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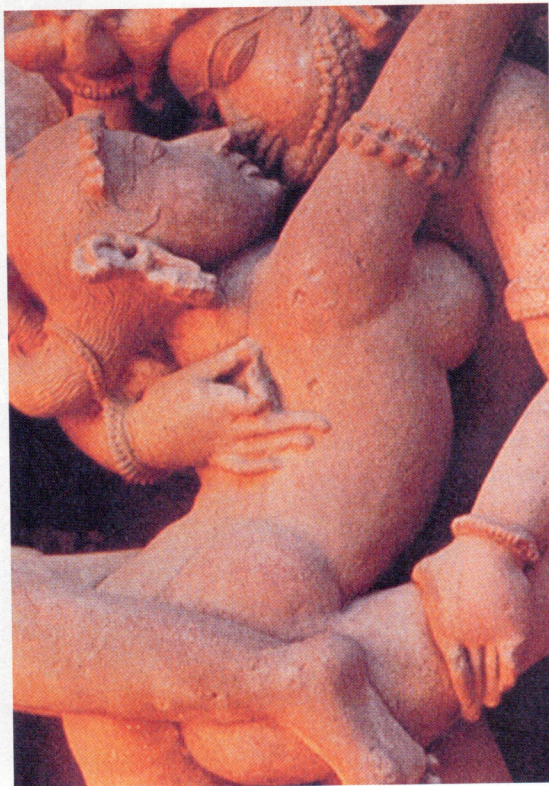
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# The Tantric Arts

Celebrating the spirituality of sex

By Courtney Mather

**TANTRA IS NOT AN EVERYDAY HOUSEHOLD WORD IN MOST PARTS OF THE WORLD.**

Yet, for those who have heard bits and pieces about it, the word invariably evokes a reaction. When I told friends about my latest writing assignment I certainly received some raised eyebrows and a whispered, "Well...you'll let me know what you find out, won't you?"

Considering Tantra's reputation as an ancient practice that can awaken one's consciousness through sex, it is no wonder that my friends were curious. Couple this with claims to promote sensuality and creativity, release inhibitions, and break down self-imposed barriers and Tantra has my attention as well!

Historically, Tantra refers to sacred, 2000-year-old Hindu and Buddhist texts that provide lessons on subjects ranging from the sciences to spirituality and sexuality. In these ancient cultures, the sensual nature of spirituality was celebrated. Viewed as both a science and an art, sexuality was revered as a vehicle for spiritual advancement. One of the better known Hindu texts, the *Kama Sutra*, features teachings of sophisticated sexual techniques and positions.

Today in the West, Tantra is commonly associated with sex. It has become known as a way for couples to improve sexual skills and thereby heighten, intensify, and prolong sexual pleasure. In a course, one can certainly expect to learn advanced lovemaking techniques such as the art of kissing and touch, methods of pelvic movement, and internal muscular exercises. Instruction is also given about the male and female orgasm, including lessons on facilitating orgasms as well as how to give more pleasure with less effort.

Yet, the benefits of Tantra are not limited to perfecting explicitly erotic techniques. At its core, Tantra still remains a form of yoga and a spiritual path. Pursued in this way and with the right teachers, Tantra can become a powerful tool in building intimacy, communication, and passion between couples. In workshops, students learn meditations and breathing exercises to practice together. They are also taught about the chakras (the seven energy centers in the body) and how to move energy through them. In learning a very nurturing style of touch, couples begin

helping one another to heal and awaken sexually as well as spiritually. Making love becomes a celebration of a very intimate connection.



Howard and Toddie Barbarosh of Kula, Hawaii, have been married for twenty-two years. They described their relationship prior to their study of Tantra as "good." Howard remembers thinking, "Here I am at fifty-nine and something is missing. This is okay but something isn't right." Three Tantra retreats later with a fourth scheduled in a few months, he says, "This [Tantra] for me has made it right."

