

Spirituality and Sexuality

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## Spirituality and Sexuality

Sexuality is viewed extremely different based on religion. Some religions promote sexuality at a young age while others advocate no sexual intercourse until marriage. There are many reasons as to why sexuality varies so differently from culture to culture. This essay will touch on topics such as, Buddhism, Tantra, Kama Sutra, Judaism, and Christianity, and their relationship with sexuality.

There are various aspects and views on Buddhism and sexuality. To make matters a bit more complex, there are also multiple types of Buddhism. Several authors provide insight to these views. One gives us a fairly modern view of marriage and sexual acts, others provide insights on the Buddhist view of gender; or, how one expresses their sexuality, and still others give us both the historical perspective and a modern view of homosexuality in this faith system.

M'O. C. Walshe gives us a dearth of information on marital relations as well as sexual acts. He states, "Many Buddhists...live a normal married life just as do many Christians, humanists, and others" (Walshe 1975). This statement helps clarify that the majority of Buddhists are no different than many other faiths when it comes to marriage. Buddhism, however, is different from many Western belief systems in that it does not consider sex as something evil. Walshe provides this insight when he says, "There is, in the Buddhist view, nothing uniquely wicked about sexual offenses

or failings” (1975).

A significant aspect of the expression of sexuality is gender. The views of women have changed significantly from early Buddhists to more contemporary Buddhist believers. Alan Sponberg helps us understand early Buddhist views in his essay “Attitudes Toward Women and the Feminine in Early Buddhism.” In this essay, he explains that Buddhist views of women were shaped by two significant social circumstances: rapid urbanization of the eastern Gangetic valley and the emergence of a new sense of self-consciousness or individuality of the Brahmanic culture (Sponberg, 1992). He also describes the four specific attitudes toward women in early Buddhism. The first is soteriological inclusiveness which means that they wanted to include women in liberation that sought to free humanity from suffering. The second is institutional androcentrism which allowed many women to pursue a religious career but within a male-dominated environment. The third is ascetic misogyny which means that men hated women and made them live a life of devout self-discipline. The fourth attitude toward women was soteriological androgyny which is defined as the fact that all beings, to varying degrees, consciously or unconsciously, manifest the full range of characteristics conventionally identified as gender specific (Sponberg, 1992). These views were held by the early Buddhists and have changed since then.

In her essay, “Buddhist Women of the Maharashtra Conversion Movement,” Eleanor Zelliot focuses on a specific branch of contemporary Buddhist women. Zelliot delineates her perceptions on modern Maharashtra women. She notes they aren’t necessarily the upholders of religious traditions and they are often a

strong force for change; they are often a stronger force than men. The author also notices that their perspective of Buddhism is personal, reflecting their experience and present situation. Finally, Buddhism is clearly a part of these women's identities (Zelliot, 1992). These are just some of the characteristics of contemporary Buddhist women. These modern Buddhist women have also found niches in outside the domestic sphere. According to Zelliot, "...Buddhist women come from a tradition in which they not only have been strong and useful in the home, but also creative in literature and design" (1992). By taking a look at both historical and contemporary views on Buddhist women, we are able to see how the take on gender has evolved.

Another component of Buddhist views on sexuality revolves around homosexuality. Leonard Zwilling and James Hughes give us some insights into those views. Zwilling uses Indian Buddhist literature for his analysis. He uses the text *Vinaya* to explain how Buddhist view *pandakas*, or men "without testicles." He comments, "In the *Vinaya* literature references to *pandakas* are made almost invariably within the context of sexual, specifically homosexual behavior, and we find in many societies a tendency to label a boy who participates in homosexual activity as not being a 'real boy'" (Zwilling 1992). Finally, James Hughes, a contemporary author, gives us a modern view of homosexuality. In his article he states, "Although homosexuality, as sex outside of marriage, has always been seen as a violation of the precept against sexual misconduct, it is seen as no worse than heterosexual misconduct" (Hughes, 2007). Again, we see the transformation in views from the past into the present.

Perspectives on sexuality in the Buddhist tradition have changed over times.

These authors have helped us understand just a little bit more about sexuality and the Buddhist tradition.

Tantra is an esoteric or “enlightened” tradition that originated in India. Tantra has influence to Hindu, Bon, Buddhist, and Jain religions. It has existed through several forms in South Asia, China, Japan, Tibet, Korea, Cambodia, Burma, Indonesia, and Mongolia. In much research, Tantra has been distorted over the years and there is not one clear definition of what it actually is. However, there is much information on how Tantra and sex are connected. It is said that sexuality was a doorway to the divine. The word Tantra means “to manifest, to expand, to show and to weave”. This relates to sex as it is thought to expand consciousness and weave together the polarities of male and female into a harmonious whole. Tantric sexual practices teach us to prolong the act of making love and to utilize orgasmic energies more efficiently. It is also said that it improves health, because sexual energy is suppose to be the most powerful energies in promoting health. The goal is controlling orgasm rather than having better sex or connecting more with our partner. Some other things Tantra teaches is foreplay, breathing techniques, various sexual positions, and even exercises to improve your orgasm and may help you have multiple orgasms. Even though modern Tantra teachers say it is not all about sex and the positions, sex therapists have used this as a tool in modern times. Many new books, films, and classes have been created now to teach curious people about the practices of Tantra.

