

PRAISE FOR *A RETURN TO EROS*

“Marc and Kristina are going where few dare to go. They are showing us what it means to live a fully erotic life.”

—**John Gray, bestselling author of *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus***

“*A Return to Eros* is the map for the new human. Read it and be forever enlivened and transformed! I believe this is the most compelling invitation ever written to live the Erotic Life. It changed my life.”

—**Kristen Ulmer, former professional extreme skier and author of *The Art of Fear***

“Surrender to this book. Erudite, provocative, and filled with lively insights, there is much to be learned from it about the sexual confusion of our times.”

—**Adam Bellow, author of *In Praise of Nepotism: A History of Family Enterprise from King David to George W. Bush***

“*A Return to Eros* is a book written with no hang-ups, no compromises, and no holds barred. It rocks!”

—**Jonny Podell, iconic American rock 'n' roll music agent at the Podell Talent Agency**

“I’ve known Kristina for many decades . . . great to see she is sharing her life work with the world . . . Join the outrageous love train!”

—**Shep Gordon, legendary rock 'n' roll manager and *New York Times* bestselling author of *They Call Me Supermensch***

“*A Return to Eros* evolves our understanding of love, and does it in a way that will transform your own experience of love and Eros. It is a radically inspiring and important book that can help all of us recognize more deeply how love’s energy literally drives reality.”

—**Sally Kempton, author of *Awakening Shakti***

“*A Return to Eros* should be placed on the shelf next to the great works on emotional and sexual emancipation, including Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* and O Brown’s *Life Against Death*. Gafni and Kincaid remind us that eros and ethics are inseparable, that we must free the erotic from the ghetto of the merely sexual, and in so doing awaken our passion for truth and justice. There may be no more urgent lesson for our culture, which now stands on the brink of another descent into barbarism, that it is through and from love that true power flows.”

—**Zak Stein, EdD (Harvard), academic director of the Center for Integral Wisdom, faculty at Meridian University, scientific advisor for Neurohacker Collective, and cofounder of Lectica, Inc.**

PRAISE FOR MARC GAFNI'S
YOUR UNIQUE SELF

“It is very rare that one comes across a teacher or a book that is ‘changing the game.’ My friend, Dr. Marc Gafni, is such a teacher. He is a rare combination of brilliance, depth, and heart. Marc’s teaching on the Unique Self in an evolutionary context is ‘changing the game.’”

—**Michael Murphy, founder of Esalen Institute and author of
*Golf in the Kingdom***

“*Your Unique Self* could only have been written by someone who passionately lives his own uniqueness. Marc Gafni is a brilliant teacher and heart master with a rare capacity for empathy and a gift for creating community. This book contains the essence of his teaching on what it means to live from an enlightened life from a ground of one’s own personal uniqueness. This is a book that deserves to become a classic.”

—**Sally Kempton, author of *Meditation for the Love of It***

“Dr. Marc Gafni’s Unique Self teaching is seminal. What you hold in your hands is a radically exciting and groundbreaking book that will change forever not only how you think about enlightenment, but how you understand, from a post-metaphysical perspective, the very nature of human life itself. The Unique Self work is magnificent, and it belongs among the ‘great books.’

—**Ken Wilber, author of *A Brief History of Everything***

“At last—a safe, precise, and potent infusion—Unique Self! Not so much a book, as an antidote, *Unique Self* stands with spiritual teacher, scholar, and master, Marc Gafni’s *Soulprints* and *Mystery of Love* as a trilogy of love and healing for humanity. Read and be restored.”

—**Lori Halperin, leading clinician and theorist in fields of
marital and sexual dysfunction**

“With exceptional brilliance and an awakened heart, Dr. Marc Gafni speaks to all of us who are interested in the evolution of consciousness.

His teachings on the Unique Self enlightenment are essential for the next stage in our evolution. They have emerged from his direct experience, and I highly recommend them.”

—**Michael Bernard Beckwith, author of *Spiritual Liberation: Fulfilling Your Soul's Potential***

“Marc, a fellow drinker at the holy taverns has written a fine, fine book. Kabbalists say a Day of Tikkun (evolution, soul-repair) is coming. There are great stories here from the Hasidic masters and from Marc’s own life, honoring the unique soulmaking that has brought you to this moment. This book will deepen that astonishing mystery and awaken you to the individual beauty of your path.”

—**Coleman Barks, author of *Rumi: The Big Red Book***

“Marc Gafni’s overflowing heart and transmission of the Unique Self teaching profoundly moves me. Dr. Marc holds the lineage energy of the great Hasidic masters of Kabbalah, which he brings with him into the visionary initiative of Center for Integral Wisdom. There is little doubt in my mind that *Your Unique Self: The Future of Enlightenment* will become one of the classic texts that forms the World Spirit vision that our world needs so deeply.”

—**Lama Surya Das, author of *Awakening the Buddha Within: Tibetan Wisdom for the Western World* and founder of the Dzogchen Meditation Centers**

“At this historic moment, our human mind is passing the border toward a new consciousness. Marc Gafni is far enough ahead of most of us to articulate insights he gained beyond that borderline. Yet, like all great teachers, the author becomes transparent. Here is an invitation and a great opportunity to listen—not to Marc Gafni, but to your Unique Self. Thus this book becomes an indispensable travel guide into the realm of a vast new consciousness.”

—**Brother David Steindl-Rast, Benedictine monk and author of *The Spirit of Practice***

A RETURN

to

EROS

THE RADICAL EXPERIENCE OF
BEING FULLY ALIVE

MARC GAFNI AND
KRISTINA KINCAID



BenBella Books, Inc.
Dallas, TX

Copyright © 2017 by Marc Gafni and Kristina Kincaid

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles or reviews.

Owing to limitations of space, permission credits begin on page 489.



BENBELLA

BenBella Books, Inc.

10440 N. Central Expressway, Suite 800

Dallas, TX 75231

www.benbellabooks.com

Send feedback to feedback@benbellabooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gafni, Mordekhafi, author. | Kincaid, Kristina, author.

Title: A return to Eros : the radical experience of being fully alive /

Marc Gafni, Kristina Kincaid.

Description: Dallas : BenBella Books, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017002508 (print) | LCCN 2017023488 (ebook) | ISBN 9781944648190

(electronic) | ISBN 9781944648183 (paperback)

Subjects: LCSH: Sex (Psychology) | Sex. | Love. | Erotica. | BISAC:

RELIGION / Spirituality.

Classification: LCC BF692 (ebook) | LCC BF692 .G3194 2017 (print) | DDC 155.3--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017002508>

Editing by Jessi Rita Hoffman

Copyediting by Karen Levy

Permissions editing by Sheri Gilbert

Proofreading by Lisa Story and Jenny Bridges

Front cover and text design and composition

by Aaron Edmiston

Full cover by Ivy Koval

Printed by Lake Book Manufacturing

Distributed by Perseus Distribution

www.perseusdistribution.com

To place orders through Perseus Distribution:

Tel: (800) 343-4499

Fax: (800) 351-5073

Email: orderentry@perseusbooks.com

**Special discounts for bulk sales (minimum of 25 copies) are available.
Please contact Aida Herrera at aida@benbellabooks.com.**

To Shabbtai and Sara

*I come to speak dangerous words.
I ask only that you listen dangerously.*

—**CHUANG TZU**

But to live outside the law, you must be honest.

—**BOB DYLAN**

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword by Barbara Marx Hubbard</i>	xiii
<i>Foreword by Warren Farrell</i>	xvi

PREFACE <i>The Future of Love, Sex, and Eros</i>	xix
---	-----

PART ONE: THE COSMO-EROTIC UNIVERSE

CHAPTER ONE	A New Sexual Narrative	2
CHAPTER TWO	Evoking Eros	20
CHAPTER THREE	Sex in the Temple	29
CHAPTER FOUR	The Dancing Master, an Erotic Story	37
CHAPTER FIVE	The Secret of the Cherubs: Reality Is Eros	41
CHAPTER SIX	Eros: From Fear to Liberation	58
CHAPTER SEVEN	The Cosmo-Erotic Reality Unveiled	74
CHAPTER EIGHT	Decoding the Solomon Matrix	90
CHAPTER NINE	The Sexy Song of Solomon	96
CHAPTER TEN	The Exile of the Erotic and the Boundary-Breaking Sexual	107

PART TWO: THE SEXUAL MODELS THE EROTIC

CHAPTER ELEVEN	From Sexual Ethics to Sexual Ethos: On Eros, Subversive or Transgressive	120
CHAPTER TWELVE	The Sexual Models the Erotic: Healing the Split	134

PART THREE: THE FIVE ESSENTIAL FACES OF EROS

CHAPTER THIRTEEN	The First Face: Interiority: Living on the Inside	158
CHAPTER FOURTEEN	The Second Face: Fullness of Presence	178
CHAPTER FIFTEEN	The Third Face: Yearning and Desire	189
CHAPTER SIXTEEN	The Fourth Face: Wholeness and Interconnectivity: On the Intimate Universe, Reality as Allurement	203
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN	The Fifth Face: The Erotics of Uniqueness and Identity	229
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN	More on the Fifth Face: Story, Voice, and Soul Prints	253
CHAPTER NINETEEN	The Harlot by the Sea, a Fifth-Face Story	276

PART FOUR: MORE FACES OF EROS

CHAPTER TWENTY	The Sixth Face: Imagination	288
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE	The Seventh Face: Perception	309
CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO	The Eighth Face: Giving and Receiving	338
CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE	The Ninth Face: Surrender	367
CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR	The Tenth Face: Play and Lishmah	394
CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE	The Eleventh Face: Creativity	419
CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX	The Twelfth Face: Pleasure and Delight	430
CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN	Union: On the Erotics of Identity and Union: A Deeper Cut	437
APPENDIX A	<i>On the Pain of Eros</i>	460
APPENDIX B	<i>The Murder of Eros</i>	471
APPENDIX C	<i>Testimonial by Dr. Kristina Kincaid</i>	481
	<i>Notes</i>	485
	<i>Permission Credits</i>	489
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	492
	<i>About the Authors</i>	496

FOREWORD

A *Return to Eros* is a tour de force of the kind that comes along once in a generation. The way this volume brings Eros to consciousness as the fundamental force direction and “purpose” of reality, on all levels and all quadrants, really is *the* discovery that underlies, directs, and “explains” the sacred purpose of cosmogenesis, the birth narrative of the New Human.

It’s the second coming of humanity for the first time in history incarnate as a fully embodied sacred sexual being.

It’s the early stages of the next evolutionary unfolding.

A Return to Eros forms the basis of evolutionary spirituality. It captures the glory of its conscious experience from the inside out in the sexuality and Eros of the evolutionary unique self.

It’s the experiential basis of the next stage of living and loving.

It’s the deepest reason for profound sexual yearning. It’s vital and is truly the only path beyond shame. It must not be denied.

It reveals the very nature of “God-in-evolution.”

It is the answer to my life question: What is the meaning of our new power that is good?

The answer is the manifestation of what this volume calls Evolutionary Eros in human form to its next level of the supra mental genius as consciously guided self and social evolution.

It’s the source energy, which can arouse the Planetary Awakening through Unique Self Symphony.

It is the juicy and delicious fruit of the joining of genius. Sexuality and suprasexuality become one.

God “took the risk” in revealing $E = MC^2$, the genetic code—the language of science—to give humans the powers of our ancient gods to use.

What the authors call “Love or Die” is the new commandment of the ontic human.

It is conscious evolution revealed as erotic evolution made aware of us in our loving.

It is the fundamental sacralization of sex at all levels.

The authors make the radical claim, which I believe is true, that when this force is not recognized, when it is denied, the result is abuse, whether in the form of rape culture or in the false complaints that attempt the rape of a name. It is only, the authors tell us, “when we embrace the full beauty of our embodied Eros, not merely in the sexual but in every dimension of our lives” that we begin to live in integrity.

Marc Gafni, the first author of this book, is an Erotic Radical. He incarnates the evolutionary Eros and articulates its teaching in ways that are several steps ahead of his generation. Like many radicals he has been made to bear the cross of a new vision. He has seen his actions falsified and distorted and experienced the projection and demonization that comes with the territory of incarnating this new vision of Eros. But as I have witnessed myself in a thousand conversations, he has kept his heart open in love, and turned his suffering into a gift and his pain into art. I am proud to stand with Marc as an evolutionary partner in offering this new vision of Eros and identity that is so vitally needed in our evolution.

Marc’s co-author on this volume, Kristina Kincaid, herself incarnates evolutionary Eros through her work with the body. Mentored by the leading-edge somatic teachers of our time, she understands the inseparable connection between one’s sexuality and one’s emotionality, and how that relationship is mirrored through our relationship to life. She brings a deep embodied understanding of the flow of Eros, love, and sexuality through the body. It is this teaching that can radically transform our

lives and birth the new human. The new human majestically called forth in this book will walk with unarmored body, will love with unguarded heart, and, through body, heart, and mind, be connected to all of life.

—Barbara Marx Hubbard
Futurist; President of the Foundation
for Conscious Evolution

FOREWORD

A *Return to Eros* is poetry. And not just poetry in spirituality, where poetry often catalyzes the spirit. Nor in eroticism, to which poetry often opens the door. But poetry in philosophy, poetry in science, and poetry in history—where poetry is often a stranger.

As such, *A Return to Eros* is not a book that will prove the return of Eros footnote by footnote. It is a book that generates the *feel* of Eros sentence by poetic sentence.

A Return to Eros does not fit into any recognizable genre. It is not pure scholarship even as it is scholarly. It is not self-help even as it inspires transformation. It is not religious in nature even as it offers visions that seek to unify the agnostic and the fundamentalist.

In fact, part of the delight of *A Return to Eros* is the element of surprise: Will we be treated to history or the future? To spiritual insight or scientific fact? To philosophy's sustainable gifts or to Gafni and Kincaid's reworking of those gifts toward the deepening of our future erotic wisdom?

When it comes to the future of love, sex, and Eros, what society often sees as black or white, the authors see in shades of gray. They invite us to confront our cognitive dissonance: "Puritanism lives side by side with promiscuity." Or: "We are not sure whether we are living in the golden age of sex or in a rape culture." The authors venture where others fear to tread: for instance, how we deal with rape of the body versus rape of a reputation should there be a false accusation. What is black and white to

some is a continuum for the authors: “Regret is not rape, and arousal is not consent . . .”

Yet still greater gifts of *A Return to Eros* are not in its surprises but in its weaving of diverse insights into a vision that is greater than the sum of its parts. The authors’ integration of the disciplines presents us with a tapestry that reweaves the source code of culture. We dance to the music of the tango that was sex and Eros and then listen for the tango that sex and Eros can become.

A Return to Eros, then, is paradoxical: It is both the return of Eros and the future of Eros. It is the return of love, sex, and Eros; and the future of love, sex, and Eros. It is about the history of religion’s constraints on sex, and about the history of religion’s lack of constraints on sex—especially how the esoterics’ embrace of sex forges the erotic and holy into one. As we discover religion’s esoterics embracing the erotic, we awaken our personal potential to heal our relationship with religion. It soon becomes no surprise when Gafni and Kincaid declare that *A Return to Eros* is all about sex and not at all about sex.

Although *A Return to Eros* is a return to the wisdom of Solomon’s temple, the Magdalene Mysteries, and Da Vinci, it is not a book about the past. Rather, it is a vision rooted in wisdoms forgotten from our past that inspire a more erotic future—what Gafni and Kincaid call a “memory of the future.”

All of this may make us yearn for simpler answers. But we recall Gafni’s warning: When simplicity falls short of reality, it leaves us feeling disappointed and disillusioned. *A Return to Eros* selects for readers who know that bringing the unconscious to the conscious level rewards us with the capacity to control our own lives—even if part of that control is the choice to “let go and let God.” And when we bring philosophies like “let go and let God” to the conscious level, we discover when we are using it to avoid responsibility. Eros, like golf, requires our taking control of the way we hit the ball even as we let go of control of the way we hit the ball. To Gafni and Kincaid, holding the paradox of Eros is a taste of paradise.

A Return to Eros considers “Eros to be the center of our reality . . . to live erotically *not merely in the sexual but in every facet of being.*” Their examination of the twelve faces of the Erotic, and of the many wrinkles

among those faces, is like being conscious of every drop in the next shower you take. The mere experience of considering every drop of the shower as if they were “all there is” will leave you feeling as enlivened as you will feel after reading *A Return to Eros*.

—Warren Farrell, PhD
Author, *The Myth of Male Power*
www.warrenfarrell.com

PREFACE

THE FUTURE OF LOVE, SEX, AND EROS

TOWARD A POST-TRAGIC SEXUAL POLITICS OF EROS

There are three primary levels of consciousness through whose prism we experience our lives. We will call these three levels the pre-tragic, tragic, and post-tragic.

Pre-tragic is the stage before tragedy. Life is good. Life is delightful. Life makes sense. It is ordered and reasonable. During the pre-tragic state we also experience pain and suffering, but our pain and suffering are not tragic. We are able to explain to ourselves and our intimates what happened. We might use religious, psychological, or scientific explanations. Explanation saves our suffering from being tragic.

The second level of consciousness is the tragic. The goodness of life is broken up by suffering, but we no longer feel able to explain it. The rules break down. Perhaps the suffering is more intense than any we have experienced before. Alternatively, our trust in the religions or philosophies of life that undergirded our explanations have been shaken, often

irrevocably. Our lives feel empty and meaningless, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”¹ We are overwhelmed by the tragic nature of life itself. We may continue to function, love, and even be highly effective achievers. But our joy mechanism is broken. We are cut off from the natural joy we once felt from the essential goodness and primal aliveness of life.

Most people live their lives at either level one or level two of consciousness, what we have here termed the pre-tragic and the tragic. Some people move from level one to level two as a result of lost trust in life, usually occasioned by a personal tragedy. Others move from pre-tragic to tragic because they are witness to the virtually unbearable suffering in the world. The laws and principles they had used to make sense of the world no longer seem sensible. Some individuals, after shifting to tragic consciousness, revert back to pre-tragic. This is either because they find some new, comforting explanation for their suffering (based on a superficial reworking of their old beliefs), or because they simply forget their experience of tragedy and fall back into their prior pre-tragic state.

But there is a third level that is available at the leading edge of consciousness. We call this level “post-tragic.” Here, the person or culture is able to once again participate in the elemental joy of living. This happens when the individual (or culture) is able to reconnect to the core Eros and aliveness of reality. In “A Dialogue of Self and Soul,” Yeats wrote of this third level, post-tragic consciousness, in the understated but raw Eros of his verse. Here is an example:

*When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing
We are blest by everything
Everything we look upon
Is blest.*

What causes the emergence of this third level of consciousness is always the deepening into what we might call emotional maturity or wisdom. Part of it may come from depth work that the person has done with his or her

own wounds. Another part comes from the maturity of letting go and letting God. Often the source is the evolution of a more poignant and potent worldview. But it always comes from some process of joyful deepening.

These same three levels of consciousness apply to the sexual. There is pre-tragic sexuality, tragic sexuality, and post-tragic sexuality. Pre-tragic sexuality has three major expressions:

- The first form of pre-tragic sexuality is purely animal sexuality—a physical, instinctual impulse unburdened by human values or narratives. This is the human attempt to partake in the purely animal mode of sexuality, which we will term “the sex-neutral narrative.” It does not work because it is basically regressive. While embracing the animal is essential for our sexuality, it is not enough. Most of us experience the sexual as being more than only physical.
- The second form of the pre-tragic sexual is sexuality defined by the laws, strictures, and taboos of religion. Sexuality is pre-tragic in this context because it is clear. Sex in every particular circumstance is either allowed and embraced or forbidden and rejected. Often the religious view is sex negative, but sometimes (for the sake of having children or even companionship), sex is considered positive or even sacred. But it is pre-tragic because it is fully understood. Sex has its place, its boundaries, and its permissions. All is explained. Everything is on firm ground. At this level of sexuality, we deploy law, culture, and taboo to sublimate the sexual and redirect its force to support our committed relationships. We further invest its power as the animating force in our cultural creations. At this level of consciousness, we feel the need to construct vessels of commitment that are sufficient to hold the raw, anarchic power and seductive beauty of the sexual. But this level remains pre-tragic because it is clear to us through laws and customs that are correct and therefore constitute the most right and righteous approach to the sexual.
- The third expression of pre-tragic sexuality is sex that occurred in the West during and in the years immediately following the

sexual revolution. Most of the old sexual ways were overturned. For most people, sex no longer needed to be tightly linked to marriage to make it proper and good. The contraceptive pill broke the causal link between sex and children. A new world was born. The sexual revolution gave us the sex-positive narrative. But it was pre-tragic because—like the sex-negative narrative—it boasted an uncomplicated clarity about sex. But all was not sweetness and light. The bland, pre-tragic, sex-positive narrative of the sexual revolution could not hold.

FROM PRE-TRAGIC TO TRAGIC SEX

Many of us today remain largely ensconced in pre-tragic sex. For some of us, that is because we are blithely positive about sex. Our arousal arouses in us virtually no ambivalence or complexity. Others remain pre-tragic because we live firmly within the boundaries of classical religious strictures around sexuality. Even if they are defined largely in their breach, the boundaries are clear. Our actions may be conflicted, but our frameworks remain cogent. We may be both sinners and saints, but we have a clear understanding of what it means to sin and what it means to be saintly.

