sensory phenomena toward the center point (bindu), disciplined Tantrikas make everything coalesce into the One at both the microcosmic and macrocosmic levels. Mutual influence draws energy from the most ordinary and even dangerous sensory activities and uses them for Spontaneous Great Bliss and emptiness.

A powerful example of this is provided in Yeshe Tsogyel's "autobiography" -- which, it will be remembered, was discovered on the subtle plane some centuries after the alleged events had occurred. In the incident I refer to, Yeshe is traveling alone under orders from her guru when she is set upon by seven bandits who rob her of her possessions and then rape her. As soon as they are finished having their way with her, Yeshe sings a song to introduce them to "the four joys" of the mystical path. That song includes the following lines:

Apprehend the very essence of lust,
Identify it as your creative visualization of the deity,
And that is nothing but the Yidam[3] deity himself.
Meditate upon lustful mind as Divine Being
(Dowman, 1984: 118-9).

No sooner does she finish her song than the "seven thieves gained simultaneous spiritual maturity and release." In the end, she has gained seven new disciples. Dowman comments on this episode:

Tsogyel's method of making a rape a positive experience was to accept the situation and then control it. Through visualization identifying herself with Tara, the Goddess of Service, who is willing to do whatever is necessary to serve the Guru who is all sentient beings, the victim was transformed into the Saviouress (*Ibid.*, 264).

The most conservative reading of this story would take the encounter between Yeshe and the rapists as a dramatization of what may take place within the psyche of any accomplished Tantrika -- namely that one's lust may become "the Yidam deity," that is the god corresponding to one's own psychology, the divine dimension of the individual's own being. A holy possibility, the unification of Spontaneous Great Bliss with emptiness, lurks in the shadow of our lust. A somewhat more daring interpretation -- but one that is also integral to Tantra -- would begin from the everyday fact that we externalize our psyche in projection by way of our internal monologue. In this case, a woman beset by rapists in profane consciousness encounters her impotence before the demon of her own lust when brutish men embody that lust in attacking her. The profane and "natural" course of action is to take the brutality of that lust as an incontrovertible fact and either to fight a losing battle with it or to reluctantly submit in a realistic admission that the seven men have overwhelming physical force on their side. The woman, then, is violated, humiliated, even destroyed.

Yeshe, however, takes a realistic stand on the subtle plane. Looking inward to the surging reality of kundalini, she knows without doubt that the brutality of lust is a human fact that harbors the sublime reality of the Yidam deity of lust-consciousness whose higher meaning is Spontaneous Great Bliss. By accepting both the lower form of lust and its higher divine meaning, she "accepts the situation and controls it." She turns her attention to the rising kundalini which begins in the lust and impotence of the navel chakra but finds its transcendent meaning in the opening of the crown chakra. In submitting to the rape, she transforms it; and in transforming it, she transmutes profane violation into mystical victory.

Thus, while the woman in profane consciousness is dragged down through mutual "mob" participation to the brutal realm of her rapists' lust, Yeshe elevates them all through sublime mutual participation into the sphere of the Yidam deity. The story tells us that every human encounter is based in mutual participation. If we know the nature of lust and that it harbors a Yidam deity, we have a choice. Either we can succumb as victims, or we can "take control," accepting the situation as a mystical opportunity. If we do so, we transform the entire episode.

Seen in this light, the story of Yeshe and the seven bandits provides an illuminating commentary on our contemporary society's obsession with victimhood. Identifying ourselves as victims lends us a certain perverse righteousness and opens the door to litigation whereby the horizontal rights of our human dignity can be defended in an entirely profane manner. The mystical realization of Tantra turns this litigious struggle upside-down and asserts that the whole notion of "victims' rights" misses the involitional opportunity whereby an unacknowledged vertical reality, the Yidam deity, remains silent and denied by the persona field. Furthermore, when the potential victim has her wits about her and has realized the transformative potential of kundalini in her own life, she turns the brutal challenge into mystical opportunity and thereby becomes the "saviouress" of brutes whose consciousness has hitherto known only the base realities of "perpetrators."

Shaktipat

To be a savior and win disciples rather than perpetrators is founded upon the reality of mutual participation. Sanskrit has a word for the mutual influence which elevates: *shaktipat*. *Shakti-pata* means "descent of power" and refers to the "transmission of psychospiritual energy (*shakti*) from the adept to the disciple" (Feuerstein, 1990). Shaktipat may be conferred by a touch, the bestowal of an article of clothing, a word, a glance, or even a thought. Often it is used in the phrase *shaktipat diksha*, "initiation (*diksha*) by the descent of power." Yeshe initiated the seven rapists through the act of intercourse they believed they were forcing upon her when the energy of her raised kundalini elevated their lust and opened their higher chakras through the inductive force of shaktipat.

[In *shaktipat diksha*] the master directly transmits his energy to the student to remove the final obstacle, awakening the sleeping serpent and leading her upward. One who is functioning on a higher level may sometimes unconsciously influence those around him in the same way that a magnet influences metal objects in its proximity. . . . As a magnet influences a particular metal, such a teacher influences those who are prepared. . . . In shaktipat the influence is conscious and extremely intense. Through a look, touch, or thought the master transmits his own power to the aspirant, who is suddenly transported into a realm of blissful divine consciousness (Rama, 1990: 39).

Generally the transmission of shaktipat is understood to take place through the heart chakra of master and disciple, for the anahata is above all the locus of sublime unity between individuals. The transmission inspires expansion, love, and the sense that one stands above "the surface of the earth." It is a "spiritual" transferal, but it takes place "from body to body" (Silburn, 1987: 87). It "enhallows" (Feuerstein, 1989: 27) the disciple along the three dimensions of mystical experience we have emphasized: physiology, emotion, and imagination. Sometimes the recipient enters directly into dhyana or samadhi and remains there for an extended period of time. "After shaktipat, meditation becomes natural, and takes place without strain or striving" (Desai, 1990: 75). It is often described as a "divine"

transmission, for it is based in the guru's capacity for becoming one with the cosmos, "the infinite realm of illumination" (Silburn, 1987: 87). The disciple experiences the master "as a spiritual reality rather than as a human personality" (Feuerstein, 1989: 26).

