

Spiritual Sex: Beyond the Physical

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In January 2003, *USA Today* stated that 40 million Americans are living in sexless marriages. Then in July 2003, the front cover of *Newsweek* called sexless marriages an "epidemic." The issue of "bedroom boredom" has created an avalanche of possible solutions to the problem of low desire, from new pills and gadgets to a serious consideration of new paradigms for sexuality, particularly women's sexuality.

Many women, especially at midlife and beyond find the old, habitual ways of expressing sexuality with a partner boring or even unpleasant. Some women say, "I don't care if I ever have sex again." I find that statement very sad because it is a denial of one of the most powerful, potentially renewing experiences in life. Sexual energy is our life force. It can be healing and rejuvenating for us at any age and it is especially important as we age. It is time that we consider a dimension of sexuality that can renew our interest, that of spiritual sex. This is a new yet ancient area of exploration.

If any of you have had an experience with something you might have called sexual ecstasy or spiritual sex you are in good company. Sex researcher and therapist Gina Ogden launched a study in cooperation with *New Woman* Magazine in 1999. More than 1,400 women responded. She found that 91% of women over 40 said that they had experienced sexual ecstasy or spiritual sex. Clearly, many women are having such experiences and are willing to talk about them. We are on a new frontier of research which brings in the so-called paranormal as part of eroticism.

The descriptions of sexual ecstasy sound quite similar to near death experiences in some ways. They described experiences such as "feelings of oneness with the universe during orgasm," having out of body travel while making love, weeping with the joy of sexual bliss, being enveloped with a loving light, and touching souls with the partner. My own spiritual sex experience was a most compelling direct encounter with universal healing energy, and there were moments of boundless, timeless existence in "light/energy."

These stories are also similar to descriptions of ecstatic, religious transformations described in writings by revered historical figures. The common themes in near-death encounters, religious transformations and cosmic orgasms are descriptions of extraordinary light, luminous colors, loss of the sense of a physical body and merging with life force energy. There are also common descriptions of seeing the past and future, traveling across time and space or overwhelming feelings of pure love.

The concept that we are more than mere physical bodies may be difficult to accept at first but the emerging field of Energy Psychology in

the West is beginning to validate these age-old concepts of the body as energy fields. From this viewpoint, we are an organized combination of several energy systems around a unifying field. If we could see the subtle energy around us, each of us would look somewhat like a “luminous egg.”

One does not have to spend years in training to experience spontaneous, spiritual sex but it may be helpful to be open to the possibility of connecting higher states of awareness with peak sexual experiences. Many people who become interested in spiritual sex have had initial spontaneous ecstatic experiences. Margo Anand, author of several best-selling books on Tantric sex tells of her spontaneous experiences as a young woman that set her on the path of exploring tantra and teaching others.

The Story of Megan

Encounters with sexual energy that go far beyond ordinary reality can be terrifying without an understanding of what is happening. Spiritual sex is unlike the traditional experience of genital stimulation and the release of tension through orgasm. Attaining ecstatic states through sexual interaction may evoke disbelief or fear in some because it involves loss of the sense of the physical body. The following story is reported by a 60 year-old woman who had been having spontaneous, cosmic experiences with orgasm since childhood.

Megan had known a male friend for several years, and they shared an interest in spiritual healing. On this occasion they interacted sexually for the first and only time. She states, “The whole night was a powerful feeling of dancing in the energy. I did not know where he began and I left off. It was beyond genital sex. The full body orgasms I experienced moved through both of us and swirled around us, appearing as a rainbow of molecular lights.” Her body had been a perfect conductor of life force energy and she had transmuted this power effortlessly. However, her partner had been overwhelmed by the surge of energy and he felt sick the next day. He could not tolerate her sexual response because it seemed “too intense.” He chose not to continue to participate in any further sexual relationship, which wounded and confused her.

Megan’s story illustrates the spontaneous link between sex and spiritual states and it highlights a dilemma with partner sex. Many other women have had sexual encounters with a partner who negatively reacted to the overwhelming intensity of such sexual energy. You may have had a similar experience.

Three Levels of Sexual Energy

As I talk with women about the possibility of spiritual sex, they are excited with the concept. However some women ask me, “where are the

men we can have this experience with?" In my upcoming book, *Wise Women*, I will explore some solutions to this dilemma. Although it is not always necessary for your partner to be at the same intense level of sexuality, it is helpful for you both to understand that there are three different levels of sexual energy.

These three levels are *genital pleasuring*, *conscious loving*, and *spiritual union*. Each level is valuable and life affirming in and of itself. Each type of sexual energy can heal at the physical, relational or cosmic level. They are not so sharply delineated one from the other but are on a continuum, activating various energy centers in the body (called chakras in Eastern healing systems). They differ from each other in the *purpose* and *meaning* attributed to the sexual interaction.

