Perceiving the Divine through the Human Body

Mystical Sensuality

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CHAPTER 2

Indo-Tibetan Tantrism as Spirit Marriage

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Introduction and Methodology

As has been documented by Eliade, Lewis, and others, a fascinating dimension of shamanic ritualism is the practice of shamanic or "spirit" marriage. The foundational principle of such marriage is the "nuptial" connection between a shamanic ritualist and a spirit spouse, sometimes yielding amorphous "spirit children" and even leading in some cases to "spirit divorce." As a ritual institution, shamanic marriage represents one manner in which religious power is mediated through the contact, if not a contract, between physical and spiritual beings, and in which the human practitioner gains the ability to perceive and thus utilize the resources of a spirit world. This chapter will demonstrate how the logic of various types of shamanic marriage can be said to be parallel to that of the embodied, gendered, and sexualized practices of Hindu and Buddhist tantra, in which physical and spiritual bodies are brought into contact and bound together in concrete ways through ritual performance. It will be discussed how practices such as tantric worship (*pūjā*) and the use of transgressive ritual offerings or the "five m's" (*pañcamakāra*), including sexual practices (*maithuna*), mediate the spiritual world and make it tangible and perceptible to the tantric practitioner (*sādhaka*). We will also examine how the principles of tantric ritualism parallel those of shamanic marriage in interesting ways, especially with respect to the exchange of physical substances and offerings for spiritual "goods," such as higher forms of perception and knowledge, obtaining *siddhi* (magical accomplishment) and *vidyā* (knowledge) for the sake of worldly power, and self-transformation or liberation (*mukti*).

It might be asked how "spirit marriage" as applied comparatively between shamanism and Indo-Tibetan tantric practices can be said to fit into the spectrum of religious practices and experiences characterized as "mysticism" and specifically "mystical marriage." This question hinges, first of all, on the way in which we define "mysticism," and secondly on the concept of marriage as it is applied within these contexts. The concept and category of "mysticism" is a highly contested term in the contemporary academic context, as evidenced by the wide range of current literature in Religious Studies and in Philosophy in which this concept and category has been interrogated and theorized. Marriage itself is a concept that is contested not only as an academic concept, but also as a touchstone for social reality and religious ethics in the contemporary public sphere; it has been part of the moral and political narrative that has shaped the political arena in the United States in recent years, given its centrality in civic and religious discourse. A discussion of "spirit marriage" therefore offers the possibility of shedding light upon the historical and cultural domain of religious experience, with ideological and metaphysical implications of academic and possibly contemporary public interest.

One common approach to defining "mysticism" is to appeal comparatively to a unitive, supersensory experience that has a transcendent and ultimate nature, a definition characterized by the work of Ninian Smart.[1] Such definitions have the benefit of a predisposition toward "contentless" experiences and thus transcend contextual differences among religious experience. Others see this as a much too "narrow" definition of mysticism, in which the unitive typology is seen as a subcategory of a larger set of categories of immediate and supersensory religious experience.[2] Smart's position was rooted in his articulation of a distinction characteristic of many of the "core" mysticism theorists—the distinction between outward and sensory-data driven experiences and inward-directed or introverted forms of experience.[3] Smart characterizes this as the distinction between *numinous* types of experience and those of a mystical character, strongly defining the boundaries between the two based upon the notion of tangible content and outward-direction of the experience versus the inwardness and unconditionality of the other. Smart's theory appears to parallel to some degree the work of Stace, who distinguishes between introvertive and extrovertive experiences, experiences of a "worldly" character versus those of withdrawal from the world. Stace, however, perceives both to have mystical character only when removed from the world of the senses, with the introvertive viewed as the ultimate trajectory and consummation of the mystical path.[4] Another approach that pays attention to a "spectrum" of experience is found in the work of Erica Bourguignon and others, who

make a sharp distinction between "mystical" and "ecstatic" types of religious experience based upon the inner or outer orientation of the experience—which leads to a number of other important and interesting questions about the nature of the boundary between the mystical and the ecstatic, and the issue of what constitutes religious versus nonreligious ecstatic experiences.[5] In the Indian context, these dynamics are demonstrated in terms of the practices of yoga and meditation in their various historical and literary contexts, where there is a clear dynamic relationship between the numinous power (the transformation of the practitioner into an "other"—i.e., a deity) resulting through such practices, and the concept of the ending of worldly existence (especially rebirth) through a liberatory process where a special form of knowledge leads to a separation or detachment from the field of experience.[6]