As might be expected, Vimalananda has a number of provocative things to say about shaktipat, and many of them suggest a reciprocity between master and disciple not emphasized elsewhere. Indeed, he implies that shaktipat is but a spiritual and elevating form of the mutual influence which obtains between all individuals, even in profane consciousness. True shaktipat requires genuine connection with and solid experience of impersonal, divine realities. Because the guru will be an expert in this field, the burden of converting mutual influence into an elevating transmutation of the disciple lies with the master. For example: "A guru always wants to make his disciple into his own guru. The Self, the Absolute Reality, is the true guru" (Svoboda, 1994: 279). This implies not only that the guru has to be able to see beyond appearances and is not fooled by the disciple's personal and neurotic limitations. The disciple, too, is an embodiment of the divine -- analogous, perhaps, to the saying of Jesus, "As you did it to the least of my brethren, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). Elsewhere Vimalananda suggests that the mutual influence which elevates the disciple can also diminish the saint's spiritual power. This claim, too, is reminiscent of words ascribed to Jesus when a woman afflicted with a hemorrhage was healed upon touching the hem of his garment: "And Jesus, perceiving in himself that power had gone forth from him, immediately turned about in the crowd, and said, 'Who touched my garments?'" (Mk 5: 30). Vimalananda's statement is more sobering:

A true saint is the embodiment of his deity and the energy emanating from him is the energy of that deity. By touching a saint's feet you collect a little of that energy, which purifies your own consciousness and makes it more subtle. The saint loses some of his own peace of mind by this which is uncomfortable for the saint; this is how many saints go bad (Svoboda, 1997: 262).

Because mutual influence works both ways, the one who is elevated may diminish the more spiritually advanced. On a more ordinary level, I have encountered this phenomenon in some of my patients who are "energy healers" and massage therapists. They often find themselves depleted or made ill by patients who seem to leave their offices in an improved state of bodily and mental health. I have also found that the level of my own consciousness can be lowered and my habitual sense of having a coherent self temporarily fragmented by an interaction with a poorly integrated patient who clearly seems to have benefited from our exchange.

Finally, Vimalananda suggests that if we pay attention to how the presence of another person subtly changes our consciousness, we can arrive at an assessment of the other person's spiritual state. This is particularly helpful when we find ourselves before a naked Sadhu who has all the trappings of spirituality but may be a charlatan:

Sit quietly and don't say much; listen, and try to keep your mind blank. If when you sit near him you find yourself forgetting the things of the world and becoming more peaceful, then he is a good saint; his halo is quieting your mind. If not, run away! (Svoboda, 1994: 267).

Muktananda emphasizes the sexual foundation of shaktipat when it dawns on him that the reason he had to struggle with a bewildering and humiliating manifestation of overwhelming sexual desire was to turn him into an urdhvareta,^[4] one in whom the "sexual fluid" rises and becomes "the source of the power to give Shaktipat" (Muktananda, 1978: 32, 99). Sexual

arousal, transmuted on the subtle plane to kundalini, makes one an initiate by transforming his own being and giving him the power to transform "other beings, indeed, the entire universe, through his limitless powers" (D. G. White, 1996: 272). D. G. White summarizes the Tantric doctrine of shaktipat as it appears in scriptures written between the tenth and fourteenth centuries. Here we encounter a magical flavor, even a literal physicality, which many later sources eschew.

The guru, having entered the body of his disciple (whose *kundalini* has been awakened) unites with that *kundalini* within the disciple's body and subsequently raises it from the disciple's lower abdomen up to his cranial vault. The form the guru takes as he courses through his disciple's body may be that of a drop (*bindu*) of seed or speech. In many descriptions of this operation, the guru is said to exit the disciple's body through the mouth and thus return back into his own body through his own mouth (*Ibid.*, 312).

White makes it clear that this is fundamentally a sexual process, albeit with gender "polarities reversed": "given that it is a feminine *kundalini* which awakens, stiffens, rises, even rushes upwards towards the cranial vault, the cavity that is the place of the passive male Siva" (*Ibid.*, 320).

Although the Hindu doctrine of shaktipat is distinguished by the fullness of its descriptions, the reality of mutual influence is also well known in Sufism, where elevating influence is often described as "perfecting" an "imperfection" in the disciple. Probably the most common practice is that the shaikh who recognizes such an opportunity for elevating a disciple invests himself with a special article of clothing, the mantel (*khirqa*), and by meditation places himself in the mystical state of consciousness he wishes to induce in his disciple. Then he ceremoniously removes the *khirqa* from his own body and places it on the body of the disciple, transferring the desired state at the same time (Wilson, 1993: 144). In her biography of Ibn al-'Arabi, Claude Addas cites several references from "The Greatest Shaikh" attesting to the "immediate transformation" that is produced in the disciple by means of the *khirqa* (Addas, 1993: 145). A passage from Ibn al-'Arabi's *Revelations at Mecca*[5] is very explicit:

So it is when the masters of spiritual states perceive some imperfection in one of their companions and wish to perfect that person's state, they resort to the custom of meeting with the person alone. The master then takes the piece of clothing he is wearing in the spiritual state he is in at that particular moment, removes it and puts it on the man whom he wishes to guide to perfection. He then holds the man closely to him -- and the master's state spreads to his disciple, who thereby attains to the desired perfection (Addas, 1993: 146).

Jalaluddin Rumi's practice of baring his breast when in an ecstatic state of divine love and pressing it against the chest of a disciple (Schimmel, 1978: 217) not only dispenses with the article of clothing as a necessary element but also seems implicitly to acknowledge the Hindu doctrine that mutual influence is in some sense a bodily transfer with sexual implications and that the bodily locus of mutual influence is associated with the heart chakra. Rumi speaks of the saint who knows with the heart and leads the disciple with his heart:

[The gnosis of the heart[6]], is one of the distinguishing features of the mystical leader. He is a lion, and the thoughts of others are like a forest which he can easily enter. . . . [H]e discovers in the unpolished stone the wonderful figures which people see in the polished mirror. That is why he can show the novice the path which leads him best towards self-realization and approximation to God, calling the figures out of the stone "heart" (*Ibid.*, 315-6).

Sufism also speaks of the intense concentration of master and disciple upon one another

[tawajjuh] that brings about "spiritual unity, faith healing, and many other phenomena" (Schimmel, 1975: 366). By tawajjuh, the master "enters the door of the disciple's heart"; and through his "knowledge of things that exist potentially in God's eternal knowledge, he is able to realize certain of these possibilities on the worldly plane" (*Ibid.*, 237). From the side of the disciple, it is said that he "passes away" or that his ego-personality has been "annihilated" in the master (*fana' fi' sh-shaikh*), who, in his turn has already been annihilated in the Prophet Muhammad. By this means, the shaikh "becomes the Perfect Man and thus leads his disciples with a guidance granted directly by God" (*Ibid.*, 237). This doctrine of the passing away (*fana'*) of one's ego so as to discover one's greater self (*baqa'*) through the relationship with one's shaikh, directly parallels the Hindu notion of shaktipat, whereby ego gives way to atman through the transforming influence of the guru.[7]

The Recipient Of Shaktipat

Ibn al-'Arabi gives us a hint as to how such an elevating influence feels to the disciple when he is transformed. In the following passage, he describes what happened to him early in his mystical career while he sat face-to-face in tawajjuh with Abu Ya'qub al-Kumi. He reports two effects, a conscious experience of trembling and a revelation from his dream that the shaikh's power emanated from the brightness of his heart chakra:

I saw him in a dream on one occasion and his breast seemed to be cleft asunder and a light like that of the sun shone out from it. . . . When I would sit before him or before others of my Shaikhs, I would tremble like a leaf in the wind, my voice would become weak and my limbs would shake (Ibn al-'Arabi, 1971: 70).