Genital Pleasuring

Genital pleasuring refers to the energy level *generated*, not the particular physical activity. The feminine way of genital pleasuring, especially, attends to the sensual process unfolding rather than a race towards orgasm. The energy *received* through genital pleasuring is manifested in physical sensations of intense pleasure. Orgasm at the level of genital pleasuring is a release of tension. Healing at this level of sexual energy is directed towards physical functions. Orgasm benefits the immune system and also promotes relaxation and a sense of well being. The *purpose* is recreation: to play, enjoy the moment and relax in the pleasures of physical stimulation. It is mutually beneficial, consensual pleasure.

Conscious Loving

This level of sexual energy *generates* intense, loving feelings for the partner. When it is consciously practiced, there is a quality of "mindfulness," which is heightened awareness and expanded consciousness. The "valley orgasm," as it is called in the Tantric tradition, goes beyond the release of tension in genital orgasm. It requires practice in relaxing into sexual feelings and slowing down the build up of tension in order to prevent sudden dissipation of sexual energy. The energy *received* is divine love. The heart chakra rather than the genital chakra becomes the focal point.

The practice of conscious loving generates energy from the heart. The *meaning* of this level of sexual energy is connection, reinforcing commitment in a long-term relationship. The healing comes from loving communion, enhancing the bond with the partner. Conscious loving facilitates balancing male-female energy in the relationship that is very effective for maintaining harmony between partners.

Spiritual Union

Spiritual Union encompasses sexual energy that goes beyond

physical sensations of pleasure, genital orgasms and even the loving connection of sexual communion. Energy generated by sexuality can be transmuted into such experiences as healing the body-mind-spirit, visualization, divining visions and balancing the genders through joining with universal energy. The more cosmic experiences utilizing sexual energy are most likely to occur in ecstatic consciousness states.

The energy *generated* by this level of sexuality is ecstasy. The *meaning* of spiritual union is enhanced awareness, inspiration and merging with the life force. The *purpose* for sexuality at this level is to unite with the Source. The energy *received* at this level is inspiration/illumination that can be translated into divine guidance or simply experienced as pure bliss. Cosmic orgasm is a completely different experience because it is multi-dimensional and has an infinite variety of patterns. Genital Pleasuring and Conscious Loving are not separate from this experience but incorporated as an integral part of it.

There are many pathways of spiritual discovery and sexuality is a time honored one. This is an ancient wisdom from bronze-age cultures that go back several millennia. These pre-patriarchal cultures held the view that sexuality was both a healing energy and a pathway to raising the consciousness. The ancients believed that ecstatic union with the source of the life force was the ultimate purpose of sexuality.

If you choose to practice spiritual union with a partner, you will need to communicate clearly with each other about your expectations. It is important to recognize that your experiences of transcendence will be unique from your partner's. However, it is helpful to feel a conscious bond with your partner. You will need to foster the psychological mindset of healing and mutual empowerment in a setting that honors the partner as divine.

The shift from personal attachment desire into selfless love for another is facilitated through communion with the partner. The partner is no longer perceived as "mine" but as a beloved gift of the Divine.

Exercise: In order to practice the generating and receiving of loving energy through the heart chakra try this exercise. Sit facing each other, knee to knee, perhaps in chairs to be comfortable. You should each place your hand over your heart and look into each other's eyes for a moment.

Now, close your eyes in order to focus on the inner sensation of warmth in the area of your heart. Feel the heat of your hand on your heart and imagine the warmth of a small sun emanating from that energy center. Visualize this as divine love and imagine it as a beautiful color. After a few moments, place your other hand over your partner's hand (the one over their heart). Imagine this warmth radiating from the center of your heart like the rays of the sun, enveloping your partner as well as yourself in a warm, liquid, colorful light. Stay with this visualization as it changes or moves and breathe deeply. Continue to be aware of this

energy from your heart center. Notice how you feel towards your partner and notice all the subtle emotional shifts. Take about five minutes to breathe and stay very aware. When you are ready to open your eyes, just look at your partner for a moment and again notice the feelings of connection. After this exercise is a good time to communicate deeply.

Bio: Linda E. Savage, Ph.D. is a licensed psychologist, marriage and family therapist and AASECT certified sex educator, who has been exploring the mysteries of sexual healing for over 25 years. Dr. Savage is the author of *Reclaiming Goddess Sexuality: The Power of the Feminine Way* which presents a view of women's sexuality that blends the ancient wisdom of the Goddess cultures with current clinical knowledge.

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