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"We're going to introduce you to a vast menu of sexual choices." Caroline picked up her puppet, a foot-high *yoni* made of purple velvet with red lips and a gold clitoris, and said, "This is a sacred space." Then Charles put his *lingam* puppet in her *yoni* puppet to demonstrate some of the "thousand-and-one varieties of movement."

The Politically Incorrect Orgasm

Once and for all—does the vaginal orgasm actually exist? If so, where exactly do you go for one? If not, why are people leaving these workshops with goofy grins on their faces? **Sara Davidson** investigates

It's a Friday night and I'm standing in the Wilshire room of the Sheraton Miramar in Santa Monica, registering for a workshop in Tantric sex. A friend I've known for twenty years, who urged me to do this and is taking the workshop for the second time, waves and walks across the room. As I pin on my name tag, he says he has to go out of town in the morning. "I might be back Sunday. What I'll miss is the stuff about sacred-spot massage. You know, G spot?"

I look at him quizzically.

"Vaginal orgasm," he says.

"Oh, come on," I say. "Vaginal orgasms don't exist. We settled that twenty-five years ago."

He raises his eyebrows. "I've known women who . . ."

"So have I. I mean, I've spoken to hundreds. This is something I feel certain about."

He smiles and looks away. A bell rings and about ninety people, nervous, curious, take seats on the thick brown carpet.

My friend was not the first person who'd recommended this workshop, given by Charles and Caroline Muir of the Source School of Tantra in Maui, Hawaii. My sister, who lives in Hawaii, had taken the course in 1987. She'd been prodding and I'd been resisting for almost a decade, but in the past year I'd heard glowing reports from others, including the actors Jill Eikenberry and Michael Tucker, whom I knew to be sharp, discriminating, feet-on-the-ground people. "It transformed the

way we thought about sex," Tucker told me. "It took us to states we'd never imagined, and I realized: This is what we're here for, to love like this." Tucker said they'd moved to Northern California partly to be close to a community of others practicing Tantric sex.

The journalist in me was intrigued. I showed the brochure to my boyfriend, Richard, a Cowboy artist who'd never taken a workshop of any kind. We'd been enjoying what we considered the best sexual relationship of our lives, and I thought what I knew about female sexuality was state of the art. I'd gone to Berkeley in the '60s, taken part in love-ins and protest marches, and visited communes where no one wore clothes. I'd written a book, *Loose Change*, chronicling the '60s and the sexual revolution. I'd been to consciousness-raising groups and heard women of all ages, backgrounds, and races talk about their sexuality. Still, Richard and I had been together three years, we'd fallen into certain rituals, and, as he put it, "How can you ever know too much about sex?"

We made our way across the room and sat down in a row of chairs. Richard leaned over. "Why are we doing this?"

"You wanted to."

"That was before."

"We can always leave."

The group had swelled to more than a hundred participants, who ranged, we would learn, from their twenties to their seventies, with the majority in their thirties and forties. They were accountants, doctors, musicians, filmmakers, >

and twenty-two of them were single.

Charles and Caroline walked onto the dais and sat cross-legged on pillows. Charles was tall and slim, with pale skin and dark curly hair. Caroline was blond, full-breasted, and moved with an eagerness and cat-like grace. They wore matching colors—turquoise shirts and black pants—and were barefoot. They were, respectively, forty-nine and fifty-three; both looked younger.

Charles explained that Tantra was a tradition that had begun in India about 3000 B.C. "It was a total way of life that included exercises for the body, breathing, meditation, music, art, and practices for making sex sacred."

Caroline spoke, in a voice that was surprisingly deep and smoky. "We're going to give you techniques and information that will make you a better lover, a sexual healer."

Charles lapsed into a Bronx accent. "The old goals, the ones I learned from Joey Giovanutti in the West Bronx, were: Get it up, get it in, get it off. These days, getting the lady off is a big goal for men. But we're going to introduce you to a vast menu of sexual choices. You've got appetizers. You've got entrées."