The American initiate of Tibetan Buddhism, Tsultrim Allione, describes even more vividly the effect upon herself when, in her first interview with Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, they sat face-to-face in silence for forty-five minutes. At first she waited in puzzlement for him to speak. Then it began to dawn on her that something of quite a different order was occurring. It was only much later that she grasped what it was:

Now I realize that what happened was some kind of mind-to-mind transmission, but at the time I only knew that I had experienced something that was completely beyond words and form. . . . It was an experience of space[8] that extended outward without any reference back. This space was luminous and bliss-provoking, a release, similar to, but beyond, sexual orgasm (Allione: 1986: xvii-xviii).

The German initiate of Tibetan Buddhism, Lama Govinda Anagarika, describes his own experience of receiving shaktipat through a light touch from the hand of his guru. Govinda perceived "a stream of bliss" traversing his whole being which he felt vividly in his body, "so that all that one had intended to say or ask, vanished from one's mind like smoke into blue air" (Govinda, 1988: 33). Some years later he experienced an analogous elevating influence from the Great Hermit at Gomchen, who had refused to meet him. He was told to wait overnight at some distance from the hermitage in a "horribly cold and draughty wooden rest-house":

But before I could fall asleep a strange thing happened. I had the sensation that somebody took possession of my consciousness, my will-power, and my body -- that I no more had control over my thoughts, but that somebody else was thinking them -- and that slowly, but surely, I was losing my own identity. And then I realized that it could be none other than the hermit . . . due to the power of his concentration and my own lack of resistance in the moment when I was

hovering between the waking and the sleeping state (*Ibid.*, 101).

The eighteen-year-old Narendra, who became Ramakrishna's favorite disciple, was frightened and repelled at his first meeting with the forty-five year-old saint. Ramakrishna raved and wept in "anxious desire" and claimed that Narendra was the reincarnation of the ancient sage Narayana. Narendra concluded that Ramakrishna was a "monomaniac." In his second meeting, however, Narendra received shaktipat:

As I was thinking [Ramakrishna was about to create another embarrassing scene], he quickly approached me and placed his own right foot on my body, and immediately I had an unprecedented experience at his touch. As I looked, I began to see that all the things in the room, with the walls themselves, were spinning wildly and dissolving into somewhere. . . .terrible fear . . .this itself was at the threshold of death. . . . [Finally Ramakrishna relented] and said, "Then enough now, the work doesn't have to be done all at once. It will come about in good time" (Kripal, 1995: 211).

An American student of yoga, D. R. Butler, describes his own first experience of shaktipat, which took place in Upstate New York in 1973 when Butler was in his mid-twenties and had already been studying yoga for five years. At a week-long yoga retreat, Yogi Amrit Desai, who until that moment had been completely unknown to the group, led them in a meditation.

The first thing I noticed was a wave of euphoria softly permeating my being. I felt intensely happy. I didn't know the reason for the wonderful feeling but I determined to relax and enjoy it.

Suddenly surges of energy -- like electrical charges -- streaked up my spine. These gradually evolved into a steady current of hot energy flowing from the tip of my spine to the top of my head. . . .

Brilliant colors swirled inside my head; I thought I would burst with happiness. Nothing had ever felt so good! Suddenly a scream burst from the back of the room, then another. In a few moments the place was a madhouse (Butler, 1990: 185).

Only after an extended outbreak of pandemonium did Desai halt the demonstration and explain to the uninitiated students that what they had felt was shaktipat. Those who wished could leave the room. About half did so. Then Desai resumed his transmission with even greater intensity.

My body was filled with a brilliant white light and I allowed myself to be absorbed in it. I felt that my life as I previously had known it literally came to an end. My ego identity became meaningless; there was no time; past and future did not exist. All that existed was pure light and pure bliss. I was content to remain in this state forever.

When I opened my eyes again I noticed that my body had bent forward; my forehead was touching the floor (*Ibid.*, 187).

Muktananda's reception of shaktipat from his guru, Nityananda, is described in too much detail to be summarized (Muktananda, 1978: 64-71). Suffice it to say that it included all the elements we have seen, including the transferal of a cloak and pair of sandals from the guru's own body. Muktananda describes with greater economy several instances in which he conferred shaktipat on someone else. There is an intriguingly inadvertent element in each of them. In one case an airline officer begs to be allowed to clean Muktananda's bathroom. His request having been granted, the officer had hardly begun when he fell into a stillness and sat in meditation for four hours. Subsequently, the officer reported, people who entered his own

meditation room would enter immediately into unexpectedly deep states of meditation (*Ibid.*, 144).

Nityananda intended to initiate Muktananda; Amrit Desai deliberately created chaos among unprepared students; and Ramakrishna, despite his tendency to spend extended periods of time completely out of his mind in divyonmada, knew exactly what he was doing in conferring shaktipat on the ambivalent young Narendra. Nevertheless, it is clear that not a few instances of elevating influence occur autonomously, quite to the surprise and amazement of the individual through whom the conferral takes place. In the following example Swami Rama makes it clear that, in his experience, a genuine shaktipat initiation originates from an impersonal source over which he himself has no control.

One day [my master] told me that a swami would come the next morning and that I was to touch him on the forehead, thereby initiating him in shaktipat diksha. I protested, saying that I had no such power to arouse the kundalini in another person. But he said to me, "Don't you know, it is not you acting. You are just the instrument of a higher power. Let the power work through you."

. . . Suddenly I found my arm being raised. It was not at all under my control. I touched the swami and he remained in samadhi for several hours. . . . There may be someone to whom I wish to impart this experience, but nevertheless I cannot. Yet with a few rare individuals I feel such a strong impulse that I cannot resist (Rama, 1990: 41).

Guy Claxton, an English disciple of Irina Tweedie (whose spiritual autobiography will be discussed shortly), inadvertently conferred shaktipat on a neighbor who had been hounding him for instruction in the techniques of meditation. Claxton refused him six times before deciding the man was serious. However, he got no further than the initial instructions for relaxing the body when:

I felt a rush of psychophysical energy seemingly enter my body from beneath and explode out toward him. My speech became slurred and my eyelids got heavy, but I kept my eyes focused on him. As the wave of energy hit him, he visibly jerked back, looking at me fearfully. Then a second wave passed through me, and again he startled. By the time a third rush of energy reached him, he was in deep meditation. I felt a force field connecting our bodies, and while I stayed in meditation, he too remained meditating (Feuerstein, 1991: 133).[9]

The End Of The Ladder

The ladder of mystical ascent, which the novice sees as a set of exercises and objective steps, one lesson after another -- like arithmetic, algebra, and trigonometry as the precursors of calculus -- and which later becomes an internal ladder identical with the subtle body, finally collapses with the experience of emptiness. For emptiness reveals that all the exercises and metaphysical explanations belong to the intermediate phase, when the world no longer appears as mountains, trees, and rivers. They constitute a necessary withdrawal from the socially sanctioned world of the citadel self in order to pave the way back, where trees, mountains, and rivers can be encountered as primary facts.