But for a large swath of people in the Western world, pre-tragic sexuality is over. A second level of consciousness around sex has emerged. We have moved from the pre-tragic sexual to the tragic sexual. The sexual revolution gave way to a world in which sex is no longer innocent. Hidden issues of sexual abuse, sexual violence, and sexual harassment have come to the surface. On the one hand, there is a dramatic evolution of consciousness. A line is drawn in the culture that says, “No more harassment and no more violence.” Indeed, before the mid-1970s, even the words “sexual harassment” were not part of our lexicon and certainly not part of our laws. In the West the ascendancy of the feminine in education and in the workforce brought in its wake a vital new vigilance that says no to any form of sexual boundary-crossing that is not welcomed by both parties. This is an important step in healing the deep violation of the feminine that has characterized much of Western history.

And yet there is a loss of clarity around sexuality. With the loss of clarity comes a loss of innocence coupled with a new form of free-floating anxiety and even fear surrounding sex. We might even venture to say that there is a new puritanism in relationship to the sexual. The old sex-negative positions of religion seem to have covertly resurfaced in the campaigns against sexual harassment.

Now to be clear, we all agree that numerous forms of harassment and sexual violence were rampant in the pre-tragic sexual world. Even in the world of sexual revolution, sexual harassment remained a given. Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael famously remarked that the “right position for women in the Black Panthers is prone.” Marital rape was legal virtually everywhere. Rape in war was regarded as the spoils of the victors. Sexual enslavement of women of “inferior” culture or religion was common throughout the world. What we would today call sexual harassment or abuse was considered to be relatively normal.

Nonetheless, most men did not harass, were not sexually violent, did not rape, and did not abuse women. The horrific lack of legal strictures allowed the actions of a small minority of men to inflict great pain and to poison the sexual culture of the world. The evolution of love that raised consciousness and made all these forms of sexual violation unacceptable, both legally and socially, is a desperately necessary and long-overdue advance. But a strong fragrance of the old anti-sexual puritanism seems to have crept its way into today’s sexual discourse. Legal scholars and social critics alike have pointed out that in the early days of the war on sexual harassment, the core issue was harassment. As years went by, however, the emphasis shifted to the sexual. Major cases of significant harassment with no sexual component were let off the hook, while any case that had even a whiff of the sexual was treated with full severity. Sex, once again, was bad.

The anti-sexual theme is covert, sensed but not articulated in the public mind. This is where the move from pre-tragic to tragic begins to emerge. We no longer have a clear sexual narrative. We are confused by sexuality. We are not sure whether we are living in the golden age of sex or in a rape culture. Rape on campus, date rape, and confusion about what constitutes consent—what is yes and what is no—abound. Regret is

not rape, and arousal is not consent, yet all too often they are confused. The hook-up culture of emotionally unattached sex dominates the campus mythos, yet very few college students say they feel sexually fulfilled or liberated. Women feel prude-shamed for not being willing to hook up and then slut-shamed for hooking up.

The anti-sexual attitude is covert. In so many dimensions of our culture, puritanism lives side by side with promiscuity. How else might we explain the national obsession with sexual scandal, such as the affair between Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky? The insatiable appetite of Americans for sexual titillation, combined with the fascination with public degradation and shaming around sex, virtually demanded that newspapers—driven by the race for advertising dollars—cover the details of the scandal more than any other event in the world for a period of nearly two years.

Today there are no clear guidelines and even fewer clear values regarding sex. It is true that we're seeing a long-overdue and welcome increase in sexual ethics. We have significantly less tolerance for all varieties of sexual harassment and violence. Yet the new sexual ethics are not rooted in a new sexual ethos. There is no sexual narrative that both dignifies and eroticizes our lives.

Hardly anyone is really happy with sex. If they are, it's only in the first wave of the sexual encounter when the passion is high and the egos are low. After that, most everyone feels like they are not quite getting enough, getting it right, or getting to move on when they are ready. And if they are getting some, they suspect it should be better than it is. Most everyone is quietly convinced that it is so much better for everybody else. Everyone is obsessed with that mythical couple, living somewhere in New Jersey, who are madly in love and having great sex after two decades of marriage. No one, of course, has ever met them, but reported sightings regularly crop up in magazines, talk shows, and self-help books. We live with the rampant dissatisfaction produced by the great tease of sexual satisfaction, which for the first time in history seems to be democratized. Everyone feels entitled, but virtually no one feels fulfilled.

SEXUAL SHADOWS

But if all that were not enough, sex is also a big-time killer. Men are raping men and killing men over sex. Men are killing women in domestic violence scenes. In the world arena, men still use sex in war to break down the social order and humiliate their enemies. While the term “rape culture” has been powerfully critiqued, more than a million rapes occur every year, leaving irrevocable damage on the lives of women and men. There is a powerful and important literature that suffuses culture which calls men out on this particular form of masculine shadow.

But don't think that women are off the hook. The feminine shadow has women killing men over sex. According to extensive rigorous data, gathered by leading cultural critics Cathy Young and Warren Farrell, the level of domestic violence inflicted by women on men is equal to that inflicted by men on women. The literature of abuse reminds us that women are also killing men in domestic violence scenes. At its heart, virtually all domestic violence is connected to wounds around sexuality. Women also engage in what has been described alternatively as social murder or name rape. The early feminists were right when they said that the rape of a name is also rape. For example, to be falsely accused of rape or sexual assault, and to have those kinds of accusations disseminated over the internet, where lies live forever, is a devastating experience. In this tragic scenario, name rape is reenacted every day online. We interviewed women who had been raped and also had brothers, sons, or partners who were subject to this kind of severe name rape. According to these women—all with powerful feminist sensibilities—both are equally egregious.

Often false sexual complaints cluster together when a group of women (or men in the more classical lynch mob) bypass structures of investigation and justice in order to socially murder someone. For example, groups of women who feel rejected and hurt—finding out, as feminist writer Jessica Roemischer writes, “that they are not the only one”—may get together and use false or distorted accusations of sexual misconduct to socially kill a man.

In the internet age, disaffected people find each other more easily. Sometimes that is constructive and positive, specifically when the

disaffected have been genuinely victimized. At other times, however, people who gather together via the internet and other social structures manifest more of a moblike energy or group-think mentality. They incite each other's anger. Facts and ulterior motives are never checked or cross-checked and social lynching takes place on the web.

Malice is not limited to males. There is masculine shadow and feminine shadow. Feminist writer Hanna Rosin devotes a chilling chapter in her book *The End of Men* to feminine violence. Feminist writers like Daphne Patai, Katie Roiphe, Laura Kipnis, and Christina Hoff Sommers have long warned of the growing phenomenon of false sexual complaints by women. Of course the sexual shadows at play which generate malice are often hidden. As Milan Kundera reminded us, "malice can never admit to itself so it must plead other motives." As Patai and other writers point out, name rape hides its true intention under the veneer of victim advocacy. The perpetrator is usually disguised either as a victim or as a rescuer who is "protecting other women." There is always some politically correct formula used to cover up wounded ego and genuine hurt, which get lethally mixed with the often strange bedfellows of malice, envy, self-interest, and self-protection. The fig leaf of relatively minor sexual hurt in the normal arc of human relationships often masks the infliction of lethal hurt that is exponentially more destructive by many orders. All of this is part of the confusion of sexuality's tragic phase.

The confusion itself is the source of much of our devastation. It is the loss of clarity that moves us from pre-tragic to tragic sex. The tragic sexual leaves so many mortally wounded in its wake. There is so much pain from something that should be the source of so much pleasure.

All of these phenomena that are rampant in our culture are expressions of the tragic sexual. But that is just the tip of the iceberg. We have not even begun to explore the super complex territory of monogamy, the myth of the white picket fence, polyamory, open marriage, betrayal in its many forms, the great controversy surrounding "recovered" memories, post-facto reinterpretations of old sexual experience, the claims of rape culture, and the list goes on and on. And anyone who, God forbid, does not want the same kind of sex that the majority approves of is in big trouble. Same-sex couples struggle, transgendered couples struggle, and

anyone with any kind of alternative sexual drive has a rough start even before the pleasure actually begins and ends. The confusion around all of these issues is simply an expression of level-two tragic sexuality.

There is more than a little that is tragic in the contemporary sexual landscape. We are not sure about anything. Either God is more than slightly sadistic with a significant interest in teasing and even torturing us through the ordeal of sex or in some mysterious way it is the essential key to this whole life journey. We are not sure. Our lack of clarity drains our energy, robs us of passion, saps our vitality, and de-eroticizes our lives.

Given all of the above, along with the fact that our yearning for great sex is such a desperate and central issue in our lives, it stands to reason that the divine designer who set up this ultimate tease must be a flaming asshole. Or worse still, there is no designer, all is random and chance, and there is no “true north” or meaning in our sexuality. It will always be this hopelessly confused. That is the tragic view.

Or, possibility two: the inherent intelligence of the self-organizing universe totally and absolutely rocks. The love intelligence of the cosmos so desires our good that she wanted to place the deepest wisdom necessary to navigate our lives with power and passion right in the center of our experience—in the heart of our sexuality—just to make sure we did not miss it. That’s why all wisdom about life was encoded in the sexual. That realization moves us toward the post-tragic view of sexuality.

FROM THE TRAGIC TO POST-TRAGIC SEXUAL

We are lost in the tragic sexual, searching for a new narrative. We long for a return to sexual innocence. Not a pre-tragic innocence but a post-tragic innocence. We yearn to re-virginate. We are not seeking sexual license as much as we desperately yearn for a return to Eros. We yearn to live the erotic life. We want to live in an erotic society. To return to Eros, we need a new sexual narrative. Core to this new narrative must be a precise and potent understanding of the relationship between the sexual and the erotic. Are they the same or are they different? If they are different, how do

they interact with one another? Could it be that our sexuality is collapsing because we have lost contact with Eros? Could it be that when we look to sex to fulfill all of our erotic needs, sex collapses under the weight of a burden that it cannot possibly bear? Is our confused pathos around the sexual actually rooted in the urgent need for a new sexual narrative that clarifies the shocking relationship among the erotic, the sexual, and the sacred?

Until such a narrative emerges, we will weirdly vacillate between being puritans and libertines on alternative days or even during different hours of the same day. We are politically correct during the day while yearning to be sexually incorrect at night. Sexual anthropologist Esther Perel reminds us, somewhat sardonically, that we often demonstrate in daytime against the kinds of sexuality that we yearn for at night. We need a new post-tragic story of sex and Eros.

BEYOND MARCUSE AND BROWN: A RETURN TO EROS

Herbert Marcuse and Norman O. Brown are the two great social philosophers who, in the latter half of the twentieth century, sought to reclaim a vision of Eros that might form the basis of a new human and a new society. But both of them lacked a sufficiently potent worldview from which that new vision of Eros could emerge. Marcuse was lost in the neo-Marxist restructuring of society, which failed to honor the potential, creative Eros of free markets and an emergent conscious capitalism. Brown sought to reclaim a regressive Dionysian innocence by recovering key stands in Freud's more mythical thinking, while recasting and rejecting still other dimensions of Freud.

Today it is clear that whatever their crucial contributions, neither neo-Marxism nor psychoanalysis is the fertile ground from which a new erotic worldview will arise.

In this work it has been our tender and audacious intention to articulate just such a new erotic worldview. We tried to tell a new story about sex whose subplot is the powerful relationship among the sexual, the erotic, and the sacred. We retold the story of love, distinguishing between

outrageous and ordinary love. We articulated a new meta meme: The Universe is a Love Story. We are convinced that this worldview is a sufficient basis to catalyze a return to Eros and a sexual narrative that is an affront to shame. Our vision of Eros is rooted in a spiritual, mystical, scientific, evolutionary worldview, which understands that all of reality is allurements, and which experiences the sexual as an expression of the erotic evolutionary impulse that moves all of reality. In this worldview, rooted in the best science and spirituality available on the planet at this moment in time, the sexual is the seat of all wisdom.

In this new narrative, Eros is not merely ordinary love, which human egos deploy as a strategy to achieve security and status. Rather, Eros is the outrageous love, which moves the sun and the stars, which is the very heart of existence itself. When we awaken to the Eros of evolution alive within us, we awaken as outrageous lovers. Our model for outrageous love is none other than the sexual itself. The sexual models the erotic; it does not exhaust the erotic. The erotic and the holy are one. This is the core of the post-tragic narrative of sexuality that will allow us to move beyond the pervasive sexual shame that covertly suffuses our culture and is the root of so much suffering and pain. This new sexual narrative is the necessary basis of a new sexual politics of Eros that has the potency and power to take us all home.

SOURCES FOR THE NEW NARRATIVE

We draw the new narrative from several sources. Systems theory, evolutionary theory, and science are crucial sources. Various schools of psychology, integral theory, attachment theory, and the social sciences all contribute significantly. But the core wellspring from which we drink is a great Hebrew mystery tradition. Mysteries are meant to remain esoteric, secret. Therefore, allow us to share with you why in our generation it is both permitted and even a sacred obligation to share these mysteries.

We live in an age when ancient wisdoms, long relegated to the basements of the spirit, are being reclaimed. The Zohar, the magnum opus of Hebrew mysticism, teaches that our era is the one in which the “gates of

wisdom will be opened.” For the first time, after several eons of intense spiritual evolution, we have the vessels to hold the light of the ancient secrets. The mystics suggest that we may well be able to hold the light more deeply today than even the ancients for whom the wisdom was initially intended. It is only now, after the vessels of law, science, and ethics have been integrated into our psyches, that we can go back and fully reclaim Eros and enchantment. It is in the service of the great Hebrew Goddess of Eros (Shechinah) that we enter the mysteries.

We, the co-authors of *Return to Eros*, are—or at least aspire to be—erotic mystics. We study, teach, and try to live the sacred erotic texts in our lives. The think tank of which we, Marc and Kristina, are, respectively, president and board director, is committed to envisioning and evolving the future of Eros in every field of human endeavor. The Outrageous Love Project (www.OutrageousLove.com) and the Integral Evolutionary Tantra School (www.IntegralEvolutionaryTantra.com) are two projects that emerged from the Center, which we were delighted to cofound. Both projects are committed to articulating a next-stage vision of Eros and ethics, which humbly and audaciously evolve the source code of culture and consciousness.

The Hebrew mystery texts on Eros, as well as those of other spiritually incorrect traditions, have been our guides and friends for many years. Of course, like all mystics who engage sacred wisdom, we hear the text in accord with the inner melody of our souls. We now share this song with you in the form of this book. You are invited to find the place in your soul where you can receive and integrate this ancient wisdom into your own song.

Let this be not a monologue but a sacred conversation. Share with us your words, your thoughts, the poetry of your soul, and we will be honored to receive at AReturnToEros.com.

With all the outrageous love and blessings in the world and beyond,

Dr. Marc Gafni and Dr. Kristina Kincaid
Carmel, California
New York, New York

PART ONE

**THE COSMO-
EROTIC
UNIVERSE**

CHAPTER ONE

A NEW SEXUAL NARRATIVE

If you stop to think even for a short moment, you realize that sex really is the great mystery of our lives. This is truer today than it was in any previous generation. For we have lost the story line of meaning around our sexuality. There are four basic stories about sex that we have inherited in our culture, and none of them addresses our sexual experience. These hand-me-down narratives can loosely be labeled as sex negative, sex positive, sex neutral, and sex sacred.

SEX NEGATIVE

The sex-negative narrative is articulated in our culture to prevent us from having sex. They tell us, of course, that it is for our own protection. According to this narrative, sex is somehow wrong, immoral, or sinful. The spokespeople for sex negative are quite potent. Even when we think we have gotten free of them, they pop up again inside our hearts or heads, wagging their fingers disapprovingly. Even if we have successfully removed them from our minds and psyches, they still show up in the way our bodies respond and behave. And, of course, they remind us

constantly of all the trouble sex has gotten the world into—from the Trojan War to the Clinton/Lewinsky drama. Not to mention the trouble it has gotten us into—emotionally, psychologically, personally, professionally, and physically. It's all the fault of sex.

You have to admit that the sexual renunciates and conservatives have a point. If you want to keep life simple, clean, and orderly, foregoing or limiting the sexual experience might be an excellent decision. If you like spiritual exercises—and you are up for it—take a few minutes and write down all the times sex got you into trouble in any or all of the above areas. We predict you will probably generate quite a list.

Lots of religious and conventional moralists fall into the sex-negative category. Religion typically affirms love and passion as virtues but divorces them entirely from sex. Moralistic religion works hard to erect boundaries that will protect us from the pitfalls of our sexuality.

But the sex-negative narrative, while it certainly has a point, clearly does not fully capture our experience of the sexual. While we all know that sex requires a dimension of discipline—context and commitment matter for sure—most of us know in our hearts that the moralists are wrong and that sex is ultimately, and overwhelmingly, good. And it's not merely a side benefit of (or a tool for achieving) a loving relationship. As the fourteenth-century Zen master Ikkyu observed:

*With a young beauty, sporting in deep love play;
We sit in the pavilion, a pleasure girl and this Zen monk.
Enraptured by hugs and kisses,
I certainly don't feel as if I am burning in hell.*

SEX POSITIVE

This brings us to the second story about sex that we hear in our culture: the sex-positive narrative. This story is told by a powerful coalition of forces talking about sex. This group tells us, "Sex is wonderful. If liberated, it's the panacea for all ills; if repressed, it's the source of all dysfunction." Sexual revolutionaries, Freudians in disguise, along with

many other intelligent folk and proponents of schools of modern psychology, work hard to strip sex of anything remotely spiritual or even emotional. They want to liberate sex from love, from Eros, and from the myriad existential and emotional complexities. To these individuals, sex is simply positive.

Truth be told, Freud himself was the most influential modern cheerleader at this party. Rooted in a hydraulic model of the psyche, which slightly confuses human beings and steam engines, he taught us that if we could just find a way to release sexual tension in a balanced way, we would be healthy and happy. The problem with this narrative is that, though we may be having much more sex, we are not feeling much more positive.

In fact, after engaging in all of the sex that so many generations thought would signal heaven on earth, we are shocked to find that the same feelings of alienation, depression, and emptiness still plague us. Okay—hydraulic equilibrium achieved—what are we supposed to feel when the sexual revolution failed to bring us any closer to liberation? We remain mired in suffering, just as before.

SEX NEUTRAL

This brings us to the third sexual narrative: sex is neither positive nor negative. The third sexual story is the sex-neutral narrative. This story was articulated by a host of sex researchers, perhaps most prominent the highly controversial, but highly impactful, Alfred Kinsey. Kinsey's father was a fundamentalist Christian who raised his son squarely in the sex-negative camp. Kinsey rebelled, however. Receiving his PhD in biology from Harvard, he argued that sex is simply a neutral biological mechanism. He sought, in both his personal and professional life, to completely disinhibit sex from any sense of being either negative or positive. For Kinsey and the sexual story he put into our culture, sex—all forms of it without exception—is simply biology. "So let's get over all of these inhibitions. Why all the fuss about it anyway?"

The problem with this third narrative is that, like the sex-negative philosophy, it does not fully capture our sexual experience. Sex just does

not feel neutral to us. Having sex and having dinner just are not the same. But that's not all. The more neutral we make sex, and the more we make it available, like food, the less satisfied we are. Uninhibited sex is available in infinite variety in almost every imaginable social or commercial context, and yet we do not seem any the better for it. So much sex and so little pleasure. So many orgasms and so little fulfillment.

A few decades ago, a sociologist named David Riesman called sex “the last frontier.” If this is true, then we have crossed it and found it wanting. Psychologists report that patients rarely complain about sexual dysfunction or repression anymore (what seemed to be the most common complaint in the days of Freud). Rather, the malaise of our time is the lack of feeling or passion and a disconnect between sex and spirit. Sex is all around, and yet it is hard to tell whether anyone is truly enhanced by it. Indeed, no one even seems to be really enjoying themselves—at least not in any sort of sustained manner.

T. S. Eliot describes this state of affairs in his epic poem “The Waste Land”:

*She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;*

Eliot speaks of the hidden alienation from the sexual even after the Church's sexual mores have been overturned.

*Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass;
“Well, now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.”*

The alienation sets in the moment it's over, surfacing our discomfort with our own sexing.

*When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,*

We pace—unable to rest in what should be the aftertaste—our confusion around sex darkening what should have been the afterglow.

*She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.*

SEX SACRED

The fourth sexual story, often deployed as a counter to the sex-neutral narrative, is sex sacred. Rooted in certain strains of the great religions, this narrative claims that sex is not negative, neutral, or even positive. Rather, it is holy. The evidence of sex's holiness, the sex-sacred story, is taken to be self-evident. Sex creates life, life is holy, therefore sex is holy.

That is a pretty good argument as far as it goes. But again, it does not address our full experience of sexuality. Just ask yourself: is most of the sex that you have for the sake of procreation? For most people, most of the time, most of their sex has nothing to do with making babies. So to root the sex-sacred narrative in sex for babies just does not speak to the truth of our full sexual lives. Besides all of that, are we really sure what we mean when we talk about sex or anything else as sacred or holy? We know it means that sex is not just neutral or even merely positive. But what does "sacred" really mean, anyway?

A NEW SEXUAL NARRATIVE: SEX EROTIC

So although all four of the sexual narratives contain some elemental validity, they are, at best, true but incomplete. They each may be spiritually and politically correct in their respective cultural space, but they do not address our deepest knowing and yearnings about sex.

We need a new sexual narrative. We need a new story. Enter the philosophy of sex erotic. This fifth sexual story, the one that addresses most fully our sexual experience, is that sex is indeed sacred but not only when it creates children. Sex is not sacred only because it creates life. Sex is sacred because it *is* life. Sex is the very pulse of life itself. Sex is the fundamental nature of all existence. Therefore, sex is the ultimate guide to

living in alignment with all of reality. Let us call this new sexual narrative “sex erotic.”