Howard and Toddie attended the "The Art of Conscious Loving" vacation seminars on Maui taught by Tantra experts Charles and Caroline Muir. The Muirs explain, "We get so many couples that come to us and say 'I love him' or 'I know I love her, but I'm not in love.'" They continue, "For most couples the chemistry can wear off in as little as two years. Our lives become a reality and we begin to spot the little things in that person that make them human and upset us." It is at this point that the Muirs frequently discover couples closing down sexually.

Dr. Johanina Wikoff, author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Kama Sutra*, and psychologist who

teaches couples about Tantra, says, "The main things that bring couples to me are low sexual desire, lack of sexual desire, changes in sexual desire, or discrepancies in the partners' desire for sexuality." She sees issues with sexual desire purely as symptoms of deeper issues. Using an example of a relationship where the man is busy working all the time and the woman is craving, yet, not receiving attention, Dr. Wikoff says, "He may be trying to relate to her sexually and she may find herself turning off. It's not just about sex. Sex is a metaphor. Sex isn't just sex. It reflects everything in the relationship."

The study of Tantra can show couples how to face the "rest" of the relationship by teaching them how to connect and be present with one another. Toddie sighs, "I didn't have a clue that Tantra had to do with communication, connection, spirit and



everything but just great sex. You learn Yoga, meditation, and, yes, some techniques and skills for improving things that you do sexually, but what tantra really is has nothing to do with how well you move your hands or your body, it has to do with how well you connect with the person you are with." Howard adds, "What we've learned, besides just making love, is how to take care of each other."

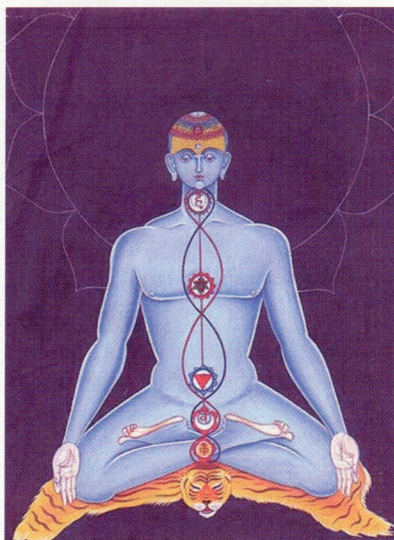
Dr. Wikoff agrees, "Rather than

wild sex in lots of positions, the emphasis of Tantra is on connection. It's not to say that sex can't become hot and passionate and intense. It can! It can also be sweet and tender and meditative. And all that comes through the connection that a couple learns by being present."

Caroline Muir adds, "I would say that most people don't fully understand how important love is in life, nor do they understand how to receive the love that is available in their personal relationships. People must also learn to give the love so that it can be received by the other. There is an art form to all of this." She continues, "With the divorce rate and the number of relationships people have in their lives, it is apparently time for this education to be available to everyone. So that's our job."

So what about sex, the subject which caught our attention in the first place? Through the study of Tantra, bad sex can become a thing of the past. Toddie remembers when a friend asked, "Well, what do you do when it is bad?" She answered, "I never have 'bad!' Every time is always the best ever. I haven't had 'bad' in three years. For me it doesn't exist anymore." For Toddie, sex has become a positive outflow of a conscious relationship. Howard adds, "It's now a celebration of our relationship. It's not an end in itself."

The Muirs remind us that most of us weren't given formal training on how to be great lovers. "We may come to discover that it is a subject that we are not naturally good at, yet, one that we can become better at with proper coaching,"



## RATHER THAN WILD SEX IN A LOT OF POSITIONS, THE EMPHASIS OF TANTRA IS ON CONNECTION

says Charles. He continues, "People will spend years learning how to hit a golf ball, they will spend hours and hours learning how to develop a backhand, but they never even consider the concept of learning how to be a better lover. What are some of the tricks? What are some of the shortcuts? What are some of the ways to get through the obvious blocks that many people have in their ability to really experience pleasure and intimacy in a very deep way?"