Shaktipat, the reality of mutual influence, which we largely ignored while defining the steps of the ladder, may now be seen to play a crucial role in mystical ascent. On the one hand, it seems to confirm the discrete steps of the ladder insofar as it is employed to lift us from the ignorance of the ladder rung of our most recent accomplishment to the insight of the next stage through a kind of borrowed illumination. For example, one who has guessed that there

is more to sex than the physiological release of profane orgasm, may be transported to erotic trance through an encounter with an American Bhairavi like Juliet Carr. A certain shaktipat, inadequate but useful, has lifted her client Bill into a more satisfying relationship with his wife. Those whom overwhelming eros has led to an unconscious state of divyonmada might be lifted to the realization that the soul has its own dragon which will bring them beyond the socially sanctioned dichotomy of good and evil. At that stage, the disciple has been guided through the turmoil of the navel chakra to the solid realization of "essential being" in the manipura of the solar plexus. Further conferrals of shaktipat may open the sublimity of the heart chakra or even induce the samadhi which is characteristic of the crown chakra.

In this manner, shaktipat confirms the structure of the ladder. It may even be the ultimate "secret" of mystical ascent that may not be spoken. Mentioning it, however, or even describing it in a general way as we have done, accomplishes little for the disciple. One has either been initiated by shaktipat or one has not. We have either been lucky enough to have encountered a master with the ability to transport us past our personal obstacles, or we continue to struggle with our exercises. It is often said that for the soul that is prepared, anything can occasion enlightenment. Swami Rama says he cannot confer shaktipat to whomever he wishes, but only when ordained by a power that transcends his own personal consciousness. Imponderable considerations -- above all "grace" in the sense of a fortuitous transcendental factor -- are involved.

We hardly dare say there is no progress without shaktipat or some form of "divine intervention," yet the alternative seems unlikely. Mystics may spend years in isolation, but we know of none for whom interpersonal influence has not played a crucial role. Since this is the case, it appears that the ladder of ascent is a useful conceit, a teaching device that establishes valuable distinctions only after the fact. Only those who have gnosis are in a position to describe the obstacles they have overcome. Our future course remains shrouded in "secrets" which no one is "keeping." It is never a matter of information being withheld but of an experience that has not yet been had. Possibly for each of us a master resides somewhere in the world who is uniquely suited to advance us through mutual influence. Possibly that individual has never even heard of a ladder of ascent, despite possessing the key to our own personal lock. Surely those who have conferred shaktipat without ever having heard of it -- Muktananda's airline officer, for example -- are unwitting masters. But whether we will have the good luck to meet this unknown master resides in the imponderable secret of our "fate."

Irina Tweedie

Notions of fate, destiny, and grace -- mysterious words, impossible to specify -- seem to play so crucial a role on the mystical path that a well-developed understanding of the ladder of ascent may serve more as a distraction than a help. Such appears to be the theme of Irina Tweedie's 800-page mystical diary, *Daughter of Fire* (1986). Tweedie was born in Russia a decade before the Bolshevik Revolution, was educated in Vienna and Paris, and married a British military officer after the second World War. Widowed in 1954, Tweedie began a search for religious meaning and was working for the Theosophical Society in London in 1959 when a friend insisted that she had to meet a certain guru in India. She was fifty-five years old and considered herself an old woman when she met the man she calls Bhai Sahib ("Elder Brother"). He was some thirteen years older than she and an initiated master in the

Naqshbandiyya Order of Sufis.

Founded in the fourteenth century by Baha'uddin Naqshband, who traced his own initiatory tradition back another two centuries, the Naqshbandiyya has many adherents in Central Asia, including Pakistan and India. Judging from the form it takes in Bhai Sahib's teaching, it may incorporate a large number of Hindu words, concepts, and practices. Bhai Sahib says Sufism is not a religion but a way of life that is compatible with any religion. [10] The Naqshbandiyya pursues a sober path based upon the silent repetition of the divine Name (dhikr in Arabic; japa in Sanskrit) in the heart, intimate spiritual conversation between master and disciple (suhbat) and the shaktipat-like concentration in spiritual unity (tawajjuh) which aims for the experiential "certitude" of divine/human unity. Its main teaching is the "education of the heart" by which the disciple is "spiritually purified" (Schimmel, 1975: 363-73).

Bhai Sahib informed Tweedie that there are two paths: the slower and less painful way of *dhyana* (meditation), [11] and the faster "Path of Fire" which requires no effort but great suffering. One does not choose the Path of Fire; one finds oneself chosen and can either accept the path or refuse. There appears never to have been any doubt in either disciple or master that Tweedie had been destined for the Path of Fire and that she would not refuse. [12] It is evident from her diary that the Path of Fire is based in shaktipat, mutual influence from heart chakra to heart chakra, and that the suffering has to do with learning to accommodate oneself to powerful unanticipated changes in physiology, emotion, and imagination. "I was broken down in every sense till I had to come to terms with that in me which I kept rejecting all my life" (Tweedie, 1986: x).

Tweedie's journal begins with her first meeting with Bhai Sahib on October 2, 1961, and ends March 9, 1967, about six and a half months after her master's death. Regarding that first meeting, when she was exhausted and ruffled from her long journey, she describes a powerful experience of mutual influence: "I caught my breath. . . . wild cartwheels were turning inside my brain and then my mind went completely blank. And then it was -- it was as if *something in me* stood to attention and saluted . . . I was in the presence of a Great Man" (*Ibid.*, 6). Thereafter, every time she meets with him, and even if she only enters his room, she finds herself in *dhyana*, her thoughts slowed down, "Thoughts come and go, lazily, slowly, just a few, and far in between" (*Ibid.*, 12). When he talks, she fails to understand at the conscious level but gives answers that amaze her. Evidently he is speaking to her unconscious mind which answers without the participation of her ego. This is why she needs a guru, she says, "Because by yourself alone you can never go beyond the Mind" (*Ibid.*, 20).