If sex is life, then naturally sex is the seat of all wisdom about life. Sex is not only our great delight and pleasure—sex is our ultimate teacher about living. For life itself is, at its core, Eros.

SEX MODELS EROS

The paradox of this book is that it is all about sex and not about sex at all. Sex is life. But if we are only alive in our sex, then we are already dead. By contrast, being fully alive in the sexual models for us what it means to be radically alive in every facet of life. The experience of being radically alive is called Eros. To be fully alive in every dimension of your life is what it means to live an erotic life.

That is why we have termed the new sexual narrative “sex erotic.” Sex erotic suggests that sex and Eros are not to be collapsed synonyms. Sex and Eros are different but closely related terms. Sex is sex. Eros is the radical aliveness that animates and drives all of reality. The new sexual narrative of sex erotic informs us of two great truths. First, that sex is the expression of the evolutionary Eros that animates and drives all of reality, awake and alive in us. Second, that sex models for us what it means to live in Eros in every facet of our existence.

The purpose of this book is to articulate the new sexual narrative. Sex is neither negative nor neutral nor merely positive. Sex is not even just sacred because it creates life. The new narrative is that sex is life. That’s why our aliveness is most directly accessed through sex. To be sexual is to be alive, and to be alive is to be sexual, but our basic yearning is not just to be fully alive during sex but also to be radically alive in all parts of our life. It is this voice of authentic yearning that is our most reliable spiritual guide. To be radically alive in every part of our life is what it means to live in Eros.

What, then, is the relationship of sex to Eros? The answer is as profound as it is simple: sex models Eros. But sex does not exhaust Eros. Sex models what it means to live an erotic life in every arena of your

engagement. To be radically alive means much more than simply being sexual. To be erotic only in sex is to live a deadened life of quiet desperation. Sex erotic implies that sex—when it is lived in its fullest form—incarnates Eros even as it models Eros. Sex erotic teaches us how to live in Eros, not only in sex but also in all the nonsexual dimensions of our lives. That is what it means to live an erotic life.

Eros is aliveness. Aliveness occurs as *you*, when the energy of reality awakens in you and through you. Eros is the vitality that pulses through our atomic structure, making our protons and electrons dance in perpetual ecstasy. Eros is the passion that makes our cells and atoms yearn for each other, always allured and constantly sexing. Eros is what makes us want to dance. Eros is—very literally—what transforms a relationship from a strategy for security to an event of cosmic significance. You can be sexually active and in relationship and remain profoundly lonely. It is only when you realize that your own attractions and allurements participate in the attraction and allurements that is the very structure of the cosmos that you begin to live an erotic life.

In the lived sensuality of an erotic life, loneliness makes no sense. Loneliness is the opposite of Eros and aliveness. Eros is wholeness and interconnectivity. It is the essential nature of a cosmos whose core truth might well be: reality is relationship. It is only when you realize that reality is relationship and that your relationship is part of the grand cacophony of relationship at every level of the cosmos that you truly transcend loneliness.

When you really get the scientific truth that your erotic autobiography is an intended outcome of the love intelligence of reality, then you begin to be at home in your life. The scientific reality of your radical uniqueness is shocking when you really get it. You have an irreducibly unique atomic and cellular signature. The extent and precision of your intricate uniqueness is made clearer every day with new studies and evidence. Your level of dazzling uniqueness intuitively implies intention. When you know that you are personally addressed and intended, you fall in love with your life. Your heart beats faster, and your eyes open wider. You realize that the ache of your wetness or the throbbing of your fullness is reality awake as you. The truly alive person does not know the ennui

of boredom. Everything is fascinating to the person who is truly alive. It matters not whether it's a piercing pain, a moment of pleasure, a bucket of grief, or a glimpse of beauty.²

THE MEANING OF EROS

Eros is the principle of aliveness and magic inherent in all of reality. Something infinitely real animates everything. Reality is realness, which is another way of saying Eros or aliveness. Everything radiates an intense aliveness. The intensification of aliveness is the natural result of living an erotic life. Most people have had the experience of visiting a place and finding it vibrating with aliveness, color, and immediacy. Some years later they may visit the same place again and find it drab and dreary. Most likely it is not the place that has changed, but the person. Beauty is always in the eye of the beholder. When your eyes are alive, then the hills are alive. When your eyes are asleep, then even the most beautiful vista is deadened.

Our lives are a search for passionate aliveness. Our lives are a search for Eros. We remember well Eros lost. Until we are able to recover Eros, we are filled with an inconsolable longing that can be healed by no external balm.

We hunger for the depths of aliveness, for it is only from those depths that we are capable of love. It is only in the quivering of aliveness that we are capable of being all we can be. That is what it means to be holy. The opposite of holy is not unholy. The opposite of holy is superficial. The holy is the real. We long for what is real. That is why we yearn with all of our being to return to Eros.

NOT SYNONYMOUS

When we talk about Eros or the erotic, we suffer from any number of confusions. There's an important relationship between the erotic and the sexual, but as we said above, they're not the same thing. Eros is the essential aliveness of reality—it's the experience of being on the inside, like

when you're running and at some point you break through and you're in the zone or the inside of experience.

There is a fullness of presence in Eros and a feeling that your yearning participates in the evolutionary yearning of being. In Eros you have a felt experience that you are not separate; you experience your own interconnectivity with the larger context, with the wholeness of it all. All blessings flow from Eros. The goodness of life, the color in a black-and-white world, and all ethics flow through the channels of Eros. The loss of Eros is the failure of ethics. Creativity, intimacy and relationship, politics, economics—nothing moves without the erotic. When there's a disconnect from Eros, systems begin to break down both in the world of the personal and in the world of the collective.

When you feel fully alive, when you are in Eros, there is no question about the meaning of life. When you are in Eros, there is no question about the essential goodness of life. When you live in Eros, life is self-evidently meaningful and obviously good. Here is an example of how sex models Eros: when you are on the edge of orgasm, you are on the inside of life—yearning, totally present, ultimately connected, lost in the experience, and yet most radically your Unique Self. When you are in Eros, you have no questions about the meaning of life. You are life.

At the edge of sexual explosion, you do not stop in the middle to contemplate philosophical issues or life's meaning, nor do you question the natural goodness of life. You are fully alive and fully in it. In fact, those five qualities—living on the inside, fullness of presence, yearning, wholeness and interconnectivity, and the experience of your unique identity—are the first five of the twelve faces of Eros that we will be exploring in this book. "Sex models Eros" means that sex models the experience of being on the inside, fully present and connected, deeply yearning, and ultimately yourself, in every facet of your life.

ANCIENT ARTICULATIONS

For ancient articulations of this new sexual narrative, we turn to the hidden wisdom of the spiritually incorrect masters. These masters taught

the esoteric traditions of all the great systems of spirit. They are the erotic mystics. The esoteric name for this tradition in the earlier sources is “the Secret of the Cherubs.” We will meet the cherubs formally in chapter three. For now, a brief introduction will suffice.

The cherubs are two figures that live atop the Ark of the Covenant in Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem. According to the sacred text, the voice of God “speaks from between the two cherubs.” What is not known other than to initiates in the esoteric tradition is that these two cherubs are locked in ecstatic sexual embrace. The voice of God speaks from between the sexually entwined cherubs.

The spiritually incorrect Tantric masters were not limited to the Hebrew mystics. They appeared in different guises in all the great traditions. Their true teachings were always esoteric, hidden from public access. Only the initiates truly understood their radical intention. These masters are called the Kabbalists in Judaism, and the Tantric masters in Hinduism and Buddhism. Rumi and Hafiz in Sufism were initiates, as were the Cathars in mystical Christianity. One master of the Zen tradition was named Ikkyu. Mary Magdalene was a master in the hidden Christian tradition. We add to these ancient traditions a vital modern wisdom tradition that we will refer to as Evolutionary Spirituality. This contemporary wisdom lineage is rooted in evolutionary science, systems science, modern physics, biology, chaos theory, and complexity theory. (More about Evolutionary Spirituality in later chapters.)

Veiled in all of these great traditions is a hidden, subversive, mystical teaching. It is either ignored or reinterpreted to avoid its full implications. The great teachers were literally killed, socially murdered, or otherwise sidelined from positions of influence. They were destroyed because the fear of Eros overwhelmed both the goodness of Eros and the wisdom of Eros.

The ancient religions, in their public teachings, sought to impose a measure of order and stability on the ignorant masses. To do so, sex had to be controlled before anything else. This is the legitimate reason for the sex-negative teaching of the great religions. Today, what we need most desperately, however, is not to control sex. Rather, we need to reinvest our sex with a meaning and purpose that is equal to the central role that sex plays in our lives. We have killed all the gods except for Aphrodite,

the goddess of sex. It is in the sexual that we still hear the murmuring of the sacred. But we cannot quite make out the words. We need to articulate a new sexual story. We need a story that invests not only our sex but all of our life with fresh aliveness and a new plot line of meaning.

The source of this narrative is in the spiritually incorrect teachings, which understood implicitly that embedded in the sexual, in the full panoply of its gorgeous and graphic detail, is all that is holy, all that is wise, and all that is good. The masters of spiritually incorrect Tantra viewed the sexual act itself as the great wisdom mystery reflecting all the deepest truths of the spirit. In a world torn apart by fanatic fundamentalisms and insipid liberalisms, we need a new teaching that all of us can recognize and take home.

Contrary to conventional religion and much of psychology, the post-conventional, spiritually incorrect Tantric masters insisted that sex is integrally related to love and Eros. There is no disconnect. And not because it is nice, secure, and comfortable if you are able to love the person you are sleeping with. But far more powerfully—and this is the heart of the secret—because the sexual is the ultimate model for Eros and love. The erotic and the holy are one. In every ethical sexual encounter, one can create an energetic container for the sacred, for opening up fully and absolutely into the radical aliveness and love that are already there. The sexual in all of her intricate detail is a most potent teacher, ripping us open, if we will but let her, to the radical fullness of spirit that seeks our pleasure and goodness.

One thirteenth-century Kabbalist put it this way: “Whoever has not desired a woman is like an ass and even less than an ass, for it is from the sexual one understands divine service.”³

Or in the language of Zen master Ikkyu:

*Rinzai's disciples never got the Zen message,
But I, the Blind Donkey, know the truth:
Love play can make you immortal.
The autumn breeze of a single night of love is better than a
hundred thousand years of
sterile sitting meditation . . .*

And just in case he was being too subtle, and to avoid being piously misinterpreted, Ikkyu continues:

*Stilted koans and convoluted answers are all monks have,
Pandering endlessly to officials and rich patrons.
Good friends of the Dharma, so proud, let me tell you,
A brothel girl in gold brocade is worth more than any of you,*

*Emerging from the world's grime, a puritan saint is still nowhere
near a Buddha.*

*Enter a brothel and Great Wisdom will explode upon you.
Manjushri should have let Ananda enjoy himself in the whorehouse –
Now he will never know the joys of elegant love play.*

Sex stands as the ultimate symbol, both signifying and actually modeling the sacred wisdom, which needs to animate and guide all areas of life. The goal of life is to live erotically in all facets of being, and sex is the model par excellence for sacred erotic living in all of the nonsexual arenas that make up most of our lives. The sexual is in the hidden teaching of the spiritually incorrect Tantric masters. It is the ultimate spiritual master. Thus, deep understanding of the sexual is the ultimate guide to accessing the spirit in every dimension of our reality.

We are not talking about sexual technique. Even when important, sexual technique is technical at best. Sexual technique can never make you a great lover. You can only be a great lover if you are fully alive. To be a great lover in all facets of your being, you must listen deeply to the simple yet elegant spirit whisperings of the sexual. Nietzsche, the great German philosopher, got something right when he said, “The degree and kind of man’s sexuality reaches up into the topmost summit of his spirit.”

SEX IS THE ANSWER

Is there anything except sex that so grabs our rapt attention; incessantly pursues us; and occupies our daydreams, fantasies, and yearnings? The

mystics are just stating the obvious when they say that, with sex, God is trying to GET OUR ATTENTION. “Hello . . . over here! Pay attention!” Now we are not talking about the God who sends good people to burn in hell because they slipped up on one of his impossible demands. Nor even the Grandfather in heaven who hands out chocolate to do-gooders. Forget that God. The God you don’t believe in doesn’t exist. Rather, the God that exists for us is the personal, erotic life force that courses through reality and knows our name. The God we believe in is the vitality of an intelligent Eros that initiates, animates, and drives all of reality and addresses us personally. The God we believe in is the force for healing and transformation in the world. The God who knows our name is the God who so clearly calls out to us that sex is the answer.

When religion splits us off from our sexuality, we correctly intuit that something is deeply askew. But sex is not a panacea. Sex is not a drug that will soothe away the lurking feeling of ennui and that this cannot be all there is. Good orgasms will not a good life make. Sex is also not merely neutral or simply sacred because it is the method of procreation. Rather, sex is the answer as a model and not as the sum total of all Eros, holiness, and wisdom. Sex, if we will but listen, is a great master of the spirit—better than any guru, psychologist, rabbi, or priest. Sex can teach us how to reclaim the erotic in every nonsexual aspect and element of our lives. For Eros is not sex. The sexual models the erotic; it does not exhaust the erotic.

EROTIC AND NONEROTIC SEX

When we say that sex models Eros, we are not talking about the merely sexual. We are talking about erotic sex. The merely sexual involves a few pathetic grunts, maybe an occasional kiss and nice word, the titillation of the narrow section of the genitals for a few minutes at the most, and a brief fleeting pleasure at climax. If you are lost in mere sex, then you will never penetrate and never be penetrated.

We all know that titillation of the sexual instruments feels good. That is not, however, the sum total of Eros. Superficial feeling good is for

people who are afraid of the full divine power of the erotic sexual. When the sexual awakens as the erotic sexual, it takes on an entirely different quality of power, potency, and pleasure. Sex is not a path unless it cracks you open to the divine.

People cling to the outside of the sexual, to breasts and pallid orgasms, because they are afraid to open up to the full power of Eros. It is the fear of Eros that keeps most people fixated on pathetic titillation. Sex invites us to be open as love. Not as ordinary love but as outrageous love. Outrageous love is Eros. The Hebrew mystics teach together with Ikkyu that the universe in every second is always making love. The Kabbalists call it *zivug*. In this world, the incarnation of that divine movement, the perpetual divine lovemaking, is not ordinary sex but erotic sex. Enter into the inside of sex, and you will find God, the sacred lover and gorgeous, divine paramour of the cosmos. The inside of sex is outrageous love. The inside of sex is Eros.

ORDINARY LOVE AND OUTRAGEOUS LOVE

Understanding the distinction between ordinary and outrageous love is the doorway to all that is magical and mysterious both in the cosmos and in life. We need to realize that Sex with a capital S is a love story. Not an ordinary love story, but an outrageous love story, an erotic love story. Because outrageous love is Eros. It is the radical aliveness and purpose that animates and drives all reality on every level of creation, all the way up and all the way down. Ordinary love is an experience of the human personality, which feels separate from all that is, grasping for some measure of security and comfort. Ordinary love is a strategy of the ego desperately fleeing the feeling of lonely desperation.

The Bengali mystic Tagore alluded to the distinction between ordinary and outrageous love when he said, “Love is not mere human sentiment but the heart of existence itself.” The love that he called “mere human sentiment” is what we are referring to as ordinary love. The love that he calls “the heart of existence” is what we are calling outrageous love, or Eros.

The mystics of the Kabbalah called ordinary love “the love after creation.” They called outrageous love “the love before creation.” Love after creation is in reaction. It is all too often culturally conditioned and imposed. Love before creation is what the great writer Dante called *l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stele*, “the love that moves the sun and the other stars.” It is the love that moved the Infinite to manifest reality in the explosion of the big bang. It is the love that is the evolutionary impulse driving all reality to higher and higher levels of consciousness and love.

Ordinary love is valid and good, but it is a strategy of the ego. It is a legitimate and even necessary human experience. It may win you comfort and some measure of illusory security, but ordinary love cannot take you home. Home is the experience that there is no place to go because you have already arrived. Home is when you stop seeking the meaning of life because it becomes outrageously self-evident. Home is when you fall in love with your life anew every day. Home is the knowing that every place you go you are being carried. Only outrageous love takes you home. Outrageous love is the dance of allurement and attraction at the very sub-atomic level of existence. Outrageous love is the ceaseless, ecstatic, creative pulsation that drives the entire process of emergence. Outrageous love is the field of allurement, at every level of reality—from atom, to plant, to animal, to human—that holds all creation together.

But outrageous love can become part of your human experience. Living becomes extraordinary when we access outrageous love in the course of what we like to call ordinary life. When you love your beloved not merely as an unconscious strategy of ego but as an expression of the Eros of existence, outrageous love is awakened in you, and your entire experience of life changes. When you hold your beloved's hand with ordinary love, your hand gets clammy rather quickly. You can't quite find the right position, and soon you want to unclasp. When you hold your beloved's hand with outrageous love, you feel like all is perfect and you want the moment to last forever.

Another scenario. Your baby is crying. Pick up the baby with the hands of ordinary love, and the baby continues to cry and fidget, often more intensely than before. But pick up the baby with outrageous love, and the baby literally melts into you. The crying naturally recedes, and the

baby falls into a profound and deep state of rest. The infant has been lifted up into the lap of Eros, and she knows it. You feel the bliss of her resting in the depth of your being, which is the Eros of existence—outrageous love itself. This shift inside you, from emptiness to Eros, from ordinary love to outrageous love, is the change that changes everything.

When the very Eros of existence is awakened in you, you are awakening as outrageous love. You become an outrageous lover. You begin to live an erotic life. Sex transforms from the pitiful grasping for fleeting fulfillment that is not working for virtually anyone, to something else entirely. Sex is revealed as the potent prose and poetry of reality itself, incarnate as your body and your desire. Sex is revealed as the love story of all of reality, happening in and as you. Sex is revealed as the source of all wisdom, pointing us toward the erotic and the holy in every dimension of life. It is a virtuous circle. Sex models Eros. You begin to live the erotic life in every dimension of your nonsexual life. As you re-eroticize your life, you are personally transformed. At the same time, regular sex transforms into erotic sex. Ordinary sex becomes outrageous sex.

SEX: A LOVE STORY

We need to realize that sex is a love story—not an ordinary love story, but an outrageous love story. An erotic love story. Outrageous love is Eros. Ordinary love is legitimate, but it is limited in the gift it can give you. In this world, that incarnation of the divine movement called outrageous love is the perpetual divine lovemaking. Participate in that perpetual movement of reality's lovemaking through your body and the result is not ordinary sex, but outrageous erotic sex. Enter into the inside of sex and you will find God, the sacred lover and gorgeous divine slut of the Cosmos. The inside of sex is outrageous love. The inside of sex is outrageous Eros. The qualities of Eros are the qualities of the sacred; the erotic and the holy are one. The goal is to re-eroticize all of your life, and your teacher and your guide is the sexual, the seat of all wisdom.

In the upcoming chapters through the end of part two, we will explore in depth the Secret of the Cherubs. At the heart of the secret is the new

sexual narrative: sex erotic. These chapters form the essence of the Secret of the Cherubs. Parts three, four, and five will explore the twelve faces of Eros—erotic qualities that are, at the same time, characteristics of Eros and paths to Eros.

Each face of Eros is an expression of a different texture of radical aliveness. When all of these awaken in you, you are living an erotic life. Each face is a portal through which to return to Eros. The twelve faces are:

- The First Face: Interiority: Living on the Inside
- The Second Face: Fullness of Presence
- The Third Face: Yearning and Desire
- The Fourth Face: Wholeness and Interconnectivity
- The Fifth Face: Uniqueness and Identity
- The Sixth Face: Imagination
- The Seventh Face: Perception
- The Eighth Face: Giving and Receiving
- The Ninth Face: Surrender
- The Tenth Face: Play
- The Eleventh Face: Creativity
- The Twelfth Face: Pleasure and Delight

The experience of being radically alive comes from all of these faces of Eros taken together. To live the erotic life is to have the most potent and powerful access to each of these faces. In each of them, sex is our teacher. It is our portal to accessing the radically alive experience of each face. But our experience of the faces does not end in their sexual expression. Quite the opposite. It is all about sex and not about sex at all. Sex models each of the faces of Eros, and in so doing, gives us a vision of what it might mean to live them fully in every dimension of our lives.

It would be a great tragedy of the spirit if the only place where we experienced the faces of Eros were in the sexual. That would be to relegate Eros to the narrow confines of the bedroom, when it needs to soar through our kitchens, our offices, our carpools, our classrooms! In erotic living, we seek the realization of these qualities in every dimension of our

existence. From work, to play, to politics, to intellectual pursuits—in all of these we seek erotic experience.

Erotic engagement could become our daily fare if we just freed our Eros from its old casing. These hand-me-down ideas of an Eros that is only about sex have become threadbare. We must reweave the fabric. The full pleasure of living, the joy of fullness and creativity, can come only when we re-eroticize our lives. Until then, human beings will turn to the shadows of Eros—rage, abuse, and violence—to remind themselves, through the intensity of those experiences, that they exist.

FACES AND PATHS

One of the fundamental principles of Eros is the path is the destination. In a true path, there is no split between the path and the goal. We are creative not only for the sake of the product that emerges but also for the sake of the creative experience itself. We do awareness practice not merely to get to awareness but also because the practice is awareness. We have sex, among other reasons, to feel intimate, but the experience of sex is intimacy itself. In the same way, the authentic and potent experience of each face of Eros is also the path to Eros.