Acknowledging the arguments offered by Katz and others against the postulation of a universal "unitive" or "core" theory of mysticism in favor of contextualizing approaches, I would argue that a more satisfactory definition of mysticism should recognize the dynamic range of types of religious experience, allowing for contextuality, self-identification, and heuristic use. In its broadest sense and in pragmatic and heuristic usage, "mysticism" refers to religious experience in its full array of possibilities, and, following upon this, secondarily as particular theories of universality, contextuality, and so on. In other words, both on the grounds of common usage and on the basis of creating a heuristic, or pragmatic, larger framework for the purpose of elucidating this domain of religion, I prefer to use the term "mysticism" here as equivalent to the expression "religious experience." What I would suggest is that mysticism, in its most common usage, refers to a sense of direct and immediate encounter with sacred, transformative, or transcendent objects, states, or presences, ranging from the tangible and concrete to the intangible, ineffable, and abstract. In this context, I would stipulate that the term "sacred" is not to be understood as a theological category, but rather as an anthropological category, and likewise for the term "numinous," which is a useful term for elucidating the phenomenological, especially the embodied, dynamics of religious experience, when divorced from its normative moorings.[7] In other words, mysticism in its broadest sense refers to the first-person and first-order experience of transcendence, transformation, power, value, or meaning—as directly felt or perceived—rather than a second-order experience that is rooted in the reports of others. There can clearly be overlap in that second-order experiences often lend or lead toward first-order cultivation (the recollection of the Buddha's qualities as an enlightened being, for example, may lead to an experience of peace in the present that is first order), and this element is of

great import in comparative analyses of the nature of religion in the twentieth century (such as that of Eliade and the concept of *illud tempus*). With respect to the "numinous," the types of intensive emotive content can be one foundation for the noetic quality of the experience—the profundity of the experience is real, even if one might analytically question the epistemological implications, that is, postulate epistemological limits, of such an experience.[8] This approach also has the benefit of connecting—or reconnecting—the concept of "mysticism" to its etymological derivation, as pointing to the idea of being "initiated," having been through a process of knowledge and transformation.

One might argue that this approach has the effect of decontextualizing the term "mysticism," and thus separating it from its historical roots, and thereby its linguistic matrix. I would argue that first of all, this has already happened—"mysticism" as a term in contemporary usage, which is rooted in a Greek cultural and linguistic context, has been extricated and theorized by Christians and has been applied to Judaism, Islam, and other traditions by both scholars and practitioners. Second, the decontextualization lends paradoxically toward allowing for greater contextuality in comparison—if we restrain the impulse characteristic of narrow theological (i.e., normative) discussions of mysticism that privilege monotheistic, and ultimately Christian, forms of mysticism, the door is open to a more balanced approach to studying religious experience. Lastly, this approach is more satisfactory because it applies to everyday usage as well as technical meanings, being closer in many ways to the conventional usage of the term "mysticism," referring to the first-person dimension of religion, while allowing for theoretical complexity within that overarching context. Even if we do not follow the most avid articulations of religious experience that place it at the center of what religion is about—such as those of Otto and Eliade—most of us can, I think, agree that first-person accounts are a crucial aspect of the larger phenomenon of religion.

Such a broader frame of reference allows for the acknowledgement of threads of continuity between ecstatic and mystical types of religious phenomena, suggesting both structural similarities and the possibility of differences revealing something important about context, especially with respect to sociodynamics of various types. Even if we apply the narrow definition of mysticism to analyze shamanism, it is possible that shamanism contains a range of practices that may be of mystical as well as ecstatic character, demonstrating the fact that there is not mutual exclusivity between "types." As Agehananda Bharati, one of the twentieth century's most provocative scholars of Hinduism and of mysticism, stated in his classic work on the topic: even if an ecstasy distinct from mysticism

is the primary goal of shamanic practice, one should not rule out the possibility that shamans experience mystic (i.e., unitive) states and that these should not be viewed as mutually exclusive categories.[9] I would argue that in fact, we should expect to see just such a thing—that the margins of the enstatic and ecstatic are fluid, and over time shift and transform accordingly with internal psychophysical reconfigurations and shifts in external sociocultural conditions, even if the morphology of a tradition changes so slowly as to make these changes virtually imperceptible or simply inconspicuous.