Bhai Sahib explains that it all has to do with the awakening of kundalini, a power that includes sex but is more comprehensive. It is the way things are done in the Naqshbandiyya: "We awaken the King, the Heart Chakra, and leave it to the King to activate all the other Chakras" (*Ibid.*, 36). She has visions of his face as "sheer energy" and is "plagued by constant vibrations in her whole body" (*Ibid.*, 37-8). "It is just like the beginning of falling in love. Falling in love with what??" (*Ibid.*, 93). On December 1, 1961, the last day of her second month's association with her guru, she marvels at her ability to pray, "My mind is still, transparent, as though paralyzed, and my heart flies away like trembling bird" (*Ibid.*, 75). He is in every one of her dreams at night (*Ibid.*, 77). A month later he begins pointedly

to ignore her, and she is hurt and angry (*Ibid.*, 92-4). Still, she finds that when she prays, she prays to him and sees his face clearly before her (*Ibid.*, 102). By the middle of the fourth month, she is plagued with sexual vibrations in the muladhara (base of the spine) which hisses, tickles, flutters, and spins. She is flooded with sexual desire and "an uncontrollable fear -- primitive, animal fear" that goes on for hours (*Ibid.*, 108-9). "Hideous beings, leering, obscene, all coupled in sexual intercourse, elemental creatures, animal-like, performing wild sexual orgies" create "cold terror" in her and fill her with shame (*Ibid.*, 110-1). Her whole being is filled with uncontrollable energy. She can remember everything he says and does but absolutely nothing else that happens from day to day (*Ibid.*, 123).

By February 8, 1962, four months after meeting him, the grotesque horrors of the svadhsthana chakra in the lower abdomen begin to give way to symptoms associated with the anahata: "I can actually HEAR the Heart Chakra spin round and round at a terrific speed; the physical heart responds by beating madly, missing out beats, and behaving as if trying to jump out of the thorax" (*Ibid.*, 125). She has visions of "luminous blood" coursing through her subtle body and sees that it extends outside her physical body and belongs to the "Web of the Universe" (*Ibid.*, 127). More and more she is plagued by his neglect of her and his solicitude for his other followers who "ask the most irrelevant questions" (*Ibid.*, 135). He explains that keeping her constantly between emotional ups and downs is essential to his method, "to cause suffering which will defeat the Mind" (*Ibid.*, 187). A voice in a dream tells her, "Only the one who is loved is tortured" (*Ibid.*, 194). By May of 1962 she is withdrawing all of her money from her extensive world-wide investments and giving him huge sums which he immediately turns over to needy charities. She is "fascinated" by the process (*Ibid.*, 200).

She is told she has to give up all her beliefs, especially those she has learned from Theosophy. "Everything in me cried out in despair." Then suddenly, "It felt like a click, a snap, and then stillness. . . . A bell-like thought floated into my mind: a belief which is taken up can be given up" (*Ibid.*, 279). Later, this sort of "click" brings about "a ceaseless streaming . . . absolute glory," which she finds she can just "sink into." It is "a tremendous pull, a wave of love" (*Ibid.*, 283). But now, eleven months after her first meeting, she begins to provoke huge fights with him, based on her morose feelings of neglect; and he fights back. They read like lovers' quarrels (*Ibid.*, 288-93). Two months later, he tells her he is speeding up the process so that her training will be complete by the time of his death. She is going to have to leave him for a while, because those who remain with him all the time do not make progress. (*Ibid.*, 325). At the end of fifteen months, she asks if he effects these changes in her deliberately with his eyes. He answers that the process is not deliberate, but admits that sometimes the disciple does see "streams of light flashing from the eyes" of the guru (*Ibid.*, 430). Her kundalini vibrations are now never felt below the waistline (*Ibid.*, 432). She concludes that this relationship is so difficult because: "It is not a human relationship at all. It belongs to 'the other part of me'" (*Ibid.*, 445).

On April 30, 1963, she reluctantly follows orders and returns to England, where she remains for two and a half years, meditating, teaching, and writing him letters two or three times a week, often filled with bitter recriminations for rejecting her. He never replies. When she returns in January of 1966, his first lessons concern the disciple's "passing away" (fana') into the guru who has "passed away" into God. Eventually she, too, will have to learn to "pass away" into God -- "the most difficult" stage of all (*Ibid.*, 515-7). More outbursts of anger. He

does not condemn her: "It is beyond the power of the human being to control anger. But after the anger, look at it: from where it came, why and how it came, and what it did to you. You will learn many things" (*Ibid.*, 637-8). She finds that his method of teaching is to fall silent so as to let her "intuition speak" (*Ibid.*, 664). She walks the streets "as though drunk" and wearing blinders -- something that happens all the time in India but never in London (*Ibid.*, 719-20).

On July 25, 1966, the eve of his death, which she does not consciously suspect, she is worried but inwardly still and at peace. He gives her the look "of a divine lover." "My heart stood still as though pierced by a sword. . . . I was so profoundly disturbed that I literally ran away" (*Ibid.*, 744). She remains in his town for two weeks after his death and then goes to a retreat in the Himalayas, repeating the Divine Name "all the time." Her consciousness is changing, but she does not understand it (*Ibid.*, 774-5). Six weeks later it dawns on her that his whole work was to make her "pregnant with God" and that her mistake was to think that she had to "get God" from him (*Ibid.*, 793). "Something intangible very slowly became a permanent reality. . . . My heart is incessantly humming its song to Him [God]" (*Ibid.*, 797). After four months, this realization has become well established: "Deep, deep within there is this love and that is the ONLY REALITY -- this love that digs deep into the heart, its blazing abyss, this love that enwraps and exalts my whole being and the whole of creation as one" (*Ibid.*, 804). "All I know is that the goal will be always receding, 'For the Beloved can never be known'" (*Ibid.*, 814).

From Tweedie's extensive diary -- written and published only because Bhai Sahib insisted -- we can detect the entire process of the diamond ladder, but undertaken without any of the corresponding concepts and without any "left-hand" practices. Kundalini is aroused and feels disturbingly sexual. Tweedie is amazed at such bodily sexual sensations and fantasies in an "old woman" like herself. She enters an erotic relationship that has all the characteristic jealousies and attachments we know from our own experiences of romantic love. We can appreciate the effects of kundalini's arousal in the physiological, emotional, and imaginal experiences Tweedie reports. It begins in the muladhara, leads to torment and terror in the svadhisthana, and the sublime sensations of the anahata. At times her ajna's third eye is opened. The central problem and source of suffering takes the form of her longing for union, intimacy, and exclusivity with her guru and his resolute insistence on frustrating this literal-minded and limited desire. She can come to know God only through personal love directed toward a specific friend and then has to lose that personal friend in order to find the Absolute Friend who hides within each personal attachment.

Her guru relentlessly spurns her attachment to his own person by ignoring her and sending her back to England, where she has to rely upon her own experience exclusively. But only when his death removes him finally from the scene does she realize that his role was not to "give" her God, but to make her "pregnant" with God. Shaktipat brings about substantial changes, by-passes the ego, introduces her to erotic trance and meditative states. But in the end she has to realize that those changes belong naturally to her own body and consciousness. Shaktipat begins in dependency, like divyonmada, but ends only when a "self" has been created and she comes to realize that God dwells there naturally and not merely in the guru to whom she was attached. Shaktipat takes her through the rungs of longing, scandal, and the subtle body and succeeds when she realizes the primary fact that life is a love affair with a divinity who is not different from the cosmos -- or, indeed, her own

heart.