The path and the destination are the same. Each face of Eros is a distinct path of Hebrew Tantra. In each, the sexual opens the door, giving us a taste of that particular face of Eros, so that Sex models for us each face of Eros so we can live that face in every dimension of our lives. The return to Eros cannot bypass sex because erotic sex models for us how to live erotically, how to be radically alive in all of the nonsexual dimensions of our lives.

CHAPTER TWO

EVOKING EROS

Our lives are spent teetering on the edge of the void. You know, the void—the big hole you feel inside. Usually it is a dull and throbbing pain, the background noise of most lives. We rush around, doing everything we can to fill the hole. We have a handy word for this rushing about: avoidance. A dance around the void. We develop the most elaborate maneuvers we can imagine, never realizing that it is all a-void-dance. That if we could but taste fullness for a moment, then the vacant dances of consumerism, addiction, empty sex, and violence would be transformed into the erotic dance of Being.

The emptiness is so palpable and overwhelming that we would fill it at virtually any price. We seek immediate gratification, a quick fix—a book, a drug, a relationship, a job—anything to fill the gaping chasm, the hole in our wholeness. We run desperately looking for the next watering hole that might fill up the emptiness we feel so deeply and try so hard to hide.

On the outside our mad dashing about may look like a dance, but we are really gasping for air. Picture a bee in a bottle. Seen from the outside, the bee darts from side to side in an ecstatic dance. On the inside, however, there is neither dance nor ecstasy. The bee is slowly dying, suffocating. It

was not meant to be this way. Life should not be a pathos-filled scramble for some snatches of authenticity in between empty charades.

THE EROTIC MYSTICS

The ancient wisdom of the erotic Hebrew mystics makes one essential promise: There is a better way to live. In the midst of uncertainty and anxiety, joy and meaning remain genuine options. We can choose life and love, or death and fear. To experience the fullness of every moment, to move from isolation to deep connection, is our birthright if we but claim it.

The great invitation of the spirit is to heal our pain, opening us up to the possibility of joy, ecstasy, and love. There is another way to dance: the dance of Eros, the dance in which we all have a place. This book is about sharing the dance of Eros with you.

As you probably know, most people assume that Eros is merely a synonym for sex. It is not. The fact that we so often confuse Eros with sex merely reminds us of how distant we are from true erotic engagement. To dance with Eros is to live and love erotically in all the arenas of our lives, beyond the merely sexual. That is what it means to be holy. Just as holiness should not be limited to our houses of worship, Eros should not be limited to our bedrooms.

Eros is to be fully alive. Eros is to be fully present to what is. It is to open your eyes and see for the first time the full beauty and gorgeousness of a friend. To smell the richness of an aroma, to feel the fullness of throbbing desire, and to taste the erotic experience that connects you with every being. It is to feel the palpable love that dissolves the walls of ego, anger, and anxiety.

Eros is the feeling you have when you stop trying to get someplace because you realize with great joy that you are already there. To be erotically engaged is to feel the radical interconnectivity of being as a living reality in your life. For the spiritually incorrect mystics, neither dogma nor doctrine will take us home. We need Eros. Eros is the key that provides deep meaning to everything—satisfying work, joyful relationships,

effective parenting. Starvation, fundamentalism, greed, war, and the rape of the Earth are all the result of lack of Eros.

It is the mystery of Eros that was at the core of the teachings of the temple in ancient Jerusalem. The dance with Eros was called the dance with the Goddess. In the hidden tradition of the erotic mystics, it is the Shechinah, the Goddess whose presence suffuses reality. The mystics render the sacred text as follows: “Make for me a temple” and the Shechinah, the Goddess—literally, the erotic presence—“will dwell in your midst.” She is Eros incarnate.

We will call these teachings the path of Hebrew Tantra. One of the meanings of the Sanskrit word *tantra* is “to expand.” Hebrew Tantra is about expanding Eros beyond the sexual to include all the nonsexual areas of our lives. To dance with the Goddess is to live the erotic life not only in sex but also in every facet of our existence. Hebrew Tantra is a means of accessing the aliveness of erotic energy to become one with the divinity that courses through us at every moment.

These teachings on sex, love, and Eros were secret. Sourced in the temple mysteries, they were transmitted in secret by the erotic mystics in all the great traditions, often at great risk to both the teacher and the student. Modern popular books, like the fiction best seller *The Da Vinci Code*, are potent because they are perfumed with the fragrance of this ancient mystery tradition. *The Da Vinci Code* is a popularization of the Mary Magdalene tradition, which asserts that Mary and Jesus were sexual. It understands sex in a very different way than sex was viewed by the classical Christian tradition. The erotic love between Jesus and Mary is a model for living the sacred life. The Magdalene tradition is rooted in the mysteries of the Jerusalem Temple, which understood that the erotic and the holy are one.

The ancient teachings about Eros have never been taught publicly, and for good reason. They were thought to be too explosive to be taught to the general public. Read superficially, they could be misunderstood as merely sexual license or an abandonment of interpersonal ethics. As we shall see, however, they are neither. Rather, the temple mysteries are a profound and powerful path of love and Eros. For the temple mystics, the goal of life was erotic living. The essence of their teachings was to transform sexuality into a loving guide to fullness, Eros, and joy.

THE QUESTION OF MEANING

When we live from the lap of Eros we stop searching for the answer to the question of the meaning of life. The meaning of life becomes self-evident. The split between the ordinary and the extraordinary disappears. It is not that we come up with a great answer. The question simply falls away. Imagine that you are having the best sex of your life with a person you love deeply. Do you stop before the explosion to ponder the meaning of life? We think not. Not because you have come up with the answer but because the question falls away in the fullness of the moment.

When all of your activity has the same level of self-evident meaning, then you are living the erotic life. T. S. Eliot once referred to this as “living an autotelic life.” *Auto* derives from the Greek word for “self,” and *telic* comes from the Greek word *telos*, which means “goal” or “end.” An autotelic person means one who is so fully immersed in the current of life that every activity is not merely a means to an end but an end in itself. For such a person, every activity is an expression of the fullness of life rather than a grasping for happiness or achievement. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an activity that is autotelic “is one which has a purpose in and not apart from itself.” The autotelic life is the erotic life.

THE RETURN TO EROS

In the language of the erotic mystics of the secret temple lineage, the return to Eros transforms reality and liberates the Goddess. Eros is outrageous love, the love that is the essence of all reality. The return to Eros happens when outrageous love becomes alive in our lives.

Eros is what we are talking about when we say God is love. God is not ordinary love, a strategy of the ego. God is outrageous love. God is Eros. Or said differently, in the language of the leading edge of evolutionary theory, reality is Eros. Reality is animated and motivated by Eros, and it self-organizes toward higher and higher levels of complexity and consciousness.⁴

Finally we will evolve the very source code of consciousness and transform our core experience of life by closing the tragic gap (which has persisted both in our personal lives and throughout human history) among the erotic, the sexual, and the holy. We will see that you can only be fully alive, powerfully ethical, and in love if you are living a full erotic life. The erotic life is purposeful even as it is powerful and poignant. But Eros is also potent in that it is always potentiating new possibility. As the great philosopher of science Alfred North Whitehead reminds us, the constant emergence of novelty is the very nature of Eros. In the fullness of erotic living you are literally a virgin, always touching for the very first time.

THE FAILURE OF EROS

We will demonstrate the surprising counterintuitive principle that the failure of Eros leads directly to the collapse of ethics. Virtually all forms of acting out, addiction, depression, violence, and abuse are rooted in the loss of aliveness—what the mystics allusively call the fall of Eros. Every form of success, fulfillment, and joy is the natural result of living the erotic life. It is only in the erotic life that we experience a life well lived. In the erotic life, we not only love on occasion; we are actually lived as love. When we live in the lap of Eros, we are able to keep our hearts open in all situations. Eros does not bypass the hurt; rather, it fills it with aliveness and love. Eros is not tepid and polite; Eros is dynamic and outrageous. The credo of Eros is simple: we live in a world of outrageous pain. The only response to outrageous pain is outrageous love. Outrageous love is Eros.

Even if we could somehow put aside the starvation and the wars, an even superficial view of our own society reveals that something is seriously askew. This is not a detail problem but an essential flaw in the plumb line of our culture. Every forty seconds someone kills themselves. Every year upward of one million people will experience a failure of love so intense and painful that they will voluntarily end their lives. In the last forty-five years, suicide rates have increased by 60 percent worldwide.

The figures are highest in Western democracies like Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, New Zealand, Finland, and, of course, the United States.

Suicide used to be largely limited to the elderly—people who had, at the end of their lives, looked back and been unable to make sense of their story. Not particularly comforting news, because all of us want to, and most of us will, reach old age. But the jolting news is that the average age of suicide is going down. Suicide is now one of the three leading causes of death among those aged fifteen to forty-four. Now of course it would be nice to dismiss this unpleasant information with the thought that only crazy or severely depressed people commit suicide. Note, however, that for every actual suicide there are ten suicide attempts. Suicide attempts have increased in the last forty-five years twenty times more than “successful” suicides.

Add to this the easily inferred truth that for every person who attempts suicide there are a lot more people in just as much pain. They are just as lonely, just as alienated, and just as depressed, but they simply are unable to do anything about it. So they live in limbo, suspended between hells, all the while maintaining the facade of normal and even successful lives.

And yet our guilty feet have got no rhythm. Beneath our desperately dancing steps lurks a yawning abyss of emptiness that kills our joy and poisons our satisfactions. We need another way to dance.

We will introduce you to a dancing master in chapter four who will show us this new way. He reminds us that Eros is a genuine possibility in our lives. Stay in the emptiness, he tells us, and it will become full. Where before you danced to the music of competition and *grenvy* (greed and envy), you are now aroused by the alluring melodies of Eros in every sphere of your life. You no longer feel like you must obey God; rather, you participate in the divine.⁵

Eros is revealed in the sound of a woman singing, the caress of a small deed of loving, or a tear quivering with tenderness. Eros is found in the silence of presence between close friends working side by side, or in the ecstasy of lovers screaming the name of God. Eros is when you explode in pleasure that affirms the very goodness of existence. Eros is when you delight in giving or receiving a gift that makes life worth

living. Eros makes itself known in all genuinely felt pain and joy, anger and ecstasy, in which we enter the feeling so deeply that we come out the other side more whole and more alive. All of these fill our emptiness and enliven our days. We are no longer alienated from our own lives, living externally, wondering, “Is this all there is?” To dance with Eros is to step inside to the full glory and wonder of your life. To live and love with passion, purpose, and poignancy—to be radically alive in all the facets of our being—is what it means to live an erotic life.

EXPANDING LOVE LISTS

One cannot be told that life is worthwhile. One must experience the erotic love of living firsthand. Yet so few people have an unmediated sense of the radical aliveness and infinite dignity of their lives. It is this very erotic sense that is so essential to making our lives a triumph. This is the experience that we call the erotic life. So many of us today are secondhand consumers of secondhand joy, never touching Eros directly. And when our Eros fails, there truly is nothing left to live for.

When we exile the essential Eros of love into the experience of romantic love with only one person—beautiful as that may be—the erotic is in exile. For there is no one person to whom we can give over the power to make our life meaningful or meaningless. When we exile Eros into the sexual, when the sexual becomes the only place that we taste the erotic, the erotic is in exile. And then sex collapses under the weight of a burden it cannot bear.

In every chapter of this book we will further unfold the stunning relationship between the erotic and the sexual. This relationship articulates a new narrative of sexuality that radically transforms both your understanding and your experience of the sexual and of sex in your life. Sex will become not the sum total of your erotic experience but the portal into ever deepening Eros in every dimension of your life.

Eros is experiencing that your existence drips with aliveness and overflows with meaning, no matter what your particular circumstance may be at a given moment. The universe feels, and the universe feels Eros.

Eros is not hard to find and impossible to avoid. For Eros is the very nature of reality itself. We are drenched in Eros. We just need to open the door and realize we are already on the inside.

When you live in Eros, you fall in love with life itself, and with your own life, again and again. From that place of being in love with life you fall in love with many people, not necessarily romantically or even sexually. But you realize that your love lists are too short. Love cannot be limited to the people who give you economic security or to whom you are connected biologically. Love rooted in Eros is not ordinary love. Ordinary love is a strategy of the ego seeking security and comfort. All too quickly, ordinary love becomes comfortably numb. Love rooted in Eros is not ordinary but extraordinary. It is radically alive. Eros is not mere fancy or passing sentiment but rather the essence of existence itself.

LOVE OR DIE

We are confronted, personally and globally, with a stark choice: love or die! It is that simple. Again, by love we do not mean ordinary love but outrageous love, that which we have called Eros. Eros is no longer a luxury—it is an absolute necessity for the survival of the individual and the planet. In the last half century, modern psychology has documented an age-old truth: a fully nourished baby who is not held in loving arms will die. The loving arms that ensure a baby's wholeness and health are not the arms of ordinary love. It is not the love of an ego seeking security. Rather, the love of a mother or father is the Eros of existence holding the baby and keeping her safe. This is outrageous love, the fabric of existence itself. This is the love about which Solomon, builder of the Hebrew Temple, wrote, "Its insides are lined with love." Just like a baby will die if not held in love, so too our world—even with all the resources, intelligence, and technology at our disposal—will die if not held in outrageous love. A de-eroticized world cannot survive. We must embrace a personal path with heart and a global politics of Eros.

Life is a choice. What is the rhythm of our dance? Are we dancing masters or bottled bees that appear to be dancing but are gasping for air?

Who are our dancing partners—desperation and emptiness or Eros and the Goddess? Are we outrageous lovers in all facets of our lives or are we apathetic, deadened, and indifferent? Bees in bottles always sting. But everyone knows that to sting is to die. The only way to not sting is to learn to be a dancing master.

The great mystery tradition of Hebrew wisdom is about a radical and profound path toward becoming just such a dancing master. The ancient Temple in Jerusalem was the center of a society, where the Hebrew mysteries were practiced and taught. At the core of the temple mysteries lay an ancient set of radical understandings about sex, love, and Eros. The Hebrew mysteries gently but powerfully charted a path that, if we but have the courage to walk it, will teach us how to live erotically in every facet of existence.

The invitation and the challenge of the spirit in our generation are to create a politics of Eros and love. That can only begin to happen when each person in the polis takes responsibility for the erotic quality of his or her life. We need to, and we can, realign our souls with the vital currents of loving energy that course through our universe. We need to return to Eros. We can decide to enter the flow, and from that place on the inside, transform first our lives and, ultimately, our planet.

At the epicenter of holiness in the ancient Hebrew Temple in Jerusalem was the Ark of the Covenant. You may remember it from the cinema—it is the very same Ark that Indiana Jones sought to retrieve in the classic movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. As we said earlier, atop this Ark was carved a pair of figures called cherubs. Surprisingly, the cherubs were locked in sexual embrace. These entwined cherubs were not only atop the Ark but were also the major decorative motif all over the temple walls, doors, and sacred vessels. Even if you absolutely affirm the sexual as a wonderful part of your life, sexually entwined cherubs at the axis mundi of holiness in the Jerusalem Temple? What might this possibly mean? We will explore this mystery in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

SEX IN THE TEMPLE

Imagine the scene: You walk into your local place of worship—church, synagogue, mosque, meditation center, or whatever. The pastor or rabbi has apparently decided to redecorate while you were away on vacation. You find that he has installed atop the Ark or altar a statue of sexually intertwined golden figures. In addition, he positions among the pews another freestanding set of sexually embracing figures. And just in case you missed the point, vivid pictures of these effigies adorn most of the sanctuary walls.

We daresay that as sexually open as we are, and much as we affirm sexuality as a wonder and a central good in our lives, the pastor's contract would not be renewed. However, in the pastor's defense, let me share with you a secret. These precise images were the central display in the archetype of the holiest of places: the ancient Temple of Jerusalem.

The figures were called cherubs. The primary set was positioned in the center of the temple, atop the Ark of the Covenant. According to Hebrew myth, this spot is the Earth's epicenter, the axis mundi, the place where heaven and earth kiss. A second set of golden cherubs was freestanding, and the rest were in pictographic form on the walls and even on some of the temple vessels. The provocatively entwined cherubs were,

for the mystics, the very key to the mystery of love, a mystery that lay at the heart of the Jerusalem Temple, a mystery that lies at the heart of all of our lives. Unraveling this mystery is the purpose of our journey together. Let the mysteries begin!

THE SEAT OF THE SECRET

Remember the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, featuring Indiana Jones adventuring through the dusty Middle East in search of the Ark of the Covenant? Lives are lost, blood is let. One was tempted to ask why he shouldn't just let the Ark stay lost!

The answer is that the Ark, perhaps more than any other earthly object, is of overwhelming mystical significance. The Ark was an elegant container that held the original tablets on which were inscribed the Ten Commandments. Described in the sources as something akin to a spiritually creative, life-giving nuclear reactor, it was lost when the Temple of Jerusalem was destroyed some 2,500 years ago. It has been sought after, physically and metaphysically, ever since. The search for the Ark is the original grail quest of biblical myth.

Jerusalem holds the secret. It is the cradle of three faiths, each today in its own way in desperate need of renewal and re-souling. At the center of Jerusalem stood the temple built by Solomon and destroyed by the Greeks, then rebuilt by Ezra and destroyed by the Romans. It is a temple that awaits rebuilding in our own inner lives, for the temple in the Hebrew mystery tradition of the Kabbalah is not so much a place on Earth as a powerful idea of the spirit. The essence of Hebrew mysticism lies hidden in the grain of the temple's wood and the folds of her curtains.

The loss of the temple is considered by the biblical mystery tradition to be the greatest spiritual disaster in history. The rebuilding of the temple through the reclaiming of its energy in our lives is the overarching goal of the entire biblical project. This is the desire that is expressed time and again in a thousand different ways in Hebrew ritual and liturgy. It is the idea that shaped all of the spiritual offspring of Hebrew religion—that is to say, much of civilization as we know it.

The temple myth is so powerful, so fertile and teeming with life, that it has given birth to most of the great systems of the spirit created by humanity. Hebrew mysticism, beginning with Abraham, gave birth to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. All three religions in their inner forms are rooted in the Temple of Jerusalem, hence the mythic power of the Christian Templars, the Islamic Dome of the Rock, and the Hebrew Temple Mount.

Further, Kabbalistic tradition tells of the sons of Abraham, who in the book of Genesis are sent eastward to the land of the Buddha. The Kabbalists teach that Abraham's heirs are the progenitors of Buddhism. There is even an old oral Kabbalistic tradition that claims that the builder of the temple (King Solomon) and the Buddha are, if not the same person, at least masters in the same sacred tradition. While historically inaccurate, the story points to the deep spiritual affinity between Solomon's teachings and those of the Buddha hundreds of years later.

So the Hebrew Temple with her eternal flame is the source of the fire that sparked, and continues to light, so many of the pure wicks of the spirit that illuminate our world. Those who have lost touch with the mystery kill one another today in order to control the temple's geographical site, a sad betrayal of the spirit for which the temple was incarnated. For the great mystics, the devotion to the temple is not about a commitment to a particular building on a particular hill in Jerusalem. It is about what we might call "temple consciousness." This consciousness represents a potent wisdom that defies convention. Temple consciousness is subversive in that it defies the petty power plays of the ego and the contorted contractions of our superficial identities.

But what is the great wisdom hidden in the temple myth? What perennial message of the spirit does it yearn to share with us? The simple answer is Eros. The temple plans were drawn up by David and manifested by his son Yedidya, better known as Solomon. Both names, David and Yedidya, mean "loved by the spirit." These kings are the great lovers of biblical myth. They loved greatly and were greatly loved—Solomon by God, the Queen of Sheba, and a thousand wives; David by God, the people, Jonathan, and biblical myth readers throughout history. The temple mystery was thus born and sired by men whose name was love. Not ordinary love but outrageous love.

What is the secret of this ancient love hidden in the temple's origins? What is the mystery of the lost Ark, crowned by her sexually intertwined cherubic lovers? Why is the mythic Ark's metaphorical recovery so absolutely crucial for our lives? Could this ancient and esoteric wisdom have something radically new and important to say about the love lost in our lives and the road to its recovery? Can the cherubs lead us home?

THE SECRET OF THE CHERUBS

To understand the mystery of the temple and what it has to teach us, we need to approach it more carefully. Indeed, gradually approaching the center is always the essential formula in the quest of the spirit. The temple itself was built somewhat like an exquisite mandala. A mandala invites the gazer to pass through layer after layer of imagery before beholding its wondrous core. Similarly, we find that the temple was a layered structure. The high priest would ascend the great staircase to the outer Courtyard of Song, pass through the courtyard into the chamber called the Holy, and from there into the innermost sanctum, the Holy of Holies. In this sanctum sanctorum of the temple, behind fine brocaded curtains, stood the golden Ark of the Covenant. The Ark contained within it the two tablets of stone upon which were carved the Ten Commandments. They were magical lapidary tablets, sculpted by the God-gripped hand of Moses himself.

Most significant, though, is that which rests atop the Ark. Sitting perched aloft the Ark are our two winged figures, the celebrated cherubs. Indeed, their cherubic faces have graced everything from the greatest works of art to countless covers of Hallmark cards. Yet here, according to the esoteric tradition, these images were not of the Hallmark variety. These two cherubs were male and female, face to face, *meurim zeh b'zeh*—intertwined in sexual embrace. In the language of the biblical source text, the cherubs were “as one embraced with his lover.” These carved creatures were the focal point, the epicenter, of the mandala-like temple space. They sat, like the guarded pupil of the eye, at the source of the sacred.

That such provocatively sexual figures would have such prominence in the Holy of Holies is a mystery indeed. It is called by the Kabbalistic initiates the *sod hakeruvim*, the Secret of the Cherubs. And though full initiation into this secret cannot be wholly transmitted in the pages of a book, together we can at least hint at its wonder and strive to scrutinize the inscrutable.