Those in the room who'd been sitting stiffly began to relax. Richard asked me why so many were barefoot. I said we might be doing yoga exercises, and that there was a tradition in the East of taking off your shoes in a holy place. Richard looked at me. "We're in a hotel room talking about sex."

Charles said the names we have for the sexual organs don't honor them. When he began giving this workshop ten years ago, he'd ask people to name all the words they knew for the penis. He picked up a list: "We had cock, pecker, prick, dick, stick, dong, shlong, big bong, ding dong, weeny, wiener, hot dog, sausage . . ." He paused. "That was the meat section." He read on—there were more than 150 names—concluding with "Charlie, Herbie, Sir John Thomas, and Chester the Pussy Molester."

In Tantra, he said, "we use the Sanskrit word *lingam*, which means

'wand of light.'" He took out a puppet—actually a child's toy, a magic wand that lit up with orange sparks when he pressed a switch. "We're going to ask you to trade in your dick or prick for a wand of light, and to use that wand as a master artist uses a paintbrush."

Caroline said most of the names for the vagina are "so demeaning they're not worth repeating. The Sanskrit word is *yoni*, which means 'sacred space.'" She picked up her puppet, a foot-high *yoni* made of purple velvet with red lips and a gold clitoris. "This is a sacred space, and through this space comes life itself." Then Charles put his *lingam* puppet in her *yoni* puppet to demonstrate some of the "thousand-and-one varieties of movement," such as altering the angle of entrance. "Keep her surprised," Charles said. "You don't always want to go straight down the fairway."

By this time, people were laughing and lounging on the floor, as if the puppets were from *Sesame Street* and it was perfectly normal to be talking about *lingams* and *yonis* in the Wil-

shire room of the Sheraton Miramar.

When the session ended, Richard and I went home and tried some of the techniques, including one for "longer, more powerful orgasms," called "Climbing the Himalayas." Charles told us, "When you're about to come, take a deep breath and visualize pulling the energy up from the genitals to the brain. When you exhale, let out a great sound and that will keep you peaking upward." The result was pleasant, but, as Richard put it, "underwhelming." We discussed going somewhere else for the

rest of the weekend, but our interest had been sufficiently piqued to impel us to return to the hotel.

On Saturday morning, Charles and Caroline began setting the stage for the ritual we'd do that evening: sacred-spot massage. Charles said there's an area in the *yoni* called

the sacred spot, also known as the G spot, after the gynecologist Ernst Grafenberg, credited with discovering it in 1944. It struck me as significant that this spot, which supposedly has been in women's bodies for millennia, was "discovered" by a man who named it after himself. "Every woman needs healing and awakening there, no matter how awake you think you are," Charles said.

Caroline said, "Most women have had traumas in this region. You've had infections or abortions, pregnancy, a difficult pregnancy, cancer, sexual abuse, sex you didn't want, sex that hurt." She said the traumas are stored in the *yoni* and cause it to shut down. Charles said, "All women have some degree of vaginal anesthesia."

He said the G spot is located on the upper inside wall of the vagina, midway between the opening and the cervix. "It's not one spot, it's more like an area that can shift and grow. It's the south pole of the clitoris, the internal pole."

I caught Richard's eye and shook my head. I'd always thought the G spot was hokum, and that searching for it would be as much of a snipe hunt as chasing the vaginal orgasm. Richard told me a joke he'd heard: "What's the difference between a golf ball and a G spot?"

"I don't know."

Richard told me a joke he'd heard: "What's the difference between a golf ball and a G spot? ... A man will spend twenty minutes searching for a golf ball."



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Charles stressed that this night was for the women. "This bud's for you, honey. Guys, it's not about your healing or getting off. We'll have that tomorrow. This is her night, and it's your opportunity to serve." He said he'd be coaching the men for two hours and Caroline would be coaching the women, "so by this evening, you'll know what to do."

He said each man should bathe, shave, trim his nails, and draw a bath for the woman. While she's relaxing, he should prepare the room. "Fluff it up with flowers, candles, soft music. Dress yourself in appealing clothing."