Spirit Marriage and Shamanic Power

An important dimension of many shamanic traditions, most notable being the paradigmatic ritual practices found in Siberia and Central Asia, is the attainment of shamanic power and authority through connection to "helper spirits" and through pacts with supernatural beings. These helpers and spirits are the "initiators" of the shaman, encountered in dreams, sickness, and other fringe states of human awareness.[10] The intersection between the shaman and such spirits leads to the possibility of a relationship between material and spiritual worlds through the sexual or "nuptial" intersection between humans and spirit agents. As is so central to religious practice and experience more broadly, the shaman becomes a medium or mediator between the mundane, physical world and the invisible and transcendent world of spirits, often in a manner that evokes strong gender imagery. In Eliade's retelling of Buryat tales, for example, the first shaman is the child produced through the sexual union of a celestial eagle and a human woman, and thus can be understood as a "spirit child" himself. Or, alternately, the woman who encounters the Eagle becomes, through the process, the first shamaness.[11] In either case, a primordial "act of love" or "act of passion," if I may, is the basis for the intersection of the mundane physical and supramundane spiritual worlds—either through the transfiguration of the woman who is in contact with this other world, or through the creation of a child that hybridizes the forces that characterize these two parallel planes of reality. These types of mediumship issues play out at the level of shamanic types of discourse in various contexts (celestial marriage or union as the source of the first shamaness, among the Buryat) and in the formulations of Abrahamic theism (such as in Christianity, where God the celestial Father paired with human mother Mary begets Jesus the Son, Mary being the "mediatrix" of humanity).[12] It can be pointed out that this model of "union" of opposites has important cosmological parallels as well—cosmogonies tied to the sexual joining of primordial or archetypal forces are characteristic of religions throughout the

world (with numerous examples in Ancient Near Eastern, Greek, Japanese, Chinese, and Indian traditions). Another example of the marriage narrative, cited by Eliade, is from among the Goldi, in which a feminine tutelary spirit (*ayami*) initiates the shaman, first though her claiming the shaman as her husband through explicit vows, then through joining him in sexual union, and ultimately in the long term by visiting him physically as an old woman, as various animals, and in dreams for the purpose of instructing him in shamanic techniques and in attracting spirit helpers.[13]

This might be said to compare in intriguing ways with the "initiators" of Buddhist tantra (such as in the story of Naropa), who appear in the guise of a fierce but beautiful young woman and also as an old crone, and the strong representation, more broadly, of goddesses characterized by animal and animal-headed imagery. There is some ambiguity, however, in both tantra and shamanism with respect to the consort or spouse being possessive or predatory upon the initiate, perhaps paralleled in the larger Indian ethos of the temptation of the yogin by celestial nymphs. In the Indian paradigm, the *apsaras*, or celestial nymph, serves to draw an ascetic or yogi out of their discipline, enjoying the fruit of their efforts in the form of sexual pleasure and thus effectively discharging their energy and discontinuing their practice. The ambiguity of tantra is likewise exemplified by the character and nature of the Hindu god Śiva—who, in his wrathful manifestations such as Bhairava, is the model of the enlightened deity within Vajrayāna Buddhism—and his consort Pārvatī. In Kālidāsa's epic poem Kumarasambhava, Śiva is drawn out of his profound *samādhi* or state of meditative absorption by Pārvatī through the force of her own *tapas*, or ascetic striving (after her enlisting of Kāma, the lord of eros, who loses his own physical form having attempted to provoke Śiva's desire—Kāma is destroyed as Śiva's third eye opens). On the other hand, the relationship between Śiva and Pārvatī becomes the model both for tantric exposition (Śiva instructing Pārvatī or the opposite) and the two in sexual union come to represent the tantric paradigm of *maithuna*, the non-dual metaphor for the ultimate state, if not the physio-psychological ground for *siddhi* (spiritual perfections) and *mukti* (liberation). As Wendy Doniger has discussed at length, the persona of Śiva is continuous with a discourse of *tapas* and sexuality that is rooted in the earliest Vedic texts, and plays on the ambiguities of the power of asceticism and the discharge of such power through magical and sexual actions.[14] Likewise, the narrative of Pārvatī utilizing ascetic discipline, that is, "spiritualizing" herself in order to attract the physical advances of Śiva, is in line with other Indian religious narratives, where asceticism is a "hook" for physical attraction and for the production of semidivine progeny through the human female's consorting with a deity.[15]