THE LION OF FIRE

The best way to behold such mysteries is through the gleaming prism of story. Thus we begin with a spellbinding ancient text that sits at the core of the mystery tradition. This esoteric tale describes an extraordinary scene that takes place in Jerusalem in roughly 500 BCE, almost two centuries before Plato and Aristotle.

The masters of the day were distressed. Adultery was spreading rampant as plague among the people. The authorities were at a loss as to how to curb this powerful urge. Finally, driven to desperation, they began to pray. For three days, they fasted, weeping and pleading with God, “Let us slay the sexual drive before it slays us.”

Finally, God acquiesced. The masters then witnessed a lion of fire leap out from within the temple’s Holy of Holies. A prophet among them identified the lion as the personification of the primal sexual drive.

They sought to slay the lion of fire. But the result was that for three days thereafter the entire society ground to a standstill. Hens did not lay eggs, artists ceased creating, businesses faltered, and all spiritual activity came to a halt.

Realizing that the sexual drive was about more than just sex, that it somehow echoed the divine, the masters relented. They prayed that only its destructive shadow be removed. Their request was denied on high with the insightful psychological response, “You cannot have only half a drive.” The greater the sacred power of a quality, the greater its shadow; the two are inseparable. So they prayed that the lion at least be weakened, and their prayer was granted. The lion, less potent but no less present, reentered the Holy of Holies. The text is alive with myth, magic,

and mystery. The most startling revelation is the radical claim as to the originating place of the sexual drive. Why does this drive, personified as a lion of fire, emerge from the temple's Holy of Holies? Apparently, this is its eternal abode. Remarkably, the text is telling us that the seat and source of the sexual drive is none other than the Holy of Holies.

In fact, the Holy of Holies is often depicted in the mystical sources as the marriage bed. The tablets and the Ark are depicted respectively as the phallus (the penis) and the yoni (the vagina) or the clitoris. This sexual model of Eros and the virtual identity between the erotic and the holy are perhaps the most vital and provocative insights of the Kabbalists. They taught it implicitly in a thousand different ways in their writings. They rarely said it overtly for fear the message would be misunderstood, leading to a kind of sexual anarchy, which would bring in its wake the collapse of family. So the dominant impression we are left with is that while sex is good, as it is created by God, it is exceedingly dangerous and is to be handled with great caution. One gets the impression that the attendant dangers may even override the essential good. Thus, nothing as audacious as the Secret of the Cherubs was written about openly. And, yet, once you see it, you realize it is there, subtly calling out, whispering from the folds of literally hundreds of texts.

Sex in the temple!? Sexually entwined cherubs atop the Ark, and a fiery feline sexual drive living in the Holy of Holies? What are these mythic images trying to express? At first blush, they seem to describe sex as a central preoccupation of the Holy of Holies, portraying the temple as some kind of ancient Hebrew Playboy mansion. While Hebrew mysticism may wholeheartedly embrace a positive and healthy sexual ethic, one would not have thought that sex is the essence of the sacred! What is being pointed toward here is not merely a sex-positive moment. Rather, hidden in the folds of the ancient manuscripts is a new narrative of the sexual that is well beyond a prosaic affirmation that sex is good or even that sex is holy because it creates babies. The answer lies in the story itself.

When the lion is subdued, the world does not wake up with just its sexual drive lobotomized. Rather, the world wakes up to an overwhelmingly dull and driveless existence. The passionate engagement in all activity has suddenly withered and vanished. Whether it is in sex, art, work,

or creativity, the thrill of existence is gone. Clearly, that fiery feline inhabitant of the Holy of Holies represents not merely sexuality. She is the incarnation of a more potent energy force. She is the embodiment of the Shechinah. She is the incarnation of Eros.

THE SHECHINAH

The Shechinah is the Hebrew name for the feminine Divine. Her name means “indwelling presence” and “the one who dwells in you.” She is presence, poetry, passion. She is the sustaining God force that runs through and provides a womb for the world. She is the underlying erotic, sensual, and loving force that knows our name and nurtures all being.

Shechinah captures an experience, a way of being in the world, for which we do not yet have an English word. For this is a way of being that we in the West are hard-pressed to articulate. It is the experience of waking up in the morning full of utter joy for the arrival of the day. It is weeping over the splendor of the sunset or the scent of the ocean or the fragility of a newborn. It is a way of living in love. It is a way of being lived by love. It is a way of living the erotic life.

Indeed, it is one of the great failures of love that we do not possess such a word for this fully charged way of living. The main reason we lack a word for the type of love we will be exploring in this book is that such an expanded notion of love is still so foreign to the fabric of our lives. Our vocabulary reflects our reality. Just as the Eskimo has an ample supply of words to describe different types of snow, a society infused with love would likewise have a menagerie of terms for different types of love. We should wonder over the paucity in the English language of our “terms of endearment.”

Our best choice in the English language is to turn toward the term Plato introduced in *The Symposium*: Eros. For Plato, Eros is love plus. It is precisely the kind of fully charged life experience that is evoked by the Hebrew term *Shechinah*.

But over time the word *Eros* has been so narrowed and limited that it has lost most of its original intention. Usually when we hear the word

erotic, it evokes only the sexual. The erotic life has been reduced to but one of its dimensions. And although the sexual is a part of Eros, it is only a limited part. The type of full Eros we have been describing in this book is way beyond the mere sexual. We must work to reclaim this original meaning of Eros, a meaning infused by its Hebrew counterpart, Shechinah. Temple consciousness incarnates in the lion of fire, the sexual drive, which lives in the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies, remember, is the place where the sexually entwined cherubs make love, above the Ark of the Covenant. And the sacred text reminds us that the voice of God speaks from within raw Eros—the radical aliveness of their sexual play.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DANCING MASTER, AN EROTIC STORY

A Tibetan story wonderfully evokes the erotic experience we are exploring together.

Reports had reached the young Dalai Lama that a certain master of Kung Fu was roaming the countryside of Tibet, converting young men to the study of violence. Rumors even began circulating that this Kung Fu master was an incarnation of Shiva Nataraja, the Hindu god in his aspect of the Lord of the Dance of Destruction. The Dalai Lama decided to invite the master for a visit.

Pleased with the invitation, the Kung Fu master strode into the Dalai Lama's ceremonial hall some weeks later. The master was beautiful indeed, with thick blue-black hair falling down over the shoulders of his black leather suit. "Your Holiness," he began, "be not concerned. I would not think of doing you harm."

"Well, when you do want to harm," asked the Dalai Lama, "what kind of harm can you do?"

“Your Holiness, the best way to show you would be for you to stand here in front of me while I do a little dance. Though I can kill a dozen men instantly with this dance, have no fear.”

The Dalai Lama stood up and immediately felt as if a wind had blown flower petals across his body. He looked down but saw nothing. “You may proceed,” he told the master of Kung Fu.

“Proceed?” said the other, grinning jovially. “I’ve already finished. What you felt were my hands flicking across your body. If I had done it in slow motion, extremely slow motion, you would have seen how each touch of my hand would have destroyed the organs of your body one by one.”

“Impressive. But I know a master greater than you,” said the Dalai Lama.

“Without wishing to offend Your Holiness, I doubt that very much,” said the Kung Fu master. “Let him challenge me, and if he bests me, I shall leave Tibet forever.”

“If he bests you, you shall have no need to leave Tibet.” The Dalai Lama clapped his hands. “Regent,” he said, “summon the dancing master.”

The dancing master entered. He was a wiry little fellow, half the size of the master of Kung Fu and well past his prime. His legs were knotted with varicose veins, and he was swollen at the elbows from arthritis. Nevertheless, his eyes were glittering merrily, and he seemed eager for the challenge.

The master of Kung Fu did not mock his opponent. “My own guru,” he said, “was even smaller and older than you, yet I was unable to best him until last year when I finally caught him on the ear and destroyed him, as I shall destroy you when you finally tire.”

The two opponents faced off. The Kung Fu master assumed a jaunty, indifferent stance, intending to tempt the other to attack.

The old dancing master began to swirl very slowly, his robes wafting around his body. His arms stretched out, and his hands fluttered like butterflies toward the eyes of his opponent. His fingers settled gently for a moment upon the bushy eyebrows.

The master of Kung Fu drew back in astonishment. He looked around the great hall. Everything was suddenly vibrant with rich hues of singing

color. The faces of the monks were radiantly beautiful. It was as if his eyes had been washed clean for the first time.

The fingers of the dancing master stroked the nose of the master of Kung Fu, and suddenly he could smell the pungent barley from a granary in the city far below. He was intoxicated by the aroma of the butter melting in the Dalai Lama's fragrant tea.

A flick of the dancing master's foot at the Kung Fu master's genitals, and he was throbbing with desire. The sound of a woman singing through an open window filled him with exquisite yearning to draw her into his arms and caress her. He found himself removing his leather clothes until he stood naked before the dancing master, who was now assaulting him with joy at every touch.

His body began to hum like a finely tuned instrument. He opened his mouth and sang like a bird at sunrise. It seemed to him that he was possessed of many arms, legs, and hands, and all wanted to nurture the blossoming of life.

The Kung Fu master began the most beautiful dance that had ever been seen in the great ceremonial hall of the Grand Potala. It lasted for three days and nights, during which time everyone in Tibet feasted and visitors crowded the doorways and galleries to watch. Only when he finally collapsed at the throne of the Dalai Lama did he realize that another body was lying beside him. The old dancing master had died of exertion while performing his final and most marvelous dance. But he had died happily, having found the disciple he had always yearned for. The new dancing master of Tibet took the frail corpse in his arms and, weeping with love, drew the last of its energy into his body. Never had he felt so strong.

What a holy tale of Eros. The darts and lunges of emptiness and violence become the erotic soarings of fullness and love. The great mystery tradition of Hebrew wisdom is about a radical and profound path toward becoming just such a dancing master. It is about the dance with Eros, with Shechinah, the dance with the Goddess Divine.

Eros has many expressions. Each expression is hinted at in the temple mysteries.

Now that we have sensed at least a fragrance of Eros, how do we find our way back to it? Through what doors might we return? This is the

great mythical question of all the mystical traditions. We are exiled from Eden. Eden is Eros. How do we find our way back to the Garden?

The answer is startling and beautiful. The way back to Eros is through sex. Sex is the portal for the return to Eros.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SECRET OF THE CHERUBS

REALITY IS EROS

Now that we understand that Eros lies at the heart of the temple mysteries, we can turn to the core question: If, as we have seen, the essence of the temple (and of every journey of spirit) is Eros, not sex, then why is sex such a prominent feature of the temple? This chapter will begin to unfold that information, which lies at the heart of the mystical Secret of the Cherubs.

The Secret of the Cherubs tells the story of the relationship between the erotic, love and the sexual. Sex models Eros. Erotic sex models what it means to be radically alive in every single facet of our lives. This is the new sexual narrative that is an affront to shame. The Secret of the Cherubs shows us the way to erotically reweave the very fabric of our lives in more vivid patterns, sensual textures, and brilliant hues. This is the path

of what we have called Hebrew Tantra. Hebrew Tantra is both the invitation and the divine demand that we re-eroticize our lives.

The Secret of the Cherubs tells a new sexual story, one we have alluded to that now needs to be spelled out in its full erotic delight.

All great mysteries arise in response to powerful yet simple questions. If we were in a classroom, with the blackboards whitened with sketches of cherubs and notes on Eros, Shechinah, and sex, I would at this point step back and ask for questions, for all good spiritual maps should give rise to questions. Slowly a hand would be raised in the classroom . . . a second hand . . . a host of hands. The questions would begin: “If all that you have said so far is true, if Eros is not sex, then why in the temple of Eros is the centerpiece two sexually intertwined cherubs? Why sex? Why wouldn’t the temple use some other image of Eros? Wouldn’t a statue of a runner who has become the wind or a painter engrossed in his colors be a more fitting figure to perch atop the Ark? If Eros and love are, as you say, more than sex, then why does the temple insist on using a blatantly sexual image?” I would add a question of my own: “What is the magnetism of the cherubs and the Ark that has so fascinated the world for millennia?”

The Greek historian Thucydides reminds us that when words lose their meaning, culture collapses. A movie called *Raiders of the Lost Ark* goes blockbuster toward the end of the twentieth century. But why is the lost Ark so precious to us? Why are people so passionately committed—willing to risk it all—to recover the Ark? Why does the Ark have sexually entwined cherubs adorning its cover? These same cherubs appear in a sacred text in the book of Genesis guarding the entrance to the Garden of Eden. What precious secret do these cherubs hold in their embrace?

QUEST FOR THE GRAIL

Think of King Arthur and his valiant knights, who are all committed to the great quest for the Holy Grail. The grail is a goblet, in the mystery tradition, in the shape of the feminine yoni. In some Middle Eastern

languages the very word for “grail,” *kos*, connotes the wetness of the feminine yoni. The phrase “My cup runneth over” alludes to this hidden meaning in the mysteries of the grail. Arthur’s knights of the round table are in devotion to the saving of the damsel in distress. For the grail tradition, this refers to the “redemption of the Shechinah”—the Goddess—which is the liberation of Eros. The table is round, a circle, alluding to the curves of the feminine. The popular *The Da Vinci Code* novel evokes the Mary Magdalene tradition, which sees Jesus and Mary in sexual embrace. Both the knights of Camelot and the Magdalene mysteries are sourced in the Secret of the Cherubs. Indeed, Jesus and Mary are no less than the cherubs above the Ark. The voice of God cannot be heard other than through their embrace. A church that denies Magdalene cannot hear the voice of God. Then, of course, there is the source of it all, Solomon, the great builder of the Jerusalem Temple, who marries a thousand wives. In the cherub tradition, the thousand wives symbolize the great erotic project of Solomon. The intention of his project was no less than the restoration of Eros to its proper position as the North Star of our lives.

Solomon, Wisdom of Solomon, Ark, lost Ark, grail quest, Temple in Jerusalem, Mary Magdalene, cherubs, damsel in distress, Da Vinci code—all of these are words that have lost their meaning in our culture. All of them are allusions to Eros. All of them have their source, in one form or another, in the Secret of the Cherubs, which lies at the epicenter of Solomon’s temple. In recovering the meaning of the lost words, we both return to Eros and evoke the possibility of a new human and a new culture.

Contrary to the tenets of classical religion and much of psychology, Hebrew Tantra insists that sex is integrally related to love and Eros. Let’s look again, one step deeper, at these three words and their relationship to one another. When we use the word *love* in this book, we mean what we referred to earlier as outrageous love. Outrageous love is the ceaseless inherent creativity of the cosmos that animates and seduces all of reality to ever higher and deeper emergence. Hebrew mystics teach that the universe in every second is always making love. The Kabbalists’ word for it, *zivug*, connotes the outrageous erotic coupling that characterizes the cosmos at every level of reality. Outrageous love is Eros. Eros is love writ large, which is the essence of existence itself.

A NEW DIMENSION OF EROS

Eros, as we have seen, is the experience of radical aliveness.

Now let's point to a new dimension to Eros. Inextricable from the erotic experience of radical aliveness is the powerful drive for union, the drive to make contact. One succinct definition of Eros therefore might be: *Eros is radical aliveness passionately seeking contact.* The drive for contact is, however, not merely an additional dimension of Eros. Radical aliveness is how the drive to contact feels.

Now let's add yet another dimension of Eros: Contact always births something new. New intimacy, new creativity, new emergence. We can now reformulate our definition of Eros. *Eros is radical aliveness, passionately seeking contact, which always births something new.* The erotic equation might be formulated as Eros = Radical Aliveness + Contact + Creativity.

Now we turn to sex. The sexual expresses the fundamental eroticism of all of reality, from the subatomic to the celestial to the human. But sex does not exhaust the eroticism of nature. The sexual is an expression of Eros; it is not the whole of Eros. Eros is the inner texture of reality that lives awake, alive, and aware in every moment. To wake up to Eros is to wake up to the shocking yet stunning realization that the universe is passionately making love all the way up and all the way down creation. Sex in the human realm is an expression of that same core yearning for contact—Eros—that drives all of reality. *Sex is cosmic Eros performed in the flesh.*

Cosmology tells us that we are made from stardust in constant equilibrium—attracted and held together by gravitational pull, kept apart by centrifugal force. We are partnered and yet separate—all part of the great cosmic Eros of reality.

FOUR DIMENSIONS OF THE SECRET OF THE CHERUBS

Let's now state clearly the four major dimensions to the Secret of the Cherubs. The first dimension is that God is Eros. For the mystics, God is

identical to reality, or life. To say that God is Eros is to say reality is Eros or life is Eros. The second dimension is that the sexual is an expression of the Erotic movement that characterizes every level of the cosmos. The third dimension is that the sexual in its ideal form models what it means to live radically alive and on purpose, in every other nonsexual dimension of life. Sex models Eros. It is in this precise sense that the sexual is the seat of all wisdom. The fourth dimension, central to the cherub mystics, is that conscious human sex actually transforms reality itself. Human sex does not only participate in the Eros of the cosmos; it is much larger than that. When human beings perform the cosmic Eros in their own flesh with the intention of *tikkun*—the healing and transformation of all that is—then, in the language of the mystics, a “great evolutionary fixing” takes place in all worlds above and below. For the cherub mystics, the miracle of life is not realized in some future world. The wonder of life is that we’ve met and been together in sexual union, making love here, “in this half-made world, where love is yet to take its hold.”⁶ When we are together with the intention of restoring wholeness in a world of broken hearts, then we are living the erotic life.

Eros is the very aliveness of the cosmos expressed in all of its potency. When that potency awakens in you, your life becomes naturally good, true, and beautiful, and you become appropriately powerful beyond imagination. This is not a surface power that you wield against others, but a depth of power that allures others into the noble grace of your own full potency. When you awaken to the fullness of your own sexual power, you have the ability through your own erotic life to participate in the healing and transformation of all that is.

For the cherub mystics “the sexual union of man and woman” both models and participates in the more primal union of Shechinah (the divine feminine) and Tiferet (the divine masculine). By masculine and feminine, we do not mean man or woman but rather two essential forces of the universe. These universal cosmic forces are often referred to by the cherub mystics as lines and circles. They are different faces of the greater union, the force of divinity that courses through the cosmos and our own bodies. Their integration is the highest erotic expression of a healed world.

Now comes the truly radical insight! The human being is responsible for effecting the uniting of the masculine and the feminine in the God force. Entrusted to us is the sacred task of erotically merging the Shechinah and Tiferet, the Goddess and the God. We are the erotic mystics invested with the power to influence the force in powerful and profound ways.

This is possible because we reside in the undivided heart of God. It is not that we have power over God; rather, we have power as *part of* God. In our sexing we unite and balance the Shechinah and Tiferet poles within us. We heal the split in divinity. This is a sacred Tantric practice to unify, balance, and integrate the Shechinah and Tiferet, the circle and line poles within ourselves and in all of reality. We are bridge and balancer. It is we who bring home the exiled Shechinah. This erotic activism is modeled by the sexual but not exhausted by the sexual. That is what we mean when we say that sex models Eros. When we live the erotic life, in every dimension of our existence, then a *tikkun*, a “great evolutionary fixing,” takes place in all worlds. The twelve faces of Eros, each modeled by the sexual—which we will unfold in the second half of this book—are the path to living the erotic life.

This fourth core dimension of the Secret of the Cherubs makes natural sense in light of contemporary science. Modern chaos theory grounds this activist principle in the material world in a phenomenon called “the butterfly effect.” For example, the gentle breeze from a butterfly’s wing on one side of the world can, two months later, be the “cause” of a windstorm on the other side of the world. If that is true about the effect of a butterfly, then imagine the impact of human beings consciously coupling—performing cosmic Eros in the flesh—with the intent of healing and transformation. For the cherub mystics, this kind of erotic activism is a core principle of human ethics.

Let’s look more deeply at each of these dimensions. Eros is the fundamental movement in the universe toward contact. Sex is an expression of the core Eros of the cosmos. Sex is the drive for contact, the drive to bond, to connect, to be intimate. Sex is an expression of the drive to greater union, which is the creative essence of reality itself. In union, we all come home. But for the erotic mystics in the cherub tradition, home is

not the boredom of perpetual rest but ground for ever greater and deeper union. Sex models the ecstatic urgency, which is the feeling of the drive to union.

In union, two separate parts do not fuse but rather make contact through intimate bonding to create newness. This newness is the greater union, the higher love, which is the yearning of reality's Eros. From quarks, to atoms, to molecules, to cells, to early organisms, to plants, to animals, to mammals, to ideas themselves, this core drive for contact is the Eros of all of reality.

Said differently, the great realization of the spiritually incorrect Tantric masters is that reality is allurement. Allurement is the quality of attraction, which is the very fabric of existence. From electromagnetic attraction to gravity to rungs of evolutionary emergence to the intellectual sex between ideas that generates newness—all of reality is moved by the intense allurement for contact, which generates new creations.

Way before sex appears on the scene, allurement is at work throughout the cosmos, attracting all expressions of creation to each other. From the first nanoseconds of the big bang to the first quarks that generated your body, to your own life, unique allurement is what drives all of life. Who are you if not your unique set of allurements? Your physical structure is the composite of the allurements that caused its atoms to form into molecules, its molecules into cells, and its cells into organs. Everything in creation is attracted to everything else, and this urge to know each other, to communicate, to join and make something greater, is the allurement that lies at the very heart of life.