The theme of Tweedie's diary -- that shaktipat is the ultimate secret in mystical ascent -- parallels certain more ordinary interpersonal relations. For example, psychotherapy patients whose ego has proven inadequate to their daily lives often display the slowness of thought Tweedie had every time she entered her guru's vicinity. A powerful erotic bond establishes itself between analyst and analysand. Sometimes it enters consciousness disturbingly, but often it works silently below the surface of their exchanges. When this happens, the patient may find himself filled with a new power. It comes and goes. Perhaps he carries the analyst around with him through the week, discussing his life with that imaginal partner. His focus narrows while his horizons expand. He gets a clearer sense of what is real. One patient claimed she was successful in her daily activities only when my soul had entered her and she found that it did the work instead of she.

This describes the sort of shaktipat connection that Heinz Kohut (1977, 1984) calls a "self-object" relationship. The patient experiences the analyst functioning within her, taking the place of her missing "self," and supplying the coherence and resolution she is incapable of mustering on her own. A patient so strengthened by a "self" borrowed from the analyst may begin to master some of her daily tasks and family relationships. Her internal monologue begins to change, and she shows more self-confidence. But she has not finished her transformation until she can separate from the analyst -- convinced that she, too, has a self. Such patients enter analysis in a far more "obstructed" state than Tweedie was when she met her guru. And they are not apt to visit the upper rungs of the diamond ladder. But they are elevated to a higher order of functioning, and the mechanism for this change is shaktipat conferred and overcome.

The Feminine Principle

It has often been observed by historians of religion -- and this is particularly true of the mystical traditions -- that the preponderance of texts have been written by men and have a masculine bias giving our constructions of mystical ascent a regrettably patriarchal tone. Certainly Evola's dogmatic assertions of masculine superiority render aspects of his account of mysticism questionable. Eliade's emphasis on the "polluted" nature of the ideal female partner appears to contribute to this bias until we reflect that overturning the caste system of purity and pollution belongs to an essentially antinomian stance. The taken-for-granted dictates of the persona field must be overcome before we can explore the realities of the field of atman. Once we recall this context, we are not surprised to learn that most of the women mystics whose stories are told by Johnsen (1994) and Allione (1986) have taken consorts from a social stratum lower than their own, have left the husbands forced upon them by their families, or have transformed those husbands by initiating them.

Our overwhelming patriarchal bias is based in the historical fact that all of the major religious traditions in the world today arose during a long period of male dominance which includes the patriarchs and prophets of Judaism as well as the Aryan superimposition of male sky-gods over the prehistoric goddess religions of India. It seems that somewhere around 1500, b.c.e., a major shift occurred in the Middle East and in the Indian sphere of civilization. Thus, the rise of Tantra in the early centuries of the common era can be seen as

a fortunate recovery. The predominance of the goddess suggests that the feminine principle has reappeared as a sort of "unconscious compensation" along the lines of Jung's thought.

Jung argues that because men have consciously identified with their masculinity and its logos-orientation (the predominance of *word* and logical connection), their unconscious psyche bears a feminine face, the "anima" which represents everything that is not conscious, including the man's unconscious femininity. The anima operates according to the feminine principle of eros where the issue of relationship and the realm of feeling-connection predominate. If Jung is right about this, it is not surprising that male mystics have emphasized and idealized the role of the goddess, for she would be the unknown, fascinating, and disturbing aspect of divinity which is missing from their masculine consciousness. The psychological compensation theory, however, would expect that a woman's mystical path would be more logos-oriented -- based on her need to come into contact with her unconscious "animus," which contains the masculine principle lacking to her conscious identity.[13] That women, too, are drawn to the goddess may well have to do with their need to revalue their own conscious selves within a patriarchal culture which gives all the power to men.

Such a perspective may well account for Yeshe Tsogyel's vision of a red, naked woman who presses her vagina against Yeshe's mouth and from which she drinks a copious flow of menstrual blood, filling her "entire being with health and well-being." Allione interprets this scene as making the statement that "primal lust binds the universe together" (Allione, 1986: 34). "Primal lust" would be the eros-principle experienced in its most passionate form, a reality that is also presented in the Tantric image of the goddess as naked and frenzied, with flying, unbound hair, and brandishing weapons and skulls. She is the enemy of the citadel self with all its isolating defenses, ordering the universe as an assemblage of "objects" linked by concepts and ultimately dead. Yeshe is nourished with the most "polluting" and feminine of substances, affirming the superiority of her woman's nature and giving her a thoroughly antinomian position *vis-a-vis* the exoteric patriarchal tradition. Eros binds and gives life. Logos separates and kills.

This makes a good deal of psychological sense -- particularly for us Westerners, whose embarrassingly simplistic characterization of gender differences gives all the power and prestige to men. Shaw's summary of this Western attitude is surely not wrong: we understand men to be active agents and women passive victims; men are praised for their sexual prowess and exploitative power in business, while women are condemned for sexual promiscuity and seen to be powerless and easily exploited; men are taken to be intellectual and spiritual, while women are said to be unconscious, emotional, and biological (Shaw, 1994: 9).

The Tantric tradition, however, does not place the superiority of the feminine principle only in the transcendental realm of theology and divine iconography. Universally, it claims that women are by their very nature more apt for mysticism in all respects: physiologically, emotionally, and imaginably. What takes a male practitioner a year to accomplish, can be obtained by a woman in a single day (Silburn, 1988: 190). Wile's historical overview of the Chinese literature on sexuality and mysticism comes to the same conclusion, "Woman is superior to man in the same way that water is superior to fire" (Wile, 1992: 11). Wile notes that the Chinese texts agree that "the energetic essence pursued by men in their female

partners" may be obtained by women in solo meditation. Women have the raw material of mystical transformation in abundance and by their very nature, whereas men require involvement with female partners in order to get it. D. G. White finds a very similar argument in the *Rasarnava*, "the greatest work of Tantric alchemy":

The lineage nectar of the alchemical lineage (*sampradaya*) is, like that of other Tantric sects, transmitted through female sexual emissions. [The author of the *Rasarnava*] also prescribes sexual intercourse and erotico-mystical worship as means to alchemical transformation. . . . Elsewhere a female "laboratory assistant" (and, especially, her sexual and menstrual fluids) is crucial to the alchemist's practice (D. G. White, 1996: 172-3).

There is no way forward without the feminine principle -- here understood very literally to reside in female sexual fluids. Women, like men, produce sexual fluids when aroused. The text seems to imply that the woman's fluids are essential, whereas those of the man are not. For a woman's arousal is sufficient in itself, while a man's arousal must be joined with that of a woman to have mystical effect. This same perspective is implied in the depiction of kundalini as a goddess.