Kama Sutra is an ancient Indian text that focuses on human sexual behavior. There is more than one author and many chapters of Kama Sutra, but the famous

text was written by Vatsyayana, between 100-500AD. The text comes from India and is the standard work on love in Sanskrit literature and was early known as Kama Shastra, the science of love. Kama Sutra is a form of wisdom and guidance and is divided in the three aims of life, virtue (dhama), prosperity (artha), and love (kama). Kama Sutra is the science of sex, helping understand the sexual relationship between man and woman. It teaches to enjoy the art form of sex with your partner through the principles of Kama Sutra. The text provides awareness on the pleasures of sensual living and the respect for the sacredness of sexual relations. Kama Sutra reveals detailed advice on sexual positions for both man and woman, with practices such as intercourse to oral gratification. There are many scholars, authors, stories, and theories all over the world that have described and developed Kama Sutra over fifteen hundred years. Under science and art for both men and women, Kama Sutra is so unique because it allows for desire of self fulfillment through the treatment of sexuality.

In the Orthodox Jewish community, sex is saved for marriage. Consequently, the newlywed couple is expected to engage in sexual activity on the wedding or soon after the marriage. Often times, couples start slow by engaging in things such as foreplay to become more physically and emotional comfortable with their partner before they take it to the next level. Some couples jump right in. Others sometimes feel no desire to engage in sexual activity because of lack of attraction or other “underlying causes” such as fear of rejection or anger about things that are beyond the spouse’s control. If several weeks pass and the couple still has not become intimate, marriage therapy is usually sought after for the couple. (Ribner &

Rosenbaum, 2005). Sex is supposed to fulfill the marriage of a Jewish couple, and if there is no sex, the marriage can be considered unconsummated.

Once they do begin to have sex, though, there are rules that the couple must abide by. These rules can be found in the Torah and go along the lines of, "...sexual activity may not take place during a woman's monthly period or for a full week thereafter and only recommences after she has immersed in a ritual purity bath. Sexual activity is not to take place when either or both partners are drunk or arguing and may not be used as weapon to punish or manipulate a spouse" (Ribner & Rosenbaum 2005). The rule about not forcing your partner into sex is practiced because it is believed that "...One who forces his wife in a holy deed will have dishonest children." If a couple has just had sex and the husband wants to have sex again directly after, it is not considered to be for procreative purposes. Because of this, he is not able to have sex automatically, unless he knows explicitly that she wants to engage again, because that can, too, be considered wife-rape (Boyarin, 1995). Sex is, for the most part, used for procreative purposes, but it is acceptable when both parties have the desire for it.

The views of Catholicism on sexuality are elaborated through a multitude of issues. The constituents of these issues are "sexual intercourse with the use of a condom is always "an intrinsically evil" act, the use of a condom to prevent the spread of the AIDS virus, even within marriage, can be as morally wrong as passing the virus to another, artificial birth control can be regarded as evil in all cases and natural family planning can be viewed as good if the intention not to conceive a child is the same in each instance, a compassionate church can teach that gays and

lesbians can never under any circumstances express sexual intimacy, ...artificial insemination, even with a husband's sperm in order to have a child, is gravely wrong" (Kelly). Christianity, especially Catholicism, perceives any type of birth control as a sin because any form of sexual activity should be utilized to conceive. Even if the birth control, such as condoms, is used solely for the prevention of disease, it is still morally wrong because it will also prevent the possibility of procreating. Homosexuals are sinners in the eyes of the Christian church, because their bodies are not anatomically built for sexual activity, due to the impossible ability to reproduce on their own. "The Church's teachings on marriage and reproduction serve to maintain, indeed sanctify, a particular gendered order between men and women" (Jung), thus suggesting that homosexuals are not made for sexual contact because they are of the same gender. However, in recent years the Roman Catholic Church has evolved and become more accepting to modern sexuality. While it's main purpose is still to procreate, sexual intercourse is also related to love making. The Church claims that condemning "all intentionally non-procreative sexual acts" is misleading. (Jung) Roman Catholics do not denounce all acts of sexuality that are not related to procreation.

### Questions

Question 1: Which of the following forms of birth control is strictly forbidden in the Jewish community?

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- a. abortion
- b. “the pill”
- c. condom

Question 2: What is “natural birth control”?

- a. Miscarriage
- b. Intercourse during a woman’s cycle where she is infertile
- c. Plan B

Question 3: In Buddhist’s views, what is one factor that shaped the roles of women?

- a. rapid urbanization of the eastern Gangetic valley
- b. women are anatomically weaker than men, which led to a male dominated society
- c. Women were needed to care for the children, causing them to be homebound

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