Sex is an expression of this erotic drive. In human sex, Eros becomes conscious of itself. In conscious human sex, all levels of one's being are brought into higher union. This is the new sexual narrative that we have called sex erotic. Cosmic Eros is enacted in the flesh. Sex erotic transcends and includes the physical. The human being becomes the creative drive of the cosmos, all levels of body, mind, emotion, and spirit moving toward union. This is the core of the Secret of the Cherubs. We will go deeper into this truth about the nature of reality in our conversation about allurement, which is the third face of Eros.

HIEROS GAMOS

The esoteric term for the great love affair of the cosmos is Hieros Gamos. The Secret of the Cherubs is the primary source of this great mystical secret. *Hieros Gamos* is Latin for “the divine marriage.” The divine marriage is the hidden mystical doctrine of the spiritually incorrect Tantric masters in virtually all of the great traditions. What does the divine marriage mean? It is not about God going shopping. Hieros Gamos is the hidden way of saying nothing less than “God is Eros.” Or we might say even more directly, reality is Eros.

At every level of existence, two expressions of reality seek contact with each other to birth not only new but also higher and deeper orders of existence. These two forces used to be called masculine and feminine, but they are not gender specific. We can no longer exclusively identify them with men or women. They are two energetic qualities of the cosmos that live in all of reality, including in every human being. Borrowing a term from the erotic mystic Isaac Luria, we call these cosmic forces lines and circles. In Luria’s evocative image, *every moment of reality, on all levels and in all worlds, is born from the [unique] interpenetration of lines and circles that takes place in that moment.*⁷ In other words, all of reality is erotic union.

Lines and circles were qualities of reality way before any gendered masculine and feminine existed. Line qualities include the forces of autonomy, independence, thrusting, and direction. In physics, these forces express as the particle (in contrast to the wave), centrifugal force, and the force of repulsion that opposes attraction. Circle qualities include the forces of allurement, attraction, reception, and cycle. In physics, these forces might be expressed as the wave (in contrast to the particle), centripetal force, and the quality of attraction that opposes repulsion. Physicist Niels Bohr insisted that a wave and a particle cannot exist separately from each other but are in a complementary both/and relationship, a sacred marriage of energy and matter.

The primary forces of lines and circles were already well known to the ancients. They are identified in the great traditions as God and Goddess or King and Queen. In Hinduism, they are called Shiva and Shakti,

in Taoism yin and yang. In Kabbalah, they are known by many terms, including Shechinah and Tiferet as well as the upper waters and the lower waters. In ancient Egypt, there were earth and sky. In the grail tradition, the knight with his linelike lance seeks the Holy Grail, the circlelike chalice. While these traditions often had markedly different visions of what constituted masculine and feminine, in all of them the goal is Hieros Gamos, some form of divine marriage in which the polarities are integrated into a larger whole. In science it was Niels Bohr who insisted that a wave and particle cannot exist separately from each other but in complementary both/and relationship, a sacred marriage of energy and matter.

SEX EROTIC

All of this forms the matrix of the new sexual narrative: sex erotic. Evolutionary theory, systems science, the new physics, the Kabbalistic Secret of the Cherubs, and the ancient knowing of Hieros Gamos all come together to weave this new sexual story. Reality is erotic. Human sexual Eros participates directly in the erotic nature of the cosmos. Or, said differently, human sexual eros models the great Eros of the cosmos at every level of reality. Reality is Eros, God is allurement, reality is allurement, the sexual models the erotic, God is Eros—all of these are potent expressions of the new sexual narrative for our time.

None of the classical sexual narratives—sex positive, sex negative, sex neutral, or sex sacred—have the capacity to address the fullness of our sexual experience. All are true, but only partially. Moreover, none of these four narratives is an affront to shame. It is only this fifth sexual narrative, sex erotic, the sexual story for our time, that has the potency to deconstruct shame. When you understand that at its source, sexual desire arises in you as the allurement of life itself yearning for contact, shame is eviscerated. The universe is erotic, motivated and animated by allurement and attraction. The sexual drive is but an expression of the core evolutionary Eros that moves all reality. It is only this spiritually incorrect but scientifically accurate understanding of reality that can birth a sexual narrative that honors the radical dignity of our desire.

FROM ETHICS TO ETHOS

If you are with us up to this point, it will be self-evident to you that “reality is Eros” has absolutely nothing to do with inappropriate sexuality. Reality is Eros takes radical sexual ethics as a given. It addresses the next step beyond sexual ethics, upon which all sexual ethics depend. It is the articulation of a sexual ethos—that is to say, a sexual story that is true both to spirit and science and to our own deepest experience and yearning.

Reality as Eros is an ethos that speaks equally to liberal Protestants, progressive devout Catholics, Orthodox and liberal Jews, Southern Baptists, Colorado New Agers, singles, hipsters, Millennials, yuppies, and entrepreneurs of every color, nationality, creed, and orientation. Reality is Eros has nothing to do with whether you are monogamous, celibate, or polyamorous. It has nothing to do with your particular sexual style or code of behavior. The knowing that reality is Eros is, however, is core to your most fundamental vision of reality, and therefore your core experience of both your sexual and your erotic self. A complementary way of saying this is that God is Eros or God is love. Reality is love. Not ordinary love but outrageous love, the love that is Eros.

The reason that we add the words *outrageous love*—as we noted above—is because it has a power that the word *love* does not have by itself. Outrageous love is caring, compassionate, and kind. But outrageous love also has a fierce quality. This is the quality that the word *outrageous* connotes. In English, we do not have a word that captures the quality of reality that seamlessly arouses, attracts, allures, enchants, shatters, demands, and delights. We are so overwhelmed by the power of this quality that we assign to it a word—outrageous—that is on the one hand confronting and demanding and on the other raw delight, desire, and amazement. Outrageous love is Eros.

Eros is not just sex. Sex is too small a word to contain the wholeness of Eros. Sex merely points toward Eros. Eros is so much greater. The erotic is the pulse of God beating at every level of reality. So, by Eros we

do not mean human sex, but rather the cosmic Eros of which sex is but one potent expression.

If we trace sex to its source we realize that the body electric is plugged straight into God. Once you discover that current, you will never be the same.

LOVING THE MOMENT OPEN

One of the principles that emerges from chaos theory contributes to a deeper understanding of the Secret of the Cherubs, and it is this: Every moment is either open or closed. Alfred North Whitehead, the great philosopher, reminds us that the “creative advance of novelty” is a defining feature of the cosmos. This means that reality opens to novelty in every moment. Or, as physicist Stuart Kauffman points out, we live in a ceaselessly creative universe. At the human level, the evolutionary impulse that drives the universe toward new depth moves us from unconscious growth to what evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley calls “conscious evolution.” In Hebrew, the word *development* or *evolution* is the same word as *opening*. To evolve means to open. To awaken to conscious evolution is to come to realize that there is only one great human choice in every moment: to open or to close. The Secret of the Cherubs integrated with the leading edge of science informs us that the moment and the human being are not separate from each other. In every moment we have the choice to be open or closed. In other words, we have the choice to actually love open the moment—EVERY MOMENT—and the moment opens, or we can choose to remain closed, and the moment remains closed.

When we stay open in love we are pulsing alive in the flow of life. We then have the capacity to love the moment open. When the moment is opened, new life is created. If the moment remains closed, the potential new life is stillborn. It is therefore a simple evolutionary truth that to open or to close is no less than to love or to die. Those are the two evolutionary choices available in every moment.

CREATION EVERY SECOND

The reason that in every moment you must decide whether to be open or closed is because every moment is new. In every new moment you either love the moment open or you let the moment love you open. To love the moment open is to penetrate the moment. To be loved open by the moment is to let the moment penetrate you. That is what it means to be open and alive. The alternative is to be closed and dead.

The pivotal insight that every moment is a new quality of intimacy is core to the realization that reality is Eros. The erotic explosion in which the unmanifest becomes manifest is not a one-time event. Said differently, the big bang or creation did not happen once upon a time. It is—both mystically and scientifically—happening right now.

Eros is the initiating energy of the cosmos, the evolutionary impulse that creates all worlds; countless planets; myriad suns, moons, and stars; and every single particle of cosmic dust. Originally, creation, or the big bang, was thought to have been a one-time, initiatory event, an erotic divine implosion in which the primal line bisected the primal circle and the cosmos poured forth. Mystics and leading-edge quantum field theorists tell us differently. The erotic Hebrew mystic Levi Isaac opens his commentary with a radical assertion: creation is happening every second. The great flaring forth of reality is enacted anew every moment. As some quantum field theorists put it, reality flashes in and out of existence every moment. The very force of Eros, which is divinity, is constantly pouring through existence. God is Eros!

My (Kristina) eighth-grade science teacher, who was an avowed atheist, used to say, “You can’t get something from nothing.” He was only partially right, however. Within the atomic world, governed by the classic laws of physics, indeed, everything comes from something. But both the universe itself and the subatomic world—which contains the core building blocks of all of reality—literally come from nowhere. Reality is *creatio ex nihilo*—something from nothing.

In the language of the cherub mystics, we might say that reality was ecstatically exploded into existence by source. Creation is not from nothing but from no-thing. They call this *yesh me-ayin*. *Yesh*, “something,”

comes from *ayin*, which is best translated as “no-thing” or “the realm of pure possibility.” But this erotic explosion that births reality is not a discrete event. The pulsing throb of outrageous love is the constant nature of reality, right now and now and now. Reality births new intimacy and new possibility in every moment.

All of reality as we know it is created out of subatomic particles. Quantum physics tells us that these particles flash in and out of the quantum field in every second. They are constantly popping in and out of existence. The particles pop out of our time, space, matter, energy, and the reality that we know into what is technically called a virtual state. This is a state of pure potentiality. It is in this sense that God is referred to by mystics as the possibility of possibility. Pure potentiality fiercely loves reality into existence in every moment. The two sexually intertwined cherubs above the Ark in the Holy of Holies represent the constant movement of pure potentiality loving reality into existence anew in every second. This rhythm of reality is the core nature of all existence.

The brain operates in much the same way. Millions of separate signals throughout the brain are constantly flashing on and off. The place in the brain in which reality “disappears” before it turns back is in the synapses between neurons, the empty space that scientific language refers to as the gap between all neuronal connections. In the language of the cherub mystics, we might say that the gap is “the space between the cherubs.” Mind the gap, for it is where creation mysteriously takes place.

According to neuroscience, there are some quadrillion synaptic connections that flash in and out of reality in the adult brain. It is in this gap that creation mysteriously takes place. Reality thus flashes in and out of existence through the perpetual Eros that emerges in the spaces in between. In the sacred texts of the Secret of the Cherubs, “the voice of God speaks from the space between the cherubs.” The voice of God is no less than the constant ecstatic creativity birthed from pure potentiality, activated from synapses “in between.”

What is so vital to realize is that this is not a one-time event but is the constant nature of existence.

In Hebrew, the implication of this perpetual Eros—the constant hidden intercourse of the cosmos—is captured in the word *zeman*. *Zeman*

has three related meanings: “time,” “invitation,” and “radical readiness.” The implication is that every moment in time is a new invitation. There is unrelenting optimism in this insight. The very depths of reality can be recreated in every moment. Yesterday can never define today. New possibility is constantly available. The pure potentiality of this moment births that which did not exist a moment ago. All trauma can therefore be healed. All pain can be transformed in the new moment.

What is required for that transformation is the third meaning of *zeman*: radical readiness. The image of a runner primed to sprint at the beginning of a race is helpful here. “Ready, set, go.” It is that sense of being fully entered by the moment and fully penetrating the moment with your readiness that embodies the understanding that reality is *zivug*, reality is Eros. This is what St. Thomas knew when he said, “The dynamic pulse and throb of creation is the love of all things for the infinite.” We might slightly reframe the end of the sentence to say, “the love of all things *within* the infinite.” There is nothing apart from the infinite field of pure potentiality yearning to emerge. All of reality is penetrating and being penetrated all the way up and all the way down. All of reality is constantly making love with itself. *This love awakens from hardwired instinct to human choice when we move from unconscious to conscious evolution.*

Every moment waits for you to love it open. To love the moment open you must be fearlessly present, facing everything, avoiding nothing. In denial, the moment closes. In radical recognition coupled with audacious yet humble embrace, the moment opens. For the cherub mystics this is what it means to continuously make love with the divine one. This is what it means to live an erotic life, to be an outrageous lover. For the cherub mystics, the human being who awakens into full consciousness incarnates the throb and pulse of evolution.

Remember the story of the dancing master in chapter four? Had the Kung Fu master merely killed the dancing master with his superior skill, the moment would have remained closed. Even if the old dancing master had succeeded in besting the Kung Fu master, the moment would not have fully opened. No new quality of consciousness would have been achieved. It was only when a new dance emerged, in which the dancing

master and the Kung Fu warrior were both transformed, that a new quality of consciousness was birthed into reality. Both the dancing master and the Kung Fu fighter claimed the full aliveness of his being as each met his unique destiny.

We are all dancing masters. When we succumb to smallness, contraction, corruption, or unlove, the moment closes. When we expand into the full aliveness of our Unique Selves, we have the power to love the moment open and to receive the potent promise of that specific instant in time. When we talk about loving the moment open or letting the moment love us open, we are not talking about a sweet or even a gentle movement. We are talking about an intensity of presence, receptivity, and thrust that opens the moment to meet the implicit creative demand of its and our raw potency.

A SEXUAL UNIVERSE

We live in a sexual universe. From subatomic particles to the plant world, where the birds and bees are symbolic of the great pollination dance, to animals, plants, and humans, to the celestial attraction between planets, the fundamental structure of reality is allurements and attractions that create profound contact at every level of the evolutionary chain. This is what we mean by Eros. We live in a universe driven by allurements. In that sense, we could say that reality is Eros all the way up to the highest spirit forms and all the way down to the smallest subatomic particles and the most essential forces of the universe.

A COSMOS DRIVEN BY EROS

We live in a cosmos driven by Eros. The universe is a perfect, interconnected whole that at the same time seeks greater wholeness. The universe is radically alive, infused with presence and infinite vitality, even as it is infinitely intimate and whole. Everything rests in the being-ness of spacious perfection.

And yet the universe is driven by evolutionary Eros. The cosmos is not only being but also becoming. Whereas being is characterized by harmony and equilibrium, becoming is characterized by a kind of ecstatic urgency and disequilibrium. Evolutionary Eros is constant becoming. It is the inherent, ceaseless desire for more and more contact and creativity. Consciousness yearns for contact. More contact always births new creativity. New creativity creates new babies of all kinds, or what science calls new evolutionary emergents. This is not an accident but the essential, sacred nature of an erotic universe. This is the lure of becoming that animates and drives all existence.

Walt Whitman caught a glimpse of this reality in his poem “Song of Myself”:

*Urge and urge and urge,
Always the procreant urge of the world.
Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always substance and
increase, always sex,
Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of
life.*

WHY SEX IS THE ULTIMATE MODEL

The sexual models the erotic for two simple reasons. First, because reality is Eros. Second, because sex or allurements is the structural nature of reality, Eros all the way up and all the way down, it is utterly natural that the sexual models the erotic. It is almost self-evident that Eros should be the seat of all wisdom about reality. How could it be otherwise? *Sex models the Eros of all reality, which inherently seeks more and more contact, mutuality, recognition, union, and embrace.*

To paraphrase the evolutionary mystic Teilhard de Chardin, the fragments of the world, driven by the forces of Eros, seek each other so that the world may come into being. Desire is, at its most fundamental level, the desire for contact. Contact always births newness. The new thing might be a baby. Or it might mean a new level of intimacy. New might

mean new creativity or possibility. In what evolutionary theorist Matt Ridley calls Idea Sex, “new” means new insight and new discovery that comes from intimate contact between ideas and people who are attracted to each other. Sex is an expression of the evolutionary Eros. The desire for contact is an expression of the core nature of the evolutionary Eros that drives all reality. This Eros animates every dimension of life. Sex models Eros means that sex is the arena where the ecstatic urgency of our drive to make contact is most apparent, most obviously pleasurable, and most self-evidently creative.

CHAPTER SIX

EROS

FROM FEAR TO LIBERATION

Eros—as we will see more clearly in the unfolding of the Secret of the Cherubs—is the core nature of reality, all the way up and all the way down the evolutionary ladder. When Eros awakens in us, it expresses itself as the radical drive for contact and connection. It is not a uniquely human impulse but rather the impulse of all of reality becoming conscious of itself in us. When we feel our Eros we feel radically alive and at home in the cosmos. We are filled with an unmistakable telos. We begin to live purpose-driven lives, which drip with the nectar of Eros itself. *Our lives become telerothic.*

EROS IS OUR BIRTHRIGHT

Our bodies and hearts know that Eros is our birthright. It is not merely an intensifier of the ordinary. Rather, it points to the extraordinary energy

at our core, which is the true marker of our deepest desire. The failure of Eros is the loss of aliveness that psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich correctly diagnosed as the “emotional plague of man.” It is not the loss of a particular privilege or experience. It is a deadening of all experience. The disconnection from Eros is cause for the loss of our unmediated knowing that life is good. When we become alienated from Eros, we forget our true identity and lose our dignity. We forget that we are good children of the universe that seeks our transformation. It is in the dignity of Eros that we recognize the glory of our true situation. It is in the dignity of Eros that we are personally addressed by reality. It is in the dignity of Eros that we know that we are needed, desired, and chosen by all that is.

BYPASSING EROS CREATES ABUSE

The loss of the larger sense of Eros reduces Eros to mere sex. This, by its very nature, creates the rupture of contact and severing of connection that fosters the abuse of sex in all of its forms. Sex is abused when it is cut off from the larger context of Eros in which it lives. When sex is disconnected from the larger Eros, it cannot help but collapse on itself because we are asking far too much from it. Sex then implodes in every form of addiction and abuse. It is only when sex becomes a portal to the unique potency that flows through us from source—what we have called sex erotic—that the dignity and delight of Eros are restored.

When sex is cut off from our total being, from our deeper wholeness, and we ask it for favors it cannot grant, then Eros is degraded. It devolves from a blessing that bestows joy to an abusive curse that inflicts suffering. Abuse may appear as sexual harassment, rape, name rape, or false sexual complaints. Abuse results from the denial of our core equation, Reality = Eros. To deny Eros is to deny reality. Eros then reappears in degraded forms of sexual acting out or in the weaponizing of sex through false sexual stories. We must always remember that arousal is not consent and regret is not rape.

We must always stay connected to the goodness of Eros. Our disconnection from the aliveness of reality’s inherent Eros results from our

exiling of the larger Eros that animates all of reality into the constraints of merely sexual Eros. Sexual Eros comes alive when it begins to enact cosmic Eros. This is the narrative of sex erotic.

SHAME AND GUILT

Let's now revisit the principle that we introduced above. Shame is the root of all evil. Shame is different from guilt. Guilt is a healthy human emotion that arises when we have done something bad. Shame, by contrast, is the experience not that we have done something bad but that we *are* bad. Shame is the feeling that we are somehow broken and cannot be fixed. More often than not, shame is rooted in something sexual. Self-images of control, artificial dignity, status, appropriateness, and more all need to be surrendered at the altar of the sexual.

Because the sexual challenges our conventional sense of identity, to heal shame we must articulate the new sexual narrative of sex erotic. In sex erotic, the sexual models the erotic. It is paradoxically the greater Eros that illuminates and eroticizes the small eros. *Shame is when sex stops short of infinity.* We heal shame when we realize that the sexual does not regress our identity but rather it expands and evolves our identity. The sexual, as we will show when we discuss the twelve faces of Eros, offers us a glimpse into who we might be if we realized who we already are.

THE UNIVERSE FEELS

The universe feels, and the universe feels the pulse and throb of Eros. It feels the intensity of desire and passion that is expressed in the word *erotic*. The greatest human desire is to participate in the Eros of reality. But we are afraid of the feeling of the erotic. It makes us feel out of control or vulnerable in a way we would rather deny or repress. It is only by entering the pounding surge of Eros and tracing it back to its original divine source that we begin to live the erotic life. But if we bypass the pounding surge it will demand its pound of flesh. The feeling of erotic

desire is the incessant longing of the universe to meet other forms of itself in order to birth new creations from the joy of that contact.

RECOVERING OUR MEMORY OF *ZIVUG*

The great *zivug* of the cosmos has been forgotten. We forget that we live in a reality whose core principle is allurements. For the Greeks, the loss of knowledge is the source of all evil. For the erotic mystic, the loss of memory is the source of all evil. Our failed memory of *zivug* is the source of great pain and confusion. On the one hand we forget that, according to the leading edge of quantum theory, reality is coming in and out of existence in every second. Mystics call the interior of this same phenomenon “constant creation.” Constant creation is the outrageous love, what the mystics call *zivug matmedet*—perpetual Eros—which fiercely and tenderly loves reality into being in every second.

However, it is not only that we have forgotten. In addition, our denial of the erotic is so desperate and intense that we have forgotten that we have forgotten. And yet, in the midst of our amnesia, we yearn to participate in the Eros of the cosmos. Anything less will not satisfy us. We yearn for what we have forgotten, and so we cannot explain our yearning to ourselves. We no longer understand our innermost drives. We have lost touch with the radical yearning for intense contact that is the axiomatic desire of reality alive in us.

FEAR OF EROS

Why are we so afraid of Eros? The erotic, at its core, is the primal drive to make contact. It is the urge to merge—at least temporarily—with another being. It is an urge that is so intense that we are willing to give up much of our vaunted sense of dignity and self to accomplish it. But we are afraid of this urge because it undermines our sense of identity. The illusion of being a self-sufficient, separate being, independent and autonomous, is significantly challenged or shattered by Eros. We assume that this

undermining of identity is regressive. Therefore, we fight it—personally, religiously, and culturally—with everything we have, because identity is the lifeboat we desperately need to feel safe in the world.