Tantra is also known for its potential to help individuals who have suffered from a bad sexual experi-

ence. "We teach the skills of sexual healing, and that really does address the issues that both men and women have that they might be carrying around with them throughout the course of their lives—issues around sexual abuse, violation, abortion, or unconscious sex that left [the individual] emotionally or physically wounded in any way," says Caroline.

**M**isconceptions abound about Tantra being a funky new age setting for orgies. Yet Howard emphasizes that this is not the type of Tantra that he and Toddie have studied. "Toddie and I have a committed, loving relationship," he says. Toddie remembers having her own doubts. "Howard made me go to our first Tantra class. I was afraid that there were going to be like twenty Playboy bunnies and seventeen guys from GQ and I was going to be this middle aged woman sitting there." She remembers looking around the room and saying, "Hey, you all look just like me!"

"I would say that the majority of couples who come to us follow the more western tradition of monogamy," says Charles. "We get students who are twenty-years old and just starting their life in relationship and others who are in their seventies after forty to fifty years of relationship," adds Caroline.

Like the rest of America, Toddie's original conception of Tantra was, "so wrong." "I wondered," Toddie reflects,

## SPAS THAT OFFER INTIMACY WORKSHOPS AND TANTRA

**Canyon Ranch** offers a Sex, Body, and Soul program in Tucson, Arizona. This couples-only workshop led by Dr. Lana Holstein and Dr. David Taylor involves Tantra, creative loving, kissing, couples massage, exploring your sexual potential, the seven dimensions of sexuality, and how to become a multi-dimensional lover. The next workshop is November 5-9, 2003. For more information call (800) 742-9000 or visit [www.canyonranch.com](http://www.canyonranch.com).

**Spa Rio Caliente**, Primavera, Mexico. Charles and Caroline Muir intend to teach their "Art of Conscious Loving" seminar at Rio Caliente in February 2004. For more information call (800) 200-2927 or visit [www.riocaliente.com](http://www.riocaliente.com). For information on the Muir's programs call (888) 2tantra or visit [www.sourcetantra.com](http://www.sourcetantra.com).

**Pura Vida Spa**, Costa Rica, hosts its 3rd Annual Tropical Tantra Retreat, December 27, 2003-January 3, 2004. Led by Steve and Lokita Carter, the directors of Ecstatic Living this workshop combine the tropical beauty of Costa Rica with lessons in ecstatic living. For more information on Pura Vida call (888) 767-7375 or visit [www.puravidaspa.com](http://www.puravidaspa.com). For information on Ecstatic Living workshops call (877) 982-6872 or visit [www.ecstaticliving.com](http://www.ecstaticliving.com).

## The Nurturing Meditation

The nurturing meditation is one of the simplest yet most profound of the Tantric secrets for sustaining love's energy in a relationship. It allows couples to communicate on at least three levels: on the conscious level, skin to skin; on the respiratory level, breath to breath; and on the most subtle level chakra to chakra. Over a period of time such regular communication creates a kind of synergy between the partners' chakras.

Couples lie together spoon fashion on their left sides (for reasons of energy flow, according to the Tantric texts). Whoever feels the most in need of nurturing, whoever has experienced the most stress that day, should take the inside.

As you lie together, close your eyes and relax. Quiet your mind by focusing on deep breathing. After a while, become aware of your partner's breath. Two breathing techniques may be performed in this position. The first, used during the first few minutes of the meditation, is called the harmonizing breath. The couple inhales together, holds the breath together, exhales together, and repeats. During this harmonizing breath, the partner on the inside is the receptive body, accepting energy through the back and into the chakras with each exhalation and filling up with that energy with each inhalation.

The second breathing technique is called the reciprocal charging breath. This time one partner breathes in as the other breathes out. During the several seconds that the breath is held, one partner will be holding the inhalation, the other the exhalation. As you practice, the reciprocal charging breath, be conscious of the energy your partner is imparting to you as well as the energy you are giving back.