The sacred-spot massage should last at least an hour, he said. During the massage, the woman might experience numbness, pain, strong emotions, memories, or exquisite pleasure. "It may take a year of practice before this area is awakened. The goal is not to give her more or bigger orgasms, but to love her and be present for whatever happens."

Charles said that continued stimulation could bring on vaginal orgasms. I raised my hand. "I have a problem with this." I asked Caroline if she could describe the vaginal orgasm. "For me, the difference between clitoral and vaginal orgasms is like night and day," she said. "A clitoral orgasm is like a male orgasm, a big bang. A vaginal orgasm feels like waves of pleasure through my whole body. And it's easy. You don't have to work and strain."

What bothered me about Caroline's description was its vagueness. In subsequent weeks, I asked numerous women about vaginal orgasms, and some said, "I think I've felt that." One said, "It's like an echo going through me." Another said, "It's like there's a trapdoor inside. When he presses against it, I can have twelve climaxes." Another said, "It happens

when he comes." On the other hand, a clitoral orgasm, or rather, I should say, an orgasm, is a clear event. Meg Ryan was able to simulate one perfectly—recognizable to all—in *When Harry Met Sally*. Could she sit in the deli and simulate one of the other kind?

Despite the skepticism in the room, Charles went further: He said that sacred-spot massage could lead the woman to ejaculate a clear, sweet-smelling liquid called *amrita*, or divine nectar. "It comes out of the urethra, but it's not urine," Charles said. "And it's not just moisture or lubrication. It's voluminous. We measure it in cups, sometimes quarts. It takes three or four towels to absorb it, and I've seen it shoot eight feet in the air and hit the wall."

"No!" someone cried.

"Where does it come from?" a woman asked.

Charles smiled. "Some researchers think it comes from the soft tissue around the urethra. But the yogis say it's generated in the *yoni* of the mind." Caroline nodded. "I feel the energy in my head first, then down my neck and shoulders and I tell Charles, 'Get the towels.'"

I looked at Richard. "I don't know what the hell they're talking about."

Charles said this ejaculation had been written about in both ancient China and India. "We believe it's every woman's birthright. It's within you, ready to come out."

"If this is available to all women," I asked, "how come we don't know about it?" Caroline said that society has a vested interest in the accepted wisdom of the time. "But this is all going to become known, because you can't stop the truth."

The accepted wisdom about female sexuality, until the late '60s, was that immature women have clitoral orgasms and mature women

have vaginal orgasms. Freud wrote, in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, that when girls grow up, they "change their leading erotogenic zone" from the clitoris to the vagina, and if they fail to do so, they'll be prone to neurosis and hysteria.

During my senior year at Berkeley, I shared an apartment with three young women. One went to a gynecologist, who, after examining her, told her about the superiority of vaginal orgasms and suggested she practice having them by inserting a shampoo bottle into her vagina. I don't remember whether she tried the shampoo bottle, but we all discussed it and were mystified. All the orgasms we'd felt were in the clitoris, no matter how they'd been achieved—through intercourse, masturbation, or simply having one's ankle caressed. We decided the doctor was crazy, but we had secret doubts: Perhaps we weren't real women, experiencing all that a woman could.

Then came the first women's liberation groups, which circulated pamphlets like Anne Koedt's "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," and Susan Lydon's brilliant essay, "The Politics of Orgasm." Lydon stated that the clitoris was the center of all orgasms and that men had trumped up the notion of a superior, vaginal orgasm to keep women dependent on them. "With the clitoral orgasm, woman's sexual pleasure was independent of the male's, and she could seek her satisfaction as aggressively as the man sought his."

Lydon's assertion was backed by scientific evidence. Masters and Johnson had hooked up women to electric sensors, monitored them during orgasm, and found, as they stated in *Human Sexual Response*: "The dichotomy of vaginal and clitoral orgasms is entirely false. Anatomically, all orgasms are centered in the clitoris."