The conception of garnering sexual attention or being the victim of sexual "attacks" by spiritual beings are by no means confined to shamanism or to tantra—the extensive European literature dealing with incubi, succubae, etc., attests to a range of levels of parallelism that would be worth exploring. Likewise, there may be a sense of animosity between spiritual consorts and human ones, such that the spirit may require absence from the earthly spouse (due to jealousy) or possibly even steal them away at the moment of death as in the Saora of Orissa in India.[16] Female shamans may find their worldly relationships even more suppressed by their spiritual suitors, as appears to be the case with respect to some homosexual shamans whose celestial spouses are male.[17] Though Eliade argues that the sexual or erotic aspect of shamanism is secondary, there is a large body of literature that suggests that the sexual act and ultimately orgasm are at the center of the shaman-spirit relationship, enacted ritually through exaggerated movements and the suggestion of sexual ecstasy. One might further look at the important distinction between "adorcism" (the willful joining in possession) versus exorcism (the attempt to break away from a hostile spirit).[18] Some sexual relationships may be desired; others not, and in both cases shamanic practices aim at the control of such spirits. It is interesting to point out as well that these spirits may also be of various animal types (female animal spirits, female cousins of animals, or female spirit children of animals), making the boundary fluid between the spirit in anthropomorphic form and in animal form, which itself suggests "boundary crossing" or "boundary breaking."[19] With respect to Indo-Tibetan tantra, this is a quite familiar theme, especially among female tantric deities, where the boundary between goddess and animal spirit seems particularly fluid, and deities like Bhairava and his various consorts appear in wrathful and animal-headed forms. Sexual union and spirit marriage are, in this analysis, founded on a root metaphor of sexual ecstasy being coextensive with religious ecstasy, where the religious ecstasy is a sublimation or a yoking of the erotic and orgasmic state at the core of the human condition of embodiment. According to Kripal, this is exemplified in contexts in which the male or female has turned to ascetic or mystical practice in the wake of failed human marriage and relationships, connecting the dissatisfaction of the worldly expression of eros to the otherworldly ecstasy of a spiritual form of rapture and marriage.[20] Hindu bhakti, for example, exemplifies the complexity of spiritual marriages or consorting (or cavorting, for that manner) and the multiple streams of interpretation that flow from it—human emotions of love and eroticism being the paradigm for divine love, and perhaps a means of sublimating or cultivating those emotions that are not being exhausted in one's human relationships. The relationship between Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā in Vaiṣṇava traditions exemplifies the

multiple possibilities of conceiving of the relationship between the human and the divine, from the romantic to the erotic.

Shamanic Marriage as Pact or Contract

Clearly there are some questions that extend out of this discussion as to what degree sexuality confers power or, for that matter, strips a person of it. However, there are important connections in shamanic traditions between spirit marriage, initiation, mediumship, and possession. As Lewis has pointed out, among the Tungus and Eskimos, there is clearly a sense that at the heart of the shaman's vocation is the formation of a pact with a spirit-entity that provides the basis of their mastery over spiritual beings and over the spirit world.[21] This "pact" or "contractual agreement"—shamanic "marriage"—is at the center of the shaman's mastery, and involves the giving of a part of the soul, self, or part of the self as a crucial ingredient of spirit mastery and possession across a range of traditions.[22] This, according to Lewis, confers an "illumination" or gnosis, which is exemplified by the full effacement of the personality by the spiritual "other," paralleling the engrossment or annihilation of the self in mysticism, and illustrated in terms of the language of erotic love.[23] The language of erotic love finds a range of expressions, including those of being "mounted" by a spirit, interpreted through the language of marriage and spiritual kinship.[24]

This is a point of perhaps the strongest and clearest relationship between shamanism and tantra—the existence of an economy of power rooted in the psycho-physiological relationship between the human world and the spirit world, in which a basic "spiritual substance" becomes the means of linking the two worlds, seen and unseen. If we follow David Gordon White's compelling arguments regarding the origins of tantra, it would appear that there is a profoundly intimate and visceral relationship between tantric *sādhaka*s and their female consorts, the Yoginīs, that parallels the "pact" spoken of previously. White argues that the economy of power in early tantra involved the transmission of "power substances" between male and female yoga practitioners as a means of attaining spiritual perfections, referred to as *siddhi*s—many of which are characterized by heightened forms of perception (such as divine sight) and action (such as flight).[25] These "power substances" were sexual fluids, and they were the potent means for the transmission and attainment of power by male practitioners from female goddesses of a wrathful sort (the Yoginīs) and vice-versa, through the practice of *maithuna* and other means. Sexual fluids thus serve as the link between the material and spiritual, as the tangible "essence" of the spirit-force or vitality engendered through yogic and tantric discipline. The Yoginīs,