Irina Tweedie's guru also claims that the difference between men and woman resides in a "substance," but for him that substance is a metaphysical principle, *prakriti*, the feminine principle, sometimes translated as "nature" or "matter," and used to describe the phenomenal world. [14] In the philosophy of yoga (sankhya) the ultimate is realized when the ever-moving, ever-manifesting *prakriti* is joined with the stillness of the spiritual, male principle, *purusha*. Bhai Sahib says:

Men have a substance in them and women have not. It makes men absorb the very essence of the Master. But men have to learn to control *prakriti* in themselves, and for this purpose practices are given to them. Women, because they are nearer to *prakriti*, are fertilized by the Divine Energy which they retain in their *Chakras* and because of this, very few practices are needed. Women are taken up through the path of love, for love is a feminine mystery. Woman is the cup waiting to be filled, offering herself up in her longing, which is her very being (Tweedie, 1986: 400).

No doubt this principle goes a long way to explaining why the vast majority of our texts have been written by men. Men are into words and concepts. These are the things that make up texts. Women are into eros. The eros that can be named is not eros. Eros is the secret that cannot be named. Sometimes men have named it shaktipat.

Two pages later, Bhai Sahib implicitly links this perspective with shaktipat -- the erotic connection with the master which elevates the disciple by devotion and longing and then has to be overcome.

For ladies, perseverance is difficult for them. It is difficult for men too; very few achieve it. Ladies have *Bhakti* (devotion) and if they get it, they get it in an instant. Otherwise it takes time. . . . In our System we make no difference -- hearts are hearts. But in our System no lady was sufficiently interested to go on to the highest level. . . . One has to leave the love behind . . . nothing remains (*Ibid.*, 402-3).

This passage makes the interesting argument that beginning and progressing on the path are easier for women because of their naturally erotic nature but that this same advantage becomes a disadvantage when the woman arrives at the final stage and has to relinquish love. Presumably Bhai Sahib means that the woman progresses easily through her attached love for the guru but can only reach the "highest level" when she has overcome this attachment in

shaktipat and realizes that the guru will not "give" her God but -- much more wonderfully -- has already "impregnated" her with God. Tweedie made this last step on her mystical journey only after her guru was finally removed through death.

Female Gurus

Because of their high aptitude for shaktipat and bhakti, women are essential to the Tantric tradition. Indeed, as Shaw points out, Tantra's insistence upon the feminine principle can be documented by the fact that there were no female Buddhas in the iconography of Buddhism before the arrival of Tantra (Shaw, 1994: 27). She tells the story of the female Buddha, Laksminkara, who became the Severed Head Vajrayogini. The legend is clearly modeled on that of the Buddha himself, Shakyamuni. Laksminkara ran away from the palace of her origins, naked, with unbound hair, her body smeared with ashes, and talking incoherently, pretending to be mad. Like Shakyamuni, she gave up her riches and social status so as to live (relatively) naked in the wilderness. But unlike her male counterpart, she had to feign madness in order to be left alone. More than this, however, every female Buddha, every Vajrayogini, has inspired a legendary life-story that has much in common with the wrathful-goddess myths of India. For example, the foremost Vajrayogini is depicted blood red, her black hair flowing and loose, and carrying a cup made from a human skull that brims with ambrosia. She is beautiful, passionate, and untamed (*Ibid.*, 28).

Dzogchen, the school of "great perfection" that was brought to Tibet by Padmasambhava in the fourteenth century, teaches that we are all fundamentally enlightened but need to have our luminous vision reawakened through contact with an empowered teacher. On the subtle plane, however, all the teachings are held, protected, and transmitted by naked dakinis. The master is but the vehicle through which these sky-traversing female beings work. The founder of Dzogchen, Garab Dorje (first century, c.e.) predicted that the majority of those who reach the ultimate level of enlightenment would be women, for women have a natural affinity for working with energy and vision (Allione, 1986: 13-4).

Because this feminine superiority is everywhere asserted in Tantra, we can hardly be surprised that women are urged to accept and identify with the goddess within themselves -- an immediate and one-step process -- whereas men are advised to approach divinity slowly and to begin by worshipping the woman's goddesshood (Shaw, 1994: 42). This is also the reason why it is widely claimed that every master requires initiation through a woman. Lilian Silburn finds this tradition in Kashmiri Shaivism:

Appeared in man, the *susumnanadi* [central channel of the subtle body] is full-blown in woman. A great master, therefore, is in possession of this function through an initiated woman. Shivanandanath, the founder of the Krama school, did not impart this doctrine to a disciple but to three *yogini* who, in their turn, initiated some men (Silburn, 1988: 190).

Miranda Shaw makes a very similar point regarding the Tantrism of Tibet, citing the *Cakrasamvara-tantra*:

My female messengers are everywhere;
They bestow all the spiritual attainments
By gazing, touching, kissing and embracing.
The most excellent place for the yogis is

Wherever all the magical powers will be attained
By all those blissful ones

(Shaw, 1994: 38).

Edward Dimock's research in Vaishnavite Bengal reveals the same valuation of women. His texts reveal that the guru who gives the initiatory mantra is said to embody Krishna. But: "The guru who conducts the worshipper in his search for realization is Radha. All women participate in the qualities of Radha, therefore, all women are in some sense gurus" (Dimock, 1989: 101). David Kinsley was unable to find Hindu texts that describe Tantra from a female point of view (Kinsley, 1997: 150). Nevertheless, he did find three schools in which women function as gurus. One of them, the Pashcimamnaya, claims that Shiva revealed his teachings to yoginis who have passed them down from generation to generation (*Ibid.*, 149). Shaw says that the eighty-four mahasiddhas or "great adepts" described in the major sources are all male, "but if we examine the biographies and iconography, about *sixty* of them had female companions" (Shaw, 1994: 38). Furthermore, many legendary biographies, like that of Yeshe Tsogyel, show male disciples assigned to female gurus and female disciples to male gurus.

That the importance of women as initiators and gurus is not limited to India and Tibet, may be gathered from the life of Ibn al-'Arabi. According to Wilson (1988: 175) Ibn al-'Arabi was initiated into Sufism by a woman and called sexuality the perfect form of contemplation. Claude Addas identifies that woman as the ninety-year-old Nunah Fatimah bint Ibn al-Muthana, who was also "assiduously frequented by Ibn al-'Arabi's mother" (Addas, 1993: 25). The Greatest Shaikh himself quotes this ancient Fatimah in language that suggests the sort of devotion that obtains between master and shaktipat-initiated disciple:

. . . Ibn al-'Arabi is a consolation to me, for he comes to me with all of himself. When he rises up it is with all of himself, and when he sits it is with his whole self, leaving nothing of himself elsewhere. That is how it should be on the Way (Ibn al-'Arabi, 1971: 143).

Furthermore, Ibn al-'Arabi names fifteen disciples whom he has initiated by investing them with the khirqah. Fourteen of them are women, including one of his wives, and eight of these shaktipat-transmissions took place in dreams (Addas, 1993: 146; Wilson, 1993: 145).