But what if the undermining of identity catalyzed by the erotic was not regressive but expansive and evolutionary? What if we really understood that Eros is the stirring within the infinite awakening as our arousal? What if erotic desire in all of its expressions simply reminded us that we are interconnected—that we need each other? What if the beds of our delight invited us to the practice of our devotions?

That is what we mean when we say that sex models Eros. This is the hidden Tantric teaching of non-rejection that appears in every great tradition. In Hebrew Tantra—the Secret of the Cherubs—we enter desire and trace it to its root, the ceaseless creativity of the cosmos that is perpetually birthed through ever more intimate contact. Desire is the doorway into the elemental Eros and allurement that drives all of reality. Desire models the great yearning for connection and contact.

Because we can't see that Eros is a doorway, we make it into a closed room with no way in or out. We then proceed to identify the erotic with its most degraded forms, hence our intense and even desperate fear of the erotic.

The Secret of the Cherubs is simple: we degrade Eros because it makes us feel out of control, but hidden in the erotic is the very source code of the cosmos itself. Reality itself is Eros. Awakening to our sexual longing models our desire to live a fully erotic life in every dimension of existence. The Secret of the Cherubs is that the great Eros of the cosmos is hidden in the small eros of sex.

SHRINKING FROM ALIVENESS: THE FEAR OF PLEASURE

The Carousel Nightmare

Our close associate, Holly, whom we have worked with for many years, brought a recurrent childhood dream into our Holy of Holies space.

(The Holy of Holies, you may remember, is the term for the inner sanctum of the Jerusalem Temple. In working with students at our Tantric institute, we refer to our study space, also, as “the Holy of Holies.” It is a re-creation of the “space between the cherubs.” It is neither a therapeutic nor a coaching space, and certainly not any form of guru relationship. It is an ecstatic yet rigorous context where we meet, as fully autonomous spiritual friends. Our intent is always to support the full emergence of the Unique Self of the person doing the work.) Here is Holly’s dream:

As a child, I had a recurring nightmare of a carousel spinning very near me, with its lights, colors, bells, and shouts of adults on painted horses reaching for the brass ring. Sometimes the riders succeeded and sometimes they reached for the ring in vain, carried around the circle until another turn for glory or another shot at victory was lost.

I didn’t know much about carnival rides yet—I was three and had only ridden a couple of times on an actual carousel, with the brass ring mechanism offering its prizes high above my reach. I loved riding painted horses, but I had that dream countless times, waking up screaming and drawing someone, parent or babysitter, to my room. I had no words to explain, just fear enveloping me as I saw myself swept under the wheel of the carousel or dragged aboard it, circling endlessly with no control over its direction or my own.

In my earliest memories, this dream was somehow familiar to me—I knew I had had it before—but what I remember on one particular occasion is my father coming to my rescue, standing beside me near the window, holding a stuffed toy bunny that was my frequent companion in waking life.

I imagine the words my dad must have used, “Wake up, Holly, it’s just a dream. I’m here. Mom’s downstairs. You’re safe.” I remember him asking with a gentle and quizzical smile, “What is this dream that scares you about?”

I remember feeling it was impossible and maybe useless to explain. I had probably tried to describe it before, and I could

see that it was upsetting to him to see me so distraught. So instead, I invented a more solvable problem. “I dreamed that I lost my bunny,” I said tearfully. “I couldn’t find him anywhere. He was gone.” My father held the missing bunny out to me. “But look, he’s right here!” he reassured me. I took the bunny under my arm, thanking Dad for returning him to me. He had solved the problem, and I went back to sleep. But of course, it was a false problem—and the carousel spun on in my dreams.

I don’t entirely know what the carousel dream was about, but I had it frequently. And I seemed already to know there were some things it was better not to talk about.

In our conversations, Holly added the following reflections about her dream:

I was learning not to feel, or more accurately, not to know or to admit to what I felt. I still did feel it, of course, or I wouldn’t have had a recurring nightmare about it, but I hid it even from myself—a terror and attraction that I could not explain.

As our conversation deepened, Holly began to grasp the dream’s meaning:

As I look back on my carousel dream, I think what frightened me was what frightens us all at times: the threat of being crushed by the enormous and potent energy of the world. Of course, I had no words for this. Just to feel it takes courage. We are all ambivalent about it—something attractive and alluring, something scary and dangerous.

As we worked with the dream together over the years, its meaning came into clearer focus. The carousel represents Eros. The carousel moves in a circle. The circle is a classic expression of the primal Eros of nature in its cycles. It is potent, enlivening, and sometimes deadly. The brass ring—another circle symbol—is the prize of erotic fulfillment. It always

seems just beyond our grasp. The horse—a potent symbol in classical myth—represents the raw experience of radical aliveness. The dream is about the fear of Eros. The carousel, with its colors, lights, and sounds, is deeply alluring, but it is also seriously frightening.

Holly's fear that "envelops" her is that she will be "swept under the wheel of the carousel or dragged aboard it." That is the fear of being overwhelmed and destroyed by Eros. This is the primary fear of Eros. Then there is a secondary fear of Eros, that of "circling endlessly with no control over its direction or my own." Holly understands that Eros is both "attractive and alluring" even as it occurs to her as "scary and dangerous."

Naturally, Holly could not share the dream with her father. The father principle is order and safety. Holly intuitively knew, even though she could not express it in words, that she could not share either her attraction or her fear of Eros with the person who represented safety and order in her life. So she lied. She told her dad she lost her bunny. This was a problem he could solve. He retained the illusion that he was in control and could make his daughter happy. Holly, however, in hiding the dream, split herself off from Eros—both her own and that of the world, for the two are indivisible.

Holly's father represents the values of conventional culture, which seek to protect the child against Eros. The fear of Eros held by the father is transmitted to the child. Because all children seek the blessings of the father, the child naturally adopts into her psyche the father's fear of Eros.

In the earlier stages of life, Eros is very bound up with pleasure, and specifically with the most basic pleasures of food and sexuality. A key subset of the fear of Eros is naturally the fear of pleasure. Wilhelm Reich was not wrong when he wrote that "the pleasure of orgasm and the pleasure of living are identical" and that "extreme anxiety" about sexual pleasure "forms the basis of a general fear of life."⁸ Fundamental pleasure is a core quality of Eros.

Pleasure is one of the twelve faces of Eros that we will explore later in this book. At this point, let us simply consider pleasure from the perspective of our fear of it. A very young child intuitively knows that cosmic

Eros is expressed in pleasure. Pleasure is the child's natural early connection to the larger field of Eros and existence. But, as we saw with Holly, our parents often rupture that intuitive currency of connection.

PARENTS AND THE SEPARATE SELF

Our parents call our separate self into existence. The default identity of most people, the separate self is our sense of being a skin-encapsulated ego. We experience ourselves as ultimately separate from each other, from nature, and from spirit. Our identity as a separate self is not actually a true identity. As we will see in later chapters, it is not our ultimate identity. It has been called by some of the wisest among us “an optical delusion of consciousness,”⁹ but it remains the persona of most people most of the time. This identity is only transcended if a person evolves her consciousness and undergoes a genuine developmental identity transformation.

We will talk about this in depth in our chapter on uniqueness (the fifth face of Eros) and in our final chapter on union. But for now it is important to note that both our fear of Eros and our first experience of separate self are inextricably linked and virtually always come from our parents.

Our parents, hopefully, love us. But they also see us as fragile separate selves in need of protection. On the one hand, this is good, for they are inspired to protect us and to teach us how to protect ourselves. This is one basic aim of education. We learn how to navigate society so we will be able to “take care of ourselves.” Because our parents experience us as vulnerable separate selves, they move to limit our unmediated contact with the forces of nature, both human and elemental. We are taught from birth the rules of navigation that will buy us safe passage through the turbulent and dangerous Eros of existence.

Part of the protection they afford us, against our will, is the protection from pleasure. Pleasure is seen by society (and by our parents as representatives of society) to be part of the inexorable force of reality that might seduce us away from our responsibilities or otherwise sweep us

away. So when Holly is allured to the carousel, she knows—even though she has no words for her knowing—that she cannot share that truth with her father. Her fear of pleasure gets tangled with her desire to receive her father's blessing. The result is that the fear of pleasure—a corollary to the fear of Eros—goes underground. She cannot express it, even to herself. But it remains an omnipresent if unconscious force in her life that appears recurrently as the carousel dream.

Pleasure represents—not just symbolically but also experientially—the world beyond the separate self. We see that in our own daily experience. Pleasure attenuates the experience of separate self. When we feel pleasure, the boundaries of separation soften. The simple experience of eating relaxes the anxiety of separation. That's why our love of food goes far beyond the need to sate our actual hunger. Like food, sex also eases the pain caused by the sharp boundaries of alienation and loneliness.

ADDICTION AND “NEGATIVE PLEASURES”

In its unhealthy expression, this quality of pleasure, which relaxes separation anxiety, is the source of addiction. For example, when we are feeling depressed or lonely, we may feel drawn to eat or to masturbate. In the pleasure that is aroused, we are able—even if only for the duration of the physical sensations—to feel less scared and alienated.

When physical pleasure is misappropriated as our sole source of Eros, it becomes addictive and therefore ultimately destructive. Because our original relationship to pleasure is distorted so early in our lives, it loses its ability to hold us in its lap. The primal pleasures of eating and sex are sharply regimented by our parents, who impose myriad cultural rules and restrictions. As a result, we do not feel the spacious holding and radical affirmation of our belonging that reality intended to communicate through pleasure. We do not feel pleasure caressing our hearts and whispering in our ear, “You are honored and desired by all that is. You are a good child of the universe. You deserve to live an erotic life filled with every sacred pleasure.”

Too many of our parents communicate in countless ways that pleasure by itself is not good. One of their most subtle messages is that pleasure is not a good in itself but is rather a reward for doing something good. Cleaning up your room is the good act; your reward is ice cream. Parents writ large as culture have long ago lost touch with the elemental insight on Eros and pleasure that lies at the heart of the cherub tradition: “God saw that it was good.”

When the parent moves to control the child’s life impulses, then the child starts to turn away from life. This is the beginning of the exile of Eros. The child begins with open hands, shouting a resounding “yes!” to life. But when that “yes” is sharply rebuked, then the child closes not only his hands, but also himself. The natural energy of Eros distorts, and life turns in on itself.

Since reality is Eros—one core expression of which is pleasure—a vacuum of Eros or pleasure is intolerable. So the child begins to fill himself with what might be called “negative pleasures.” Both the term and the idea are rooted in key passages in Freud’s writing. When you lose contact with the larger erotic life force, you turn away from life. You take the energy of pleasure back into yourself, where it twists and distorts. It appears as withholding, anger, resentment, and inappropriate aggression. The natural erotic current of “yes” energy is turned into “no.” The child defines herself by protecting her separate self from all that is outside of her boundary. At the same time, her natural allurements to Eros and pleasure is disowned and goes underground.

Materialist psychology tries to subdue Eros and pleasure by identifying it with personality dysfunction or neurosis. But pleasure is not an aberration from reality. At its core, the pleasure principle is the reality principle. The rupture of our experience from Eros and pleasure is therefore a primal alienation from reality itself.

Denial, as psychology has well documented, always demands its proverbial pound of flesh. Denial of our essential erotic nature will always create distortion of the most tragic kind. As social philosopher Norman O. Brown writes in explanation of Freud, when taken too far, the

alienation from Eros is the path of sickness and self-destruction. The repression of libido turns the lack of Eros into pain.

Wilhelm Reich calls this alienation from Eros the emotional plague of man. When man's erotic force is blocked, it turns in on itself, seeking expression. The result, he says, is that "man can murder, rape, and pillage."¹⁰ Reich was perhaps Freud's most brilliant student. Reich broke with Freud over the latter's inability to understand the cosmic nature of Eros.

The hidden fear of the full power of Eros remains with us throughout our lives, expressing itself in many ways. One way the fear manifests is in our relationship with pleasure. Whenever we go to engage pleasure, the original "no" of culture or parents shows up. That first "no" was sharp and painful. We experienced it not as a "no" to something external to us but as a "no" to our essential selves. Our core desire, our most primal "yes," was rejected. The pain of that originally rejected Eros is reawakened every time we move toward Eros or pleasure. The original fear of Eros, learned in our earliest years, is layered with the pain of rejection that our original erotic "yes" occasioned. The fear of Eros is thus a kind of double loop that shapes our entire lives.

Fear of Eros fosters the alienation that lies at the heart of our culture. Freud is a primary example of this disconnection from Eros that has contributed so much to our modern disease. Freud identified the pleasure principle as being characteristic of the earliest stages of life before a child matures. At maturity, he argued, the reality principle supplants the pleasure principle: the ego then guides the id as the child's new North Star. Should the pleasure principle reappear inappropriately in the child's life, that is considered "regressive." But this Freudian philosophy sets up pleasure and Eros in opposition to reality. In fact the opposite is true: Eros is the very nature of reality all the way up and all the way down the chain of being. To set up a semantic field in which pleasure and reality are antonyms is a potent expression of our fear of Eros. To return to Eros, we must therefore establish the core principle of reality as Eros. That is the intent of these chapters.

THE HIDDEN LIGHT

There is a beautiful teaching in the cherub tradition about the hidden light. It is written that when God created the world, he hid the most intense light until the time of the world to come, when it would be available for the righteous. Simply read, this is a mythic story about the anthropomorphic God saving the really good stuff for the really good people at the end of time. The cherub mystics, however, read it differently. The world to come is the space of liberated consciousness that is already present right now. The righteous are those who are able to access that liberated consciousness, the full intensity and beauty of the hidden light.

“But where,” ask the cherub mystics, “is the light hidden?” They answer elliptically, “The light is hidden in the darkness.” By “darkness” the mystics mean the same thing that Eastern sages refer to as ignorance—the blindness of unconscious drives. Blind need or desire is the nature of the sexual in the experience of the vast majority of people. It is when the sexual wakes up to its true erotic nature that the hidden light is revealed. Said directly: For most of us, the great realization of Eros is hidden in the small eros of the sexual. Eros is the ultimate nature of reality. Reality desires ever greater contact and ever greater intimacy. This is true on every level of reality, from the subatomic all the way through the human. This is the “hidden light” secreted in the darkness for the “righteous ones” in the “world to come.”

The great gnosis of reality as allurements—reality as Eros—is hidden in the sexual. The hidden light is too intense for ordinary reality. Ordinary reality is—as it should be—based on boundaries and separation. But on a deeper level, we are all so profoundly interconnected and interdependent that the notion of separation becomes ludicrous. Imagine if you met a person and you could clearly see all the myriad lines of connection between you. Imagine if you could see through the veil of separation and witness the thousands of seemingly random events in previous generations that were intended by the self-organizing universe to bring you together with this person, in this precise moment, for this precise meeting. Imagine that you also were able to hold in your mind’s eye the dazzling meshwork of allurements holding your world together. You would

see level upon level of stunning beauty and symmetry, beginning with the atomic level and then moving to the chemical, cellular, biological, and cultural structures of allurements at each level of reality.

Holding this paradox between our radical uniqueness as distinct beings and the realization that we are not in any way separate from the seamless coat of the universe is what it means to be awake. This is the hidden gnosis that animates the erotic life.

This knowing is hidden in the erotic. The erotic in its degraded forms is precisely the darkness that the mystics referred to. When Eros is in its degraded form, we are repulsed and filled with shame. The edifice of our nobility and goodness seems shattered by the irrational urges that threaten to overwhelm many of the values and principles that we hold so dear. As cultural critic and sexual therapist Esther Perel once remarked, “We long to do at night what we protest against during the day.”

Desire is politically and socially incorrect. The solution, however, is not to act on every desire. Sex requires a radically awake sexual ethics that protects every man and woman from every form of unwelcome sexual advance. Rather, what we need to do is to trace Eros back to its source. Degraded Eros must not be bypassed but excavated. We need to find the root of our desire, which is desire itself. When we trace our desire back to its source we realize that it is not personal to us. Rather, allurements are the nature of reality itself. Reality then awakens in us personally.

But allurements are not only the nature of reality—it is also the glory of reality. All parts seek to make contact. All parts yearn for ever greater mutuality, recognition, union, and embrace. It is only in the evolved human being, however—the superior man and woman—that desire awakens to its true nature. In humans, Eros awakens to itself. We move from unconscious desire to conscious desire. We move from chance to choice. More than that, we realize that sexual desire models all desire. Our deepest desire is for radical aliveness, contact, and creativity. We yearn to awaken as outrageous lovers. Said simply, we long for Eden. We long for the return to Eros. This is the hidden light to which the cherub mystics refer, the light hidden in the darkness of Eros in its most limited and even degraded of forms.

ORGASM: THE EXTREME LIGHT

One of the core expressions of the erotic is orgasm. It has been playfully suggested that orgasm derives from the Hebrew word *mugzam*, “extreme light.” This is the hidden light to which the Zohar refers. Orgasm triggers an intensity in consciousness that is not sustainable within what we normally experience as ordinary life. Orgasm is marked by a sense of radical vulnerability and openness, an extreme sense of connection, the obliteration of ego, and the radical intensification of pleasure. All of these are at odds with our story of how ordinary reality should feel.

The word *orgasm* itself has been exiled to the sexual. Orgasm, however, refers to a moment of radical clarity and aliveness in which all the masks drop. In these moments the natural devotion and delight that exist between us all is nakedly revealed.

The great philosopher of dialogue Martin Buber wrote a book of Hasidic stories that he titled *The Hidden Light*. They are stories of rare and intense contact—of outrageous love—between human beings, and between humans and God. They are “orgasm stories,” tales of extreme light that attracts and allures us beyond ordinary consciousness. These are stories of Eros even though there is no sex in them. They are stories of Eros because they describe moments when all walls fall down, allowing for radical contact while at the same time retaining the irreducible dignity and uniqueness of every individual in the tale. In these holy stories—stories of holy Eros—the invisible lines of allurements that animate all of reality in every second become visible to the naked eye. The curtains of the Holy of Holies are drawn back, the intertwined cherubs are revealed for all the pilgrims to see. Whereas Buddhist meditation might be said to focus on awareness, many of the meditative practices of the cherub mystics might be said to focus on allurements.

To wake up is to begin to integrate the extraordinary truth of orgasm consciousness into our seemingly ordinary lives. This is the hidden light secreted in the hidden teaching of the Secret of the Cherubs.

The teaching is secret because it threatens the fabric of ordinary existence. It challenges the very core of our limited experience, with its contraction and separation. The Secret of the Cherubs locates the gravitas of

our human experience in the dignity of Eros. This is the erotic realization of awakening: that we are all interconnected, that we all yearn for contact, and that we all need each other.

When we cannot access the dignity of Eros, then we experience the erotic as undermining our dignity. That is the source of our radical fear of Eros. We reject the Secret of the Cherubs because, like the intensity of orgasm, the erotic intensity of our true interconnectivity simply overwhelms us. Our dignity lies not in the posturing of a separate self but in knowing that we are an inextricable part of all that is—and all that is desperately needs our service. All that is needs our outrageous love, our erotic potency.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE COSMO-EROTIC REALITY UNVEILED

To live an erotic life is to know that you are part of a cosmo-erotic universe. We live in a cosmos driven by Eros. Eros is not an aberration but the natural pulse of reality. Our purpose in this chapter is to enter into some depth in describing the cosmo-erotic nature of our universe. This is what theologian and mystic Meister Eckhardt understood when he allegedly wrote, “We must learn to penetrate things and find God there.”¹¹

To get a sense of the Eros of the cosmos, we need to go back to how it all began. Let’s first recap what we have learned so far. The innate design of the cosmos is one of attraction and allurement. The interior face of the cosmos is Eros—the motivational force of evolution itself, participating in the yearning force of being. Written in lowercase, eros is sex; written as a proper noun, Eros is the cosmic pulse of reality. The sexual models the erotic. Reality is Eros and God is Eros are precisely the same thing. For what is reality if not God, and what is God if not reality?

THE PLOTLINE OF REALITY

What evolution teaches us is that reality is not a fact, but a story. A story has a beginning. It has a plotline. The action has direction and is driven by underlying forces. Scientists say that it appears there really was a beginning known as the big bang. The cosmos was birthed through a great flaring forth of light and matter, animated and driven by a force of wild attraction, emerging from a single point that expanded and is still expanding. This is the radical beginning of the most outrageous love story ever told.

The universe is not a fact, but a story. A story means that reality is not static. It is going somewhere. Reality has direction and purpose. But it is not an ordinary story; it is a love story. And it is not an ordinary love story; it is an outrageous love story. Outrageous love, as we have seen, is but another descriptor of Eros. Based on our deepest scientific and mystical understanding of reality, it is entirely accurate to say that the purpose of existence is fulfilled through ever-deeper manifestations of outrageous love. Outrageous love, or Eros, is the force that drives what scientists have taken to calling the self-organizing universe.

Cosmologists at the Santa Fe Institute like to call this self-organizing property, which moves reality to ever-higher levels of order and love, the fifth force of the universe. Besides the electromagnetic, the nuclear, the strong, and the weak, there is a fifth force that drives the whole story. This fifth force is an inherent, ceaseless, creative force of attraction, Eros by any other name. The gravitational and nuclear events that shape and mold the universe come from the power of allurements. Everywhere we look, we see examples of this urge to merge and emerge, from the vast galaxies to the smallest particles, across the animal kingdom and into humankind. Eros is the most powerful force in the cosmos, binding us and everything else together. It is both the currency of connection between human beings and the essential force that drives the evolutionary process as a whole.