the agents of the spiritual world that are the recipients of these offerings, are wrathful in character and often have animal attributes, paralleling their shamanic counterparts. Though this may seem to only be a basic parallel, analogous to the larger literal and figurative uses of sexuality in the comparative context, there is an important point of difference. This is the fact that sexual fluids and their restraint (*brahmacarya*) and sealing (*mudrā*) are seen as having profound ramifications for the spiritual path and physical vitality as the distilled essence (*bindu*, "drops") of life itself. It might be argued that sexual fluids are the physical equivalent of the soul or spirit and the physical analogue of the subtle physiological process, and in giving these up, one is in principle giving up one's spirit. As characterized in the *haṭhayoga* tradition more broadly, the "bindu" composed of the vital life energies (and ultimately sexual fluid) is the core basis for psycho-physiological life and the process of rebirth, and therefore its manipulation and transformation has crucial spiritual implications. The *bindu*, which is the very essence of life, is a powerful, refined spiritual substance that if manipulated properly facilitates the obtaining of bodily immortality, spiritual mastery, and unlimited gnosis of *samādhi* in *haṭhayoga* and tantra. Here is where one of the clear parallels can be found—the tantric yogin or *tāntrika* exchanges the vital force of sexual restraint and *tapas* acquired through yogic control for the attainment of supernatural power. This power may be, in my analysis, of a numinous character (approximating or assimilating divine abilities such as flight) or a cessative one (lending toward insight or wisdom, as is the case with the Buddhist *prajñā* goddesses, the *ḍākinī*s), and I believe White would argue the primacy of the numinous over the cessative, especially in the early formations of tantra.

In the *Kulārṇavatantra*, which is the distillation of the *kula* or "clan" tantric practices, the spirit world, and especially the Goddess (Devī or Śakti), is made manifest in the material world through multiple forms of mediation, allowing the spiritual "transaction" to take place. The *Kulārṇavatantra*, which represents a sophisticated attempt to systematize the practice of tantric yoga into Śaiva and Vedānta traditions, presents a glimpse of how exactly the spiritual "transaction" or spirit marriage can take place in concrete and systematic terms. These include the performance of incantation or *mantra*, ritual worship (*pūjā*), the use of prohibited substances as offerings (*pañcamakāra*), including sexual rites (*maithuna*). *Pūjā*, the performance of worship through offerings, invokes the various sense-fields through offerings that correspond to them—through the image, the offering of incense and flowers, food and water, ringing a bell, through touching the image, and so forth. The taboo substances are understood not only as transgressive offerings appropriate for an occult deity, but also as the cultivation of inner

powers in the *sādhaka*, where the fragrance of wine activates the power of will (*icchāśakti*), the taste of wine activates the power of knowledge (*jñānaśakti*), and the intoxicating effect, the purification of mind (*cittaśodhana*).[26] Likewise, in the tantric sexual ritual of *maithuna*, the sensation of bliss (*ānanda*) at the heart of the sexual act is seen as the power of the goddess (*śakti*) in a tangible form, and the discernment of that reality differentiates *maithuna* from the mundane expression of intercourse, and activates the inner transformation of the *sādhaka*.[27] Thus, through the process of *kaulatantra*, the *sādhaka* strives for the complete and total divinization of mind and body—identity with the god Śiva—and thereby the transformation into a deity with attendant knowledge (*vidyā*) and power (*siddhi*) that is unlimited in nature.

The basic ritual and sexual equations, transactions, or contractual agreements lay the foundation for the more extensive interpretation of tantric *maithuna* as a consorting of identifiable gods and goddesses who dwell in an ecstatic and timeless state, as opposed to the more "momentary" encounters of earlier tantra. On a purely speculative level, sociologically speaking, this might demonstrate a shift from tantric encounters with "rogue" female possession ritualists that are part of charismatic female movements (such as characteristic of contemporary India and many other parts of the world) toward an integration or control of such (liminal) possession ritualism within the folds of a (liminoid) tantric tradition. On the other hand, the exchange between the male and female might be argued to bring an elevated spiritual status to both parties as the female is the gateway to possession and personification (initiation) and the discharge of male sexuality is the basis for the absorption by the female of the fruits of the male *tapas* and procreative on a spiritual if not a physical level. The "contractual" arrangement of this tantric relationship, or the exemplification of it through the Śiva-Śakti relationship and the Buddhist analogues such as Cakrasaṃvara and Vajravārāhī, demonstrates the exchange of power in a state of equilibrium, and therefore a more stable resolution of the polarization and exchange process.