This ushered in the reign of the >

"A woman would have a hard time finding the G spot herself. She'd have to send her partner on a Lewis and Clark expedition up her vagina."—Dr. Ruth

clitoris supreme. We were free, our experiences were validated, and we buried the vaginal orgasm under cement. In the following years, the vibrator became a standard bedroom accessory and, for many women, intercourse was—I can't resist saying it—an anticlimax. While the clitoris ruled, the vagina was made an inferior place, lacking the nerves and exquisite sensitivity of its cousin. Gradually, this changed the way men made love. The new attitude was conveyed in the 1978 movie *Coming Home*, in which Jon Voight, paralyzed from the waist down and confined to a wheelchair, was able to give Jane Fonda such pleasure it made her breathless and ready to leave her macho husband.

Around the same time, college students reading *The Sun Also Rises* were baffled at why Jake's impotence meant he couldn't have a life with Lady Ashley. A young man at the University of Oregon, where I was lecturing, asked, "Why couldn't he just go down on her?" Because, I said, in 1926, to Hemingway and the community at large, this was unquestioned: It takes a penis. In 1978, the penis was nice but expendable.

In "The Politics of Orgasm," Lydon wrote that women are culturally conditioned about sex. "Historically, women defer to whatever model of their sexuality is offered them by men." During the Tantra workshop, though, as I listened to Caroline and Charles, I began to consider the possibility that for three decades, women had been deferring to the women's line. Was the vagina more potent and responsive than we'd believed? Or were we now being taken in by a New Age shill?

During the lunch break, I stopped in a bookstore and browsed through the section on health and sexuality. In the books I scanned, there was no mention of vaginal orgasm. I found sev-

eral discussions of the G spot, including the book *The G Spot*, by psychologists Alice Ladas and John Perry and sex educator Beverly Whipple. When published in 1983, *The G Spot* was a best-seller, but was criticized by the medical community for sketchy data and by feminists for resurrecting the vaginal orgasm. Today, the G spot still gets no respect. My favorite sex guru, Dr. Ruth Westheimer, writes in her latest book, *Sex for Dummies*, that women are constantly asking her about the G spot after trying and failing to find theirs. "It seems odd to me that such a wonderful thing as the G spot wasn't better known before recently," Dr. Ruth writes. "My problem with the G spot is that there has never been any scientifically validated proof that it exists. Because of where the G spot is said to be located, a woman would have a very hard time finding it by herself. Instead, she has to send her partner on a Lewis and Clark expedition up her vagina."

As for female ejaculation, Masters and Johnson, in their most recent book, *Heterosexuality*, state that it's probably a form of urinary stress incontinence. The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, however, in its updated 1992 version of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, acknowledges the existence of a "controversial theory" that when the G spot is stimulated, "some women orgasm with a gush of fluid from the urethra, which is not urine." They caution, however, against the G spot's becoming an "ideal" for women to live up to or its being "used to reinstate so-called vaginal orgasms as superior, making us feel inadequate."

After lunch, the Muirs showed a segment from a video they'd made, *Secrets of Female Sexual Ecstasy*: Charles and Caroline are nude as he massages her "sacred spot" with his fingers. He's looking in her eyes, speaking softly, and

then a clear liquid squirts out of her and drenches her legs.

When the lights came on, there was stunned silence. Charles said, "I know all you women are thinking, I'm the only one who doesn't have a sacred spot, and the men are thinking, Holy shit." People laughed, nervously. "Remember, the only goal tonight is to try the technique, observe the results, and report on what you find. Women, I've warned the men not to let you start a fight. Our experience is that one out of four of you will try."

He sent the couples home and directed the singles to stay for a special "ritual," which Richard and I asked permission to watch. When the singles had gathered in a corner of the ballroom, Charles told them, "Here are your choices. You can go home alone and experiment by yourself, or you can say, 'I'd like to experience sacred-spot massage and I'm willing to trust someone to do it with me.'" He said the women would choose their partners. "For the men, this means taking the risk you won't be chosen. If you are chosen, you're making a commitment to serve the Goddess in whatever form she comes to you."