Dreams were extremely significant for Ibn al-'Arabi. We have already seen the importance he placed on the dream image of his shaikh Abu Ya'qub al-Kumi, with his breast "cleft asunder and a light like that of the sun [shining] out from it." Dreams give us direct information from the subtle plane and reveal realities unavailable to our sensory eyes. Ibn al-'Arabi argues that the Sufi should be so lucid in his dreams that he can "interpret" them even while they are occurring. To interpret in this sense (*ta'wil*) means to discover their higher meaning. When seen with the eyes of *ta'wil*, every physical object reveals a reality belonging to soul; every soul reality (including dreams) reveals an angelic reality; and every angel reveals its "lord," which is one of the Names of Allah, who exists beyond all concept and image (Corbin, 1969: 239-44). Thus, for a transmission of the khirqah to have taken place in a dream means that it has been effected on the subtle plane and by-passed the ego even of the shaikh. In dreams Ibn al-'Arabi's soul invests the soul of his disciple under the direction of their respective angels. A shaktipat transmission that occurs in a dream reveals the higher significance of the teaching and guidance the shaikh gives his disciple through words and gestures in the empirical world. Psychologically, it refers to the realm of the atman field, where all lasting and transcendental influence takes place.

The persona field of the West insists that the only indisputable realities are those empirical facts which can be demonstrated by laboratory experiments that quantify the results and prove mathematically that our eyes and intuition have not deceived us. From this highly patriarchal and logos-inspired perspective, eros (and its further explication as kundalini) is a highly dubious factor. Undoubtedly it expresses itself in physiological changes which *can* be quantified. But the emotions and images eros generates are seen as too idiosyncratic to merit attention. Truth for the West is above all a collection of statistical proofs from which the consciousness of the individual has been "factored out." Mysticism takes precisely the opposite route. Consciousness is the indisputable fact and not the object of which we are conscious. To get to the underlying reality of consciousness itself, mysticism attends exclusively to eros and attributes its physiological, emotional, and imaginal products to the higher reality of the subtle plane. Sometimes mystics indulge in the conceptual structures of metaphysics to describe the reality of the subtle plane. But metaphysics is always secondary to erotic consciousness. Gnosis precedes description and explanation, and the roots of gnosis are sunk deep into eros.

Eros, despite its being the name of a male god in ancient Greece, is a mode of human knowing and functioning that expresses itself more naturally and abundantly in women than in men. Ultimately this is the reason Tantra places such strong emphasis on the feminine principle. On the subtle plane the divine reality -- from dakinis to Kali-like goddesses all the way up to the cosmos as the light of chiti, like thread in the cloth and cloth in the threads -- is predominantly feminine. On the empirical plane very much the same is true. Dependable advancement in mysticism depends upon shaktipat, and women have better access to this erotic potential for transformation. The great secrets that must remain unknown because they are fundamentally unspeakable have a feminine character. Although women are more familiar with these secrets, they are no better than men in articulating them. The diamond ladder -- a masculine construction *par excellence* -- makes some useful distinctions revealing why some erotic achievements are superior to others; but its rungs are shaped of eros. Its secrets are hidden in eros, and eros is a feminine mystery. This is why in Tantra Bhairavis play a more important role than Bhairavas, yoginis than yogins.

Nevertheless, the literature of Tantra remains primarily the work of men; and despite the importance of women, the texts generally assume male masters and male disciples. Allione regrets this emphasis in that guidance for women mystics has been neglected. She argues that to make the Tibetan Tantric path more available for women, there ought to be specific directions for women to follow -- methods of practice and guidelines for finding and working with male consorts. She believes that a masculine "daka" principle ought to be as well developed as that of the dakini (Allione, 1986: 17). The fact that eros is more natural and well-developed in women is no excuse for neglecting the equally obvious fact that the erotic principle has to be awakened and integrated -- even in women. If Tantra is the foremost tradition to have recognized and developed the universally human fact that mystical union occurs through the erotic interpenetration of male and female, it would seem that a woman's progress on the path would have some differences from a man's. These differences ought to be explored and made explicit. In the end a new picture of the diamond ladder might result -- perhaps a pair of ladders with different numbers of rungs and specific cross-over points based in shaktipat.

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1. Elsewhere I have referred to this phenomenon as the "self field." In this context, however, in which we have been talking about the *citadel* self, the term "atman field" may be less confusing.
 2. I have argued this point at some length in terms of the self-self relationship that obtains in psychotherapy (Haule, 1996; 1999a), in romantic love (Haule, 1990), and in shamanism (Haule, 1997).
 3. Yidam: "Tibetan, literally 'firm mind.' In Vajrayana Buddhism, a term for a personal deity, whose nature corresponds to the individual psychological make-up of the practitioner" (Fischer-Schreiber, *et. al.*, 1989).
 4. *Urdhva-retas*: "the physiological process by which the semen (*retas*) flows upward (*urdhva*), and . . . the *yogin* in whom this process is alive" (Feuerstein, 1990).
 5. Citing *Futuhāt*, I: 187.
 6. The technical term employed, *ferasat*, is rendered as *cardiognosy* by Schimmel, evidently derived from *kardia* (heart) and *gnosis*.
 7. I have explicated the doctrine of fana' as it applies to romantic love at some length in *Divine Madness* (Haule, 1990).
 8. "Space (*dbymgs*) is not the interval between objects and it is not spatiality; it is better conceived as an all-pervasive, all-penetrating, sub-atomic plenum" (Dowman, 1984: 241).
 9. Citing Guy Claxton, *Wholly Human: Western and Eastern Visions of the Self and Its Perfection*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.
 10. In this regard, Bhai Sahib's understanding of the Naqshbandiyya differs quite radically from what the tradition has become in this century, as presented in Buehler's historical overview (Buehler, 1998). According to Buehler the tradition has become a rather superficial means of declaring one's identity as a Muslim. Evidently Bhai Sahib's practice represents an earlier form of the Naqshbandiyya in which the shaikh is an instructor in esoteric disciplines.
 11. "To put somebody in Dhayna -- it can be done -- but it would only show that my will is stronger than yours" (Tweedie, 1986: 21). "If I give the order, anybody can put anyone in Dhyana" (*Ibid.*, 500).
 12. The Shishya [disciple] has every right to test the Guide; but once he is satisfied and accepts the Guide . . . then the Guide can take over, and the disciple has no free will for a while (*Ibid.*, 21).
 13. Jung's theory has won both praise and vituperation from feminists. The fact that it seems to be supported by the mystical traditions lends it weight, but one never forgets that Jung was born in 1875 in the most conservative country in Europe, where universal feminine suffrage can today be counted in years rather than decades. In Jung's writings, the anima is presented much more positively than the animus.
 14. In this regard it plays a role parallel to *hylé* ("nature," "physical matter") in neoplatonism and the various hermetic philosophies of the West, including alchemy. The central myth of alchemy is the engulfment of spirit in *hylé*, which corresponds to the Indian doctrine whereby *prakriti* plays the role of Maya and deludes us into thinking that what is physical is ultimate. The wise, in both Western alchemy and in India, are not deceived by appearances and see that spirit resides in matter and longs to be freed.