Before you go on to whatever you have planned for the rest of the day, look at each other. Look into each other. Don't speak, just gaze upon the face of your partner with whom you now feel so well connected. Notice the light that radiates from your lover's eyes. This light

is another by-product of the nurturing meditation; it is the light of love that comes when harmony exists.

**Eye Contact** Closing the eyes during lovemaking is common among Westerners, but among Tantrists it is considered to eliminate potential for a much deeper bonding. Closing the eyes shuts out the lover and creates darkness during what is a potentially enlightening experience. Conscious lovers should try to maintain contact with each other in as many ways as possible during their lovemaking, and the eyes offer perhaps the most important way of doing so. In Tantric loving, the eyes are considered a primary organ of intimacy. They are not only the gateway, but also a means of extending and receiving energy, especially from the fourth chakra, from the heart.

**The Couple as a Team** Remember that the ultimate goal of the Tantric teachings is unity. Sex is one of the most basic, pleasurable ways of achieving unity, but the principles of Tantra can be applied to other areas of life as well.

Tantric couples often meditate together; they share their thoughts, dreams, fears, hopes, and fantasies. They work together—they may share a career, as we do, or they may do the dishes together, or garden together, or clean out the garage as a team. No matter what work you do as a couple, collaboration is a cornerstone of a good relationship. Working together on a project or at job is symbolic of working on the relationship—paying attention to it, and in so doing, paying it homage. As you work together, whether it be on a mundane chore or on some inspired creative endeavor, you will also be working together toward the goal of harmony, that honeyed atmosphere in which love grows and passion is an eternal flame.

Source: As written in *Tantra: The Art of Conscious Loving* by Charles and Caroline Muir.

"how I ever got that opinion of it. Then I realized that you get that opinion from television and ads in the back of magazines, and from people who maybe went to something that isn't this."

When seeking a teacher, Charles and Caroline Muir recommend checking to see where they have studied, if they are certified, how long have they been teaching, and if they are educated in the yogic nature of Tantra. They also

recommend asking whether there is any nudity in the classes. "There is never nudity in our seminars and we really don't see a need for it," says Caroline. Exercises are explained or demonstrated fully clothed in class and then students are given "homework" to practice in the privacy of their own rooms.

Howard and Toddie believe that studying Tantra is the best thing that has ever happened to them. "It fortu-

nately turned out to be the best decision of our entire lives." "Without a doubt, the most phenomenal experience of my entire life and the most life changing," says Toddie. Howard laughs, "At the end of the seminar she went around to everyone in that room and thanked them for the best week she had ever had in her life." They both believe that even if you have a good relationship, Tantra can only make it better.

Describing her marriage before Tantra, Toddie hesitates, "It was comfortable, it was good, it was loving. It was sometimes fun. It had stress." Describing her marriage now, her face lights up and she exclaims, "I think it's fantastic, spectacular, joyful, easy, fulfilling, safe, cute." Looking at Howard she says, "You went from terrific to stupendous. You went to the 'Best Ever.'" Howard giggles. I look at him inquisitively. "It's what we're not saying," he says with a grin. ☺

### Tantra Events with Steve & Lokita Carter

#### Tropical Tantra:

An Ecstatic New Year's  
Week at Costa Rica  
Dec 27-Jan 3, 2004  
Pura Vida Retreat  
& Yoga Center



#### Timeless Loving:

A Gentle Introduction  
to Tantra  
Feb 13-15, 2004  
Harbin Hot  
Springs, CA

Steve & Lokita Carter have been enriching thousands of lives with their popular Tantra seminars for many years. As a couple, they bring the perfect blend of male and female perspectives to their teaching. Steve & Lokita are widely renowned for their fun, safe and warm-hearted approach to Tantra and ecstatic living. Toll-free 877-982-6872 or 707-987-3456 [www.ecstaticliving.com](http://www.ecstaticliving.com). E-mail: [info@ecstaticliving.com](mailto:info@ecstaticliving.com)