Marriage (*vivāha*) in the traditional Indian context is centered on the ritual control of sexual fluids, and therefore the continuity between sexuality, marriage, purity, and spirituality is clear.[28] Tantra inverts this paradigm, disrupting the physical basis of both psychological and social reality, and ultimately creating a new order or equilibrium that is like a reverse mirror image of the stability of brāhmaṇical norms. Urban suggests this allows for the challenging and subverting of the social order through the manipulation of its own symbols.[29] It should also not be forgotten that the core sectarian sense of tantric identity emerged in part out of the Kaulatantra tradition, whose namesake is

derived from *kula*, meaning "clan" or "family"—indicating the establishment of a familial foundation for cult authority and identity. The family identity is tied into the concept that at the apex of the family tree is the divine, suggesting the descent of the divine into the human realm through the human intermediary chain of lineage, which plays out across tantric and non-tantric Indian religious practice (family being the model for spiritual community, such as the bodhisattva as the "son" or "daughter" of the Buddha, etc.).[30] It is interesting to note that Max Weber argued in *The Sociology of Religion* that in many religious contexts, marriage is founded as a contractual agreement based on supporting the well-being of the collective—producing workers and descendents who can care for the cult of the dead, namely the ancestors, to be contrasted with "orgiastic" eroticism that is a flight from such a centralized and ideologically homogenous community.[31] Here we seem to have an interesting juxtaposition of these impulses, brought to complexity in the differing states of the partners and the status of the "children" resulting from their union.

Symbolic Power in Human and Spirit Marriage

Marriage as a human phenomenon clearly mediates power both within a relationship of partners and outside of it. Part of the power of marriage is in the power of communal effort, that "two heads are better than one" in problem solving, survival, and actualization. It is the locus for the satisfaction or lack thereof of a dizzying array of physical and psychological desires and necessities, and thereby a complex economy of priorities and negotiations and in some cases the reckless abandonment of one person, the other, or both. It is not surprising that like its spiritual twin, human marriage often involves a dimensionality of sacrifice with respect to potential relationships and types of agency, but also a gaining in terms of material abundance, legitimating sexual relationships, procreating, and so forth. Worldly responsibilities are brought into focus, for example, by the tension between renouncer and householder in the Indian tradition—exemplified in the modern context by the complex relationship of Gandhi and his spouse. Nevertheless, it can be pointed our that yogic and ascetic practices have been woven into householder traditions, exemplified in contemporary yoga traditions such as the Krishnamacarya lineage and in tantric householdership in India, Nepal, and Tibet. It also is demonstrated in the complex worldly and otherworldly relationships between female possession ritualists in India and their material families and their spiritual helpers and preceptors.

One question that naturally comes to mind is the way in which "spirit spouses" may reflect intrapersonal and spiritual tensions within a community.

Does the jealousy of the spirit spouse, for example, reflect the jealousy of the divine powers that are battling for the souls of human beings, or is this a metaphor for the power dynamics of human relationships? Might this be a metaphor for relationships of power and attraction outside of one's immediate relationship, or a fantastic mirror image of such relationships—which cannot be consummated in the manner of a material relationship, not having the fullness of the physical dimension, with jealousy possible in both directions? Or, analogously, a reality that would be familiar in the context of polygamy or polyandry (or in contemporary polyamory), where jealousy and other emotions must be held in check or dealt with in strategic ways? In this analysis, issues such as fidelity in the spiritual and sexual dimensions of life serve as a model for the complexity of relating to the larger "spiritual family." This is not to broach the topic of arranged marriages and the complexity of issues that that brings to the fore, such as the ways in which the broader social context of the conjoining play a crucial part of the narrative of "union." Marriage brings social order to the world, spirit marriage to the spiritual world paralleling this world—perhaps with clear implications in the opposite: bodily marriage, spiritual effects; and spiritual marriage, bodily effects. Another question would be, "Does the gendered body enter into this equation, and therefore reflect an idealized spiritual order?"—a point that may have implications with respect to the issue of gay marriage, for example.