Eight people stood up and left the room. Those remaining—nine women and six men—were praised for their bravery by Mair Simone, who'd been introduced as a "certified *dakhini*"—a sexual priestess, a private Tantra coach who could be called on to help couples during the "holy act." (I wondered what her certification process had involved.) Mair asked the men to sit on the floor with their eyes closed. Then she asked the women to join hands and form a circle within the circle, facing the men. The women walked around and around. "Look for guidance," Caroline said. "Whom should I choose?"

The women were then told to walk to a partner and take his hands. All the men were immediately chosen

except Ralph, a divorce lawyer in his fifties who had fifty extra pounds on him and friendly, impish eyes. When Mair saw he wasn't being chosen, she sat down in front of him, but before taking his hands, looked back at the three women who hadn't picked a partner. She beckoned to them, seeing if one had felt shy and might change her mind. Julianna, a young redhead, walked forward and took Ralph's hands. "Open your eyes, guys," Charles said, "and behold the gift."

Later, Ralph would tell the group that when he opened his eyes, he was looking at a woman he'd never seen. "I thought, It's *yonis* time, and I don't know this person!"

Mair came up and asked Julianna how she felt. "I'm a little uneasy. I'd feel better if you came along," Julianna said. Mair asked Ralph if she could join them and he agreed, but he later told me he'd been thinking, Am I such a loser that I have to be trained by a pro?

On the ride home, Richard was cranky. He'd been bored and irritated when he and the other men had been taken aside for "coaching." "These guys were duds," he said. "They were complaining: 'You mean we have to serve and we don't get anything? I don't know if I want to go down that road.' And Charles told them, 'Just try it. Go down the road and sightsee. One night only.' But they said, 'This goes against my whole upbringing.'"

I told him what Michael Tucker had said after taking the workshop: "I always thought I wanted my pleasure, but the point is to fill the woman with pleasure and then the man will get everything he's ever wanted and more. If the woman of the house is happy and full, good things will flow."

"These guys didn't want to hear that," Richard said. "They wanted to measure the sacred spot with a slide rule: Is it an inch and a half, an inch?"

We walked into the house and drank some cognac. He was still gloomy. He said he didn't belong at the workshop, nobody had talked to him, and he didn't want to talk to anybody. "This happens a lot when I go places with you."

"I thought the woman was supposed to try to start the fight."

He smiled. "Tomorrow's my night, right?"

"Right," I joked, "but you ain't gonna get zilch if you don't get down to business pretty soon."

We found the G spot. An erogenous zone I hadn't known existed—a zone just as feverish and riveting as the clitoris, if not more so because of the novelty. I felt as if concrete were cracking; a whole political edifice was toppling. It was as if a switch had been pulled, klieg lights turned on, and vast reaches that had been asleep were now alive.

I could understand, though, why people might have trouble finding the spot after reading a book. It was not a single locus, but a constantly shifting field, and it required a certain level of arousal to be activated. The way Richard described it later to a friend was, "It's like a root structure. If you press against it, the roots withdraw. But if you rest your finger there, the roots will reach down for it."

I could understand, also, how this information would be threatening in certain quarters and exceedingly welcome in others. For when the vagina is put back in play along with the clitoris, the penis is wanted, essential.

I had a strong sense-memory of being nineteen, in college, with my first lover, and I remembered how startling and wonderful it had felt—simple intercourse. We'd made love on the floor of my dorm room and at the apartment he shared with a guy from France and in the motel room we rented when he

visited me at my parents' home. That's what it felt like again.

Then Richard and I found ourselves in a place where it seemed as if no human had set foot. It was lush, mysterious, shot through with a sense of the magic and love in all things. We lay quietly with our chests pressed together and there was an exchange between his skin and mine, his ribs

and mine, his heart and mine that filled our dry cells and made us whole.

Sunday morning, in the Wilshire room of the Sheraton Miramar, the men and women looked as if they'd taken ecstasy, the love drug. Ralph was sitting on the floor, beaming, his arms around the two beauties who'd gone home with him. Couples were kissing, lacing their fingers together. The women didn't sit so much as flow over the chairs, and the men looked powerful. They were knights.