THE EROTIC MOTIVE OF THE COSMOS

Science looks through the eye of the mind and the eye of the senses. Spirit looks through the eye of the heart. At this moment in history, which we are seeing with growing clarity, all three eyes are describing the same reality. Our contemporary understanding of Eros at the subatomic and cellular levels augments the realization of the great traditions, which saw erotic love as the primary motivating force of the cosmos. This is the primary position of the Kabbalists, such as Isaac Luria and Moshe Chaim Luzzatto, rooted in the earlier Zoharic texts, as well as of many Christian thinkers like St. Thomas Aquinas and Mechtilde of Magdeburg. St. Thomas spoke of the “dynamic pulse and throb of creation” as the love in all things. Mechtilde understood herself to be participating in this very throb and pulse when she wrote:

*Lord, love me hard,
love me long and often.
I call you, burning with desire.
Your burning love enflames me constantly
I am but a naked soul, and you, inside it,
are a richly adorned guest.¹²*

Similarly, a Tantric text called the Mahārtha-Manjari describes how Shakti, the creative power of the divine, leaping forth in her own bliss, manifests this universe as an expression or even an outpouring of love.

My (Marc) lineage master, Mordechai Leiner of Izbica, refers to Eros as *teshuka*, or desire as the essential structure of reality. This refers not to superficial desire but to the desire that lies at the heart of reality. Evolution is reality’s desire. It was to this that Buddha may have been referring when he said, “Have few desires but have great ones.” He was distinguishing between authentic desire, which is source itself, and superficial desire, which seeks to cover up the experience of alienation from source. This ability to discern between authentic and pseudo desire is what Leiner called *birur*, and was for him the mark of the enlightened one.

Leiner emerges out of an older erotic lineage of cherub mystics known as *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, who describe God in sensual terms as the “delight of all delights.” In one highly sexualized passage, they describe erotic longing, the core motive of the cosmos, as it shows up in the human being.

And the joy is strong and overwhelms his heart so much that, even a young man who has not gone to a woman for many days, and has great desire, when his seed shoots like an arrow and he has pleasure, this is as naught compared with the strengthening of the power of the joy of the love of God.¹³

Remember in reading this passage that these mystics had already attained the realization that God and reality are one. So the phrase “love of God” should be read as “love of reality.”

All of these interior qualities of the cosmos have now been shown to have exterior form as well. We have seen that we are all made of stardust delicately balanced in a constantly recalibrated equilibrium—attracted and held together by a gravitational pull, while kept apart by centrifugal force. We live in a continual, divine erotic tension of radical urgency and ecstasy. We are partnered, yet separate—we are all dancing madly in the great erotic force that is Eros.

The big bang is happening in every moment of reality. The core essence and very nature of reality is erotic. All of reality is moved by the insatiable urge to merge. Eros is the unbearable yearning to make contact, which is the inner and outer form of reality, all the way up and all the way down, from subatomic particles to atoms to molecules to complex molecules and more and more complex molecules—all of it yearning for ecstatic union.

ALWAYS TWO COMING TOGETHER

In the initiating orgiastic movement of the big bang, separate subatomic units, which physicists call quarks, are elemental forms of existence. Quarks, however, cannot live by themselves. Paraphrasing the Bible we

might say, "It is not good for a quark to be alone." Quarks live only in intimate relationship with other quarks. The inexorable force of Eros moves these elementary particles to transcend what might have otherwise been their merely separate existence and form a higher union with other quarks.

These higher and deeper units are called hadrons. The most stable of these hadrons are protons and neutrons, the components of atomic nuclei. Atoms are born because subatomic particles are attracted to and allured by each other. And so it is all the way up the evolutionary chain. This implicit allurements is the face of mystery itself, because it did not have to be this way. The mutually attracted and allured atoms recognize each other and embrace. Separate subatomic units are moved to form a single unit. A boundary drops around them. Whole atoms are formed. What moves them? The Eros of evolution, which is the Eros of love.

To live an erotic life is to know that sexual play between beloveds is part of the great love play of the universe. Updating the biblical verse we might say, "It is not good for either humans or quarks to be alone." Lovers are electrons and neutrons who have consciously awakened to their own nature. The Persian poets of Eros from the Sufi lineage wrote much of their verse in ecstatic affirmation of this great identity between the personal and cosmic journeys of love. Hafiz, probably the most well-known of these poets, writes in "What Happens":

*What happens when your soul
Begins to awaken
Your eyes
And your heart
And the cells of your body
To the great Journey of Love?*

*First there is wonderful laughter
And probably precious tears*

*And a hundred sweet promises
And those heroic vows
No one can ever keep.*

*But still God is delighted and amused
You once tried to be a saint.*

*What happens when your soul
Begins to awake in this world*

*To our deep need to love
And serve the Friend?*

*O the Beloved
Will send you
One of His wonderful, wild companions*

ALLUREMENT AND AUTONOMY

What is essential to understand about Eros is that it is not only a force of allurement. Eros is no less than the assertion of independence and autonomy. Desire is both an expression of allurement and a unique presence. When you are filled with desire, you feel wildly attracted to make contact, but not to disappear. Desire is presence. In desire you potently incarnate the unique quality and force of your radical being-ness. Eros therefore is both the urge to merge as well as the urge to emerge.

Early electromagnetic allurement is a physical illustration of these two qualities of Eros. What science terms “the forces of attraction and repulsion”^{*} express precisely the dance between merger and emergence. Eros is not fusion but merger, which catalyzes new emergence. For example, when human beings come together in Eros and love, we both merge and emerge, disappear and appear at the same time. A larger whole is formed without losing the integrity of the separate parts.

The force of Eros is the force of desire itself, built into the very fabric of reality. Desire, or what cosmologists call “allurement,” is the essence of

^{*} Repulsion means the establishments of a boundary, the refusal to fuse, the assertion of independent integrity and autonomy.

reality itself. Quantum physics shows us that every particle that comes into existence is paired with another particle. Each has both a point and a wave, called a wavicle. The creation of all life—sexual reproduction, in almost all instances—involves two coming together. Our DNA splits into two, generating the missing half. Our cells divide into two during the mystery of mitosis and meiosis. Similarly, most primal creation myths portray human beings as coupled, not as separate individuals. Our brains have two parts: right and left hemispheres. Our spoken language is binary, as are our computers. Our blood circulates in an oscillated dance between the right and left sides of our bodies. Stars, we now know, have companion stars, and they are wildly attracted to each other by this potent force. It is Eros that both allures the stars to each other as well as keeps them from collapsing and disappearing into one another.

When we say God is Eros, we are describing an evolving reality that births new love, new tears, new creativity, and new ideas in every moment. Reality as Eros is the only force that can give birth to the next great stage of our evolutionary awakening. Let's take another look at the origins of Eros in order to understand this point. At the inception of the big bang, the elementary particles called quarks and leptons merged, and within microseconds birthed protons and electrons, which then birthed the first atoms. Reality is Eros all the way up and all the way down the chain of being. Atoms, through their oppositely charged particles, were allured to each other. In their meeting, they created an electromagnetic field, producing an interaction that formed new helium and hydrogen atoms. These elementary particles bonded together, and then formed increasingly complex elementary particles. They were required to relinquish part of their identity in order to merge. Such is the nature of all erotic relationship. The first seconds of creation necessitated a sacrifice and a bonding in order to allow the great genesis of existence to begin.

These intimate relationships led to a complex relational process that continued to deepen, ultimately allowing photosynthesis to appear. Some three hundred million years later, sexual reproduction through vertebrate genitalia emerged, creating an even deeper intimacy. We live in an intimate universe—a universe that is not just radically committed to life, but to ever deeper levels of intimate connection in life! This awareness

explodes our identity as limited separate selves. We are allured to see ourselves in a larger context, where our interconnectedness and intimacy become undeniably self-evident.

DESIRE: THE HEART OF ALL MATTER

Allurement is the “strange attractor” at the heart of all matter, the very real and pervasive attractive energy that animates all forms of life. Allurement is at the root of what shapes us and is responsible for bringing together galaxies and planets, as well as lovers. From the union of two individuated beings comes the possibility of new creativity—unimaginable emergent capacities that did not previously exist.

Scientist Brian Swimme reminds us that allurement expresses the deep need of life for life. It is extraordinary to realize that the ecstatic force of allurement, sparked fourteen billion years ago and which gave rise to all life, lives in us. Ecstatic urgency, the urge to merge, the very nature of this attraction is seen all the way up and all the way down the evolutionary ladder, and yet its origin remains a total mystery.

Let’s take a deeper look at this magnetic attractor called desire and its luring and seductive appeal to thrust all life forward to greater and greater levels of wonder and complexity.

As we continue to observe evolution within visible matter, we can more readily begin to feel the tangible passion of this primal thrusting forth of desire. We begin to see it enfolded, not just in the stark imagined world of chemical interactions but also in the passion and desire throbbing in and through all of evolution, in plants, insects, vertebrates, fish, reptiles, and mammals—all the way up the great chain of being and becoming. We can hear it and see it, calling us to its persuasive impetus and its seductive siren song. It is to this that the great philosopher of science Alfred North Whitehead referred when he said that evolution is moved by the “persuasion of love.”

If we can let ourselves awaken to the intimate nature of what science sees as objective reality, we feel it deeply in our being, in our hearts, and in every cell of our bodies. If we allow it all the way in, we might feel it

as a burning impulse or an unbearable longing to reach out to and make contact or even temporarily merge with another. When felt through the flesh, there is a stunning, visceral realization that the very same desire and yearning that lies at the core of the evolution of life itself is quivering alive in us! As we rise up the evolutionary ladder, we begin to see the carnal causal design of the entire cosmos, amazingly expressed as we observe the dramatic mating rituals among living things.

FLOWER LOVE LESSONS

Zen master Basho pointed to the cosmo-erotic universe in his own implicit yet enigmatic way. He writes:

*Having sucked deep
In a sweet peony
A bee creeps
Out of its hairy recesses.¹⁴*

Zen master Ikkyu is more explicit, pointing out that human allure-ment and the allure-ment of plants are part of the same cosmo-erotic field:

*Plum blossom close to the ground her dark place opens
wet with the dew of her passion wet with the lust of my tongue*

Flowering plants have created deeply intimate relationships with their pollinators that have evolved over millions of years, producing a fascinating diversity of strategies to lure them in. Using sweet scents, bright colors, and perfectly designed forms, the blooms entice their pollinators with the promise of a scrumptious feast. Flowers provide visual clues and formations, through their shapes and sizes, that allow pollinators to make contact. Some flowers also feature nectar guides, which contain patterns visible from the air, showing pollinators the way to the sweet spot. Plants pollinated by beetles, for instance, have large open blooms, making for a wider landing area to accommodate larger guests. Irises

are prolific producers of flowering petals that take an enormous amount of energy in order to stay in competition with nearby flowering plants, in hopes of alluring the services of bumblebees. Flower receptacles and displays uniquely vary from gullets and spurs to flaps and tubes. With a narrow tubule and a long tongue, the right pollinator, and the right plant part, contact is made. The propagation of new life continues.

We have all been delightfully intoxicated by the scent of a flower. Flowers use potent aromas to attract their pollinators as well. Those with alluring fragrance are often those that are quite plain in their appearance. Some flowers exude scents that can be detected at a distance of over a mile away.

Food produced by flowers is also a major attractor for pollinators. Nectar is primarily a sugar water that contains amino acids and minerals. Plants dependent on pollinators with high-energy diets, such as hummingbirds, produce massive quantities of nectar. Pollen, high in protein, is produced by flowers in large amounts to ensure an appropriate feast. Along with the need for sustenance, pollinators also need to reproduce in order to propagate the next generation of their species. The warty hammer orchid of Australia, for example, takes advantage of this evolutionary impulse to reproduce by mimicking a chemical scent identical to the pheromone of the female thynnine wasp. In addition, the orchid's labellum, or lower lip, is shaped like the body of the female wasp. The male wasp tries to grab the faux female and fly off with her to mate but, instead, he crashes into the flower, releasing its pollen. The male thynnine wasp is a rather randy guy, and his constant desire to make contact through mating over and over is advantageous to the warty hammer orchid by causing its ongoing pollination and propagation.¹⁵

ANIMAL LOVE LESSONS

Desire and its passionate declaration can be found throughout the natural world in examples of animal courting behavior within many species. Expressions of such passion fascinate in the incredible intricacy of their spectacle. From bizarre mating rituals and courtship displays that offer up explosions of color to melodic song and ecstatic dancing, they all

express a lavish display with the sole motivation to evoke desire, pleasure, and the deep impulse to merge with the other.

Most of us don't think of spiders as sexy, yet have you seen a peacock spider perform his mating ritual? No larger than a quarter-inch long, male peacock spiders are remarkable for their beautiful bright colors and butt-shaking dance. As a female approaches, the male begins to shake his body, sending waves of vibrations into the ground that a female detects through her legs. As he moves and splays the incredible iridescent fan on his rear end back and forth, he begins to perform a sensual, tribal-like dance that involves leg waving and drumming on the ground. Spiders, not having ears, hear the drumming on the ground through organs on their legs. The vibration of the drumbeats travels up the legs of the female, which seems to be a great turn-on for her. If the male's routine is met with approval, then—well, you know the rest.¹⁶

The word *romance* evokes images of a love letter, a box of delicious chocolates, a bouquet of flowers, or maybe a table for two at an intimate restaurant. And although we never really think much about other species on this planet having romantic lives, the worlds of mammals, birds, and creatures of the ocean reveal astounding beauty and untamed passions in their mating rituals from which we humans might take some erotic cues.

Brolgas, elegant birds from the crane family, mate with their partners every year in nesting areas that remain the same throughout their lives. For them, keeping the passion alive is of utmost importance. For the duration of their bond, they continue their dance of tossing clumps of grass in the air and flapping and extending their wings while bobbing and bowing their heads. We humans might do well to notice, for example, how the brolgas take responsibility for their sustained arousal. In doing so, they ensure that no matter how long they have been together, passionate expression, which is vital to keeping the relationship alive, continues to flourish.¹⁷

TRIBAL LOVE LESSONS

Each year, the Wodaabe tribe in Niger holds a beauty contest with an interesting twist. The men of the tribe dress up for the women, who pick

the winners. At the annual festival, hundreds of people gather to watch the young men, who have spent hours painting their faces using colorful red, white, and yellow clay paint along with black eyeliner made from charred egret bone. They ornament their bodies with long strings of cowrie beads and place ostrich plumes on their heads to emphasize their height. The men then begin to dance vigorously for seven nights, showing off physical qualities of strength, stamina, and endurance. At the end of the week, an intricate ceremony is held for the women to choose their favorite man. The men line up, grinning widely so as to show their bright white teeth while displaying their handsome beauty and charisma. Each woman invites the man she finds most attractive to be her lover. Wodaabe women are known to be attracted to the tallest men with the whitest teeth, the largest eyes, the most angular nose, and the most stunning bodily decorations. There is no surprise, then, that Wodaabe men have evolved to become taller with whiter teeth, larger eyes, and more Romanesque noses.¹⁸

In human beings, this evolutionary desire for contact bursts forth in its fullest conscious form not just in sex. It is also expressed in the form of poetry, of caring for the weak and helpless, and in a thousand other ways. Human beings manifest love more fully and outrageously than any earlier species in the evolutionary chain. But the authentic love expressed so dramatically and poignantly between human beings is the same impulse of outrageous love that moves quarks to make contact with other quarks to form an atom. It is one love. Evolutionary love—outrageous love—all the way up and all the way down the evolutionary chain.

AN AFFRONT TO SHAME

One of the recurrent motifs of the new sexual narrative is the realization that shame is the root of all evil. By shame, we mean the feeling that something intrinsic to our being is essentially wrong and can never be fixed. Sex is a primary source of shame. Cultural critic Warren Farrell makes this point powerfully.¹⁹ Imagine a parent passing by his two teenagers, who are watching a brutally violent action movie. Chances are that the parent walks by, perhaps makes a remark about violence (or not), and

then goes on about his business. Or perhaps the parent sits and watches with the teenagers for a while. Imagine the same parent passing the same two kids, and they are watching an erotic movie in which there is graphic sexual intercourse. Almost certainly the parent will stop, somewhat aghast, and will turn off the television or at least change the channel. There is virtually no possibility that the parent will sit and watch erotica with her teenage son or daughter.

Whatever the wisdom of the parent's action, the message is clear. Brutal violence and murder are acceptable, and sex is shameful. Why, even after the old religions have lost their hold on us, does sex remain so insidiously shameful? The reason is our confused relationship to three primary human experiences: control, desire, and pleasure.

Control: We are taught to be "in control." The dangerous people are those who are "out of control." We critique a person's level of development by saying, "He has no self-control." We emotionally shake our angry partner or child with words like "control yourself." And yet the sexual experience requires that we—at least on some level—relinquish control. We are shamed by our loss of control.

Desire: We are taught that our desires, particularly our desire for pleasure, are both ignoble and dangerous. They are ignoble, we think (whether consciously or unconsciously), because they are selfish. In most of the public teaching of most of the great religions, desire is the ultimate enemy. And yet the fulfillment of the sexual is directly dependent upon desire. The more intense the desire, the more pleasurable the sex. We are shamed by our desire.

Sex is thought shameful because we cannot control it fully. This is also tied into control, because we do not fully control whom we desire, the intensity of our desire, or even when we act on our desire. People who think they can completely vanquish sexual desire are foolish indeed.

Pleasure: There is an implicit sense that pleasure is narcissistic and selfish, in contrast to virtue, which is holy and devout. And yet sex is uniquely pleasurable. It is virtually impossible to split the experience of sex from the experience of pleasure. Moreover, we cannot even control what form of sex causes us pleasure. We are shamed by our idiosyncratic desire for pleasure, which we cannot control.

Clearly, the requirement for elemental self-control in sexuality, the regulation of desire, and the commitment not to spend life pursuing merely superficial pleasures are all noble impulses. But the result is a profoundly ingrained sense of shame in regard to sexuality. That shame is massively destructive on both a personal and a cultural level. It is shame that causes us to split off from our sexuality, which nearly always brings disaster. It is shame that causes us to hate ourselves for sexual desires we cannot control. Sexuality challenges our cultural, spiritual, and psychological self-image. Are we really the person that we claim to be? Just think for a second, beginning with your early teenage years, about the hidden shame around your sexuality. Take a moment and list five direct results in your personal life from the deeply ingrained sense of sexual shame.

On a cultural level, shame is no less insidious. The violence of Islamic fundamentalism, for example, and the cruelty of Nazism have both been correctly traced to different forms of sexual shame. The attempt to split sexuality off from life must always fail, for sexuality is life. The failed attempt at repression turns life against itself in revulsion and disgust. That is the root cause of the cruelty and violence. In democracies, sexual shame is regularly deployed as a political weapon. The director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, tried destroying Martin Luther King Jr., the head of the civil rights movement, by shaming him for his extramarital affairs. Al Gore lost the presidency, according to many, because Bill Clinton was unable to campaign for him as he had been widely shamed for his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. The result was the presidency of George W. Bush, which led the United States to invade Iraq. The destruction wrought by that invasion in post-Saddam Hussein Iraq is incalculable. If not for the massive public shaming of Clinton over a consensual affair with an adult woman, all of that pain and suffering may not have happened.*

* It is not that Clinton was right—clearly, he did not have an agreement from Hillary to engage with Monica. However, the level of shaming—as it always is in sexual issues—was insanely disproportionate to the level of infraction both for Bill and for Monica. The source of the obsession is our confusion around sexuality, rooted in large part in our own hidden sexual shame.

Desire, pleasure, and the loss of control are all shamed. Shame is the root of all evil. Neither the sex-positive, sex-sacred, nor sex-neutral narratives truly move us to sex beyond shame. It is only when we articulate the new sexual narrative of sex erotic, rooted originally in the Secret of the Cherubs and deepened by modern science, that we understand allure-ment and desire to be the essence of the cosmos. Then we can begin to live our sexual desire as an affront to shame. It is the new sexual narrative of sex erotic that reclaims pleasure as the motivating force of evolution and the inner feeling of divinity. In the cherubic mysteries, our desire is our devotion. Devotion merges with delight even as pleasure screams the name of God. We give up control as an act not of reckless abandon but of wild and holy surrender.

DESIRE IS THE PORTAL

Sexual desire is the portal to the sacred in us. The universe feels, and the universe feels desire. Desire is evolution. Desire is allure-ment, Eros, and Eros knits together all of reality even as it drives it to ever higher and greater levels of uniqueness, consciousness, creativity, and love. Desire is, at its core, the desire for contact.

The sexual impulse is the gorgeous manifestation of that very desire for contact. Desire is no less than the evolutionary impulse in us, awake and alive. The great traditions, East and West, which taught that subdu-ing desire is the great work of man, were not wrong. They were a neces-sary step on the evolutionary journey. We needed structures to contain desire so it would not overwhelm us. That was but the first step, however. It is not the overcoming of desire but the clarification of desire that is the core spiritual work of the human being.

Desire is personal at its very core. To step up and play a larger game in life is to identify and incarnate the unique desire of your personhood. That is the desire that reality seeks to live through you. That is what we refer to when we speak of outrageous love. To awaken as an outrageous lover means to commit your unique outrageous acts of love to incarnate the per-sonal face of evolutionary desire that desperately needs to be lived by you.

Finding the right gorgeous expression of your sexual desire is essential to living your desire in every other frame of life. Sexual desire models desire in every dimension of life. The sexual models the erotic. The sexual is an expression of the evolutionary Eros that initiated, animates, and motivates all of reality. The two cherubs above the Ark in the Holy of Holies, lost in the rapture of their sexual desire, incarnate the nature of reality on all of its levels.