Two points stand out clearly with respect to the issue of the intersection of spirit marriage and tantric traditions. The first is the idea that at the foundation of the power relationship is a process of exchange, whereby the spirit draws on the power human, to some degree "feeding" on it, and thereby through that transaction exchanging and infusing the human consort with power. In tantra, this transfusion of power is centered on the distillation of spiritual energy (*prāṇa, bindu*) in the subtle body (*sukṣma śarīra*) in the form of sexual fluids, identified and mastered in the form of the sensation of bliss (*ānanda*), which is at the core of the psychophysical rituals of *kaulatantra* and *haṭhayoga* and the transformation of the ordinary human person into a divine being (such as Śiva) or a Buddha. The second point is that this exchange is situated in a larger nexus of communal relationships that suggest that the connection between the spirit world and the human world is mediated through the consort relationship, and that power extends out of this primordial conjunction. This can in turn be tied into larger discussions about the role of sexuality as both a central component of embodied life and experience, and as a metaphor for transcending the dualities implicit in embodied existence, world, and deity that characterize religious experience, and thus mysticism, through a range of religious traditions and phenomena. Marriage and

its structure in human life is a privileging of a relationship where the sacrifice of autonomy is seen as means to a higher unity, a leap of faith that is paradigmatic on multiple levels. It is reflexive in that it demonstrates the continuity of order in both embodied and disembodied existence, and ultimately, the power of their conjunction.

Notes

1. Ninian Smart, "Understanding Religious Experience," in *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, ed. Steven T. Katz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 10–21.
2. Jerome Gellman, "Mysticism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/mysticism/.
3. Robert K. C. Forman, "Mysticism, Constructivism, and Forgetting," in *The Problem of Pure Consciousness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3–49.
4. W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960), 62–123. Though I find the distinction between "extrovertive" and "introvertive" quite appealing as a "spectrum" of experience, I am arguing here that the term "extrovertive" can be fruitfully applied to the realm of the senses, a usage that is at odds with Stace's definition. On Stace's assertion that sensorial phenomena should not be included under the "mystical," see *Mysticism and Philosophy*, 47–55.
5. See, for example, Erica Bourguignon, *Religion, Altered States of Consciousness, and Social Change* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1973), 3–35.
6. Stuart Ray Sarbacker, *Samādhi: The Numinous and Cessative in Indo-Tibetan Yoga* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 27–51.
7. In the second case, this would be so if the experience of the numinous "otherness" is understood as being the experience of an external force, the experience of radical self-transformation, or some combination of these possibilities.
8. Two possible trajectories of interpretation that might be fruitful with respect to looking at the noetic in this manner would be to plug this approach into James's theory of mysticism and Geertz's definition of religion (especially the concept of the "aura of factuality").
9. Agehananda Bharati, *The Light at the Center: Context and Pretext of Modern Mysticism* (Santa Barbara, CA: Ross-Erickson, 1976), 141–48.
10. Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 67.
11. Ibid., 69.
12. I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (London: Routledge, 1989), 56.
13. Eliade, *Shamanism*, 71–73.
14. Wendy Doniger, *Śiva: The Erotic Ascetic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 40–82.
15. Ibid., 64–65.

16. Eliade, *Shamanism*, 78; Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, 53.
17. I. M. Lewis, *Arguments With Ethnography: Comparative Approaches to History, Politics & Religion* (London: The Athlone Press, 1999), 109–11.
18. Ibid., 106.
19. Ibid., 109.
20. Jeffrey Kripal, *Roads of Excess, Palaces of Wisdom: Eroticism and Reflexivity in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 73–77.
21. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion*, 50.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid., 50–51.
24. Ibid., 52.
25. David Gordon White, *Kiss of the Yoginī: "Tantric Sex" in its South Asian Contexts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 10.
26. Arthur Avalon, M. P. Pandit, and Tārānātha Vidyāratna, *Kulārṇava Tantra* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000 [1965]), 47–48.
27. Ibid., 52.
28. Hugh Urban, *The Economics of Ecstasy: Tantra, Secrecy, and Power in Colonial Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 140.
29. Ibid., 141.
30. White, *Kiss of the Yoginī*, 18–21.
31. Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Talcott Parsons (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 240.

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