Charles asked people to describe their experience. Dora, who was single, spoke first. The day before, she'd been tense and crabby and had accused me of stealing her chair. She was a tall, plain woman and had chosen Carl, the smallest man in the room. "He was the most giving, loving man I've

ever known," she said Sunday. "I've never felt so cherished. I woke up this morning, touched my own arm, and felt I was being loved. I walked outside and felt the sun loving me."

"She got her money's worth," Richard whispered.

Gary, an English teacher, said his wife hadn't wanted to make love for the past six years. "And she's a sex therapist. When I started the massage last night, Ellen didn't feel anything," he said. "But then she started crying. This memory came to her—of >

Meg Ryan
was able to
simulate
one perfectly—
recognizable
to all—in *When
Harry Met Sally*.
Could she sit
in the deli and
simulate one of
the other kind?



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having urinary infections and painful dilations in the hospital when she was in seventh grade."

Ellen said, "I made myself open my eyes and look at him, and I felt such relief, so unburdened."

Only one woman in the room hadn't found the G spot. "My husband must have worked on me for two hours," she said. "I finally had to use my vibrator, I was so frustrated. I didn't want to come back here today. I feel like I failed."

"You didn't fail," Charles said. "And he wasn't working on you. He was loving you." Charles suggested to her, to everyone, that for the next ten days, "you're going to practice this for ten minutes a day. This is an art form. It takes some study."

Charles asked if anyone had experienced *amrita*. One woman raised her hand, but she was a veteran. She and her boyfriend had been attending a university of sex in San Francisco. (One exists, I learned; it's a private, informal school for people who want to pursue "conscious loving.") No one else had spotted the elusive vaginal orgasm, either. Charles said, after the workshop, that this had been a "tame group."

In subsequent weeks, I questioned many women and found two who said they'd had ejaculations. For one, a novelist, it had been an accident that had unnerved her and that she wasn't eager to repeat. For Jill Eikenberry, who experienced it after almost a year of Tantra practice, it was "an incredible release. It feels like it's washing away all kinds of things. There's no tension or clenching, as with orgasms I've had before. But it shouldn't be thought of as a goal. That's not the Tantric way."

On Sunday afternoon, Charles and Caroline began instructing us in what they called "sexual healing for men." Charles whipped off his belt and trousers and lay down on the dais in swim trunks, holding the *lingam* puppet in front of him. "This region in men needs healing—from all the times it was rejected, criticized, teased, from having its neck wrung in masturbation." Caroline sat down and pulled his legs over hers so his hips were in her lap. She

showed us how to massage the pressure points in the groin and, using the puppet, showed us "thirty-seven ways to touch a *lingam*." There were dozens of maneuvers, including "the Arnold," which involved gripping the muscle at the base so it became pumped.

At the end of the workshop, it seemed to me that the men had been given short shrift. We'd spent a day preparing for the women's night and a few hours preparing for the men's. I asked Charles about this during an interview the following day, and he said they'd purposely made women the priority. "Women need to be healed first, because they're the most scarred. Also, we've found that once the woman's energy is released, everything else will follow."

It is now eight months since we took the Tantra workshop and our friends want to know, did it work? Does it last? What I can say is that levels of delight, for both of us, have increased exponentially, and higher peaks, wilder climbs, may still be ahead.

People's reactions to Tantra have been as telling and fascinating as the course itself. Some are intrigued, many find it weird or distasteful, and others are not in the mood—too busy, too tired—things are fine the way they are, thank you. What people are up against, it seems, is 2,000 years of fear and loathing of female sexuality, and the primal anxiety—in women as well as men—that if Pandora gives in to her impulses and opens the box, dark furies will be set loose. Transcendent sex requires one to surrender control, to abandon all devices for protection, to shed one's carapace—and sometimes it's more comfortable to keep the carapace in place.

Charles Muir calls from Hawaii to ask how Richard and I are doing. "Are you having vaginal orgasms yet?"

"No."

"Have you ejaculated yet?"

"No."

I take note of the word *yet*. He suggests that we come to Mexico for an intermediate course that lasts a week, so we can make "real progress." But we haven't booked any flights. Yet. 