

Love under Will: Sexuality, Magic & Liberation

by Phil Hine

I am the flame that burns in every heart of man, and in the core of every star. I am Life, and the giver of Life, yet therefore knowledge of me is the knowledge of death. Liber AL, II, 6.

At a time when Magic is (supposedly) undergoing a renaissance, with core ideas & techniques presented in a clear and open manner, Sexual Magic remains entangled in glimmers and misconceptions. There is little published material, it seems, which deals with the subject clearly. It is usually the case that Sexual Magic is shrouded (sometimes "drowned") in symbolic asides and allusions.

To begin with, what actually constitutes an act of Sexual Magic? A broad definition is: *that it is the harnessing of one's own sexuality with intentionality* - literally "Love Under Will", to bring about change. This implies a great deal more than the waving of rods, wands, cups, and roses. Celibacy, as a conscious decision *not* to be sexually active can be as much an act of Sexual Magic as any ritualised copulation or masturbation.

The basis of Sexual Magic is to understand, and experience sexuality as sacred or "Magical". Sexuality is probably the most powerful means of transformation, discovery and knowledge that Humanity has. This is why sexuality is effectively put under 'lock and key' by our Society. The Judeo-Christian attitude to sexuality has become "embedded" in the cultural psyche, to the extent that many of us feel that sexual expression is "naturally" followed by shame and guilt. For orthodox Christianity, sexuality can never be entirely sinless, even within the confines of marriage. The onset of the "Permissive Society" is supposed to have freed us from past constraints and inhibitions, but has it? Sexuality has become another brand of commodity, another source of status. Although we tend to regard our own sexual natures in terms of privacy and "naturalness", it is subject to a great deal of interference and manipulation from external agents. There is a media-borne cultural imperative that we must be *good* at sex; that success is dependant on the number of orgasms that we can wring from our partners, or indeed from the number of partners we have. For many of us, sexuality is a major means of gaining status and Egocentric power, associated with imposing ones will upon others. The key factor in Rape for example, appears to be that of the male demonstrating his power *over* another person (woman or weaker male). Society acts to channel sexual energy into acceptable forms - those which maintain alienation; channels such as Sentimental Romanticism and Pornography. More powerful and invasive than any medieval incubi are the neuroses, obsessions and acts of violence which seem to be the inevitable spawn of this Sexual Nihilism. A characteristic of this profoundly Egocentric sexuality is that ones partner is regarded as little more than an instrument to satisfy ones own needs (be they physical or status needs). Human emotions are alienated in

the scramble for consumer gratification; in goods, wealth, success, and the conquering of each others orifices.

These cultural imperatives, to be successful and goal-oriented in every area of Life, are so deeply embedded that we only tend to notice the most obvious manifestations of them - with regard to work, for example. They can easily pass unnoticed in the very personal domain in which we place our own sexuality, and equally importantly, our sense of "Spirituality". As a result of the cultural emphasis placed on goal-orientation, a good deal of what passes for Western Occultism is also goal-oriented. Western Sexual Magic is no exception. There is a tendency to regard Sexual Magic as merely a 'better' way to acquire goods, "powers" or wealth, and there is great emphasis placed on the necessity of visualisation, inhibition of orgasm and mental concentration, rather than bodily awareness and pleasure. This seems to be a rather clinical and narrow approach to sexual potential- as Zach Cox put it (in *Aquarian Arrow* 22) "like using a microprocessor chip as a doorstep".

Part of the problem that Western Sexual Magic suffers from is the enshrinement of the ideas of Aleister Crowley, who is often held up as a paragon of the 'new sexuality.' However, Pan-sexuality such as Crowley displayed does not automatically imply total sexual liberation. Though a great innovator and synthesist, Crowley was unable to disentangle himself from the prevailing sexual mores of his time. His sexual philosophy displays a typical (and enduring) dualistic attitude towards women, placing his "idealised" women on a pedestal, yet seemingly unable to accept women as equals. Examples of his Egocentricity are not hard to find:

"At about 8.45pm I was on 34th St & Broadway, looking for a soul-mate, a destined bride, an affinity, a counterpartal ego etc.; and should have considered the conditions satisfied by any orifice into which I could plunge my penis at a cost not exceeding \$2.50".

Rex De Arte Regia.

Crowley's approach to Sexual Magic seems to have been almost totally results-oriented, with his numerous *opera* for money, fascination, success, youth and magical energy. He implies that the partner in such a working is secondary to the will of the Mage, the selection of an appropriate partner being left to unconscious caprice. Unfortunately for present-day occultists, there is little material available concerning the work and ideas of the women who followed Crowley's system. Doubtless much of Crowley's attraction as a guru-figure is the way his attitudes uphold male Egocentric sexual values. All the material currently available on the subject of "suitability" of partners" is male-oriented, and serves to maintain a kind of imbalance. On the one hand there is Louis T. Culling's attitude:

"Often, a woman who has studied occultism becomes impossible because she has too many preconceived ideas which are not in agreement with her role as a good, co-operative partner. If there is any possible rapport, the woman becomes responsive automatically to the aspiration of the male, and after this has happened, it would be very easy to give her an explanation and an understanding of the magical aspects"

A Manual of Sex Magick, p25.

while on the other hand, there is Kenneth Grants implication that Tantra is well-nigh impossible nowadays, due to the lack of suitable partners:

"Western women who possess the required traits are rare, and as they have not the hereditary advantage of initiation into occult techniques - as have certain African and oriental women - the sudden impact of magical energy on their personalities tends to disturb their sanity"

Aleister Crowley & the Hidden God, p84.

Grant notes that according to Tantric practice, woman is the initiatrix of the male, but seems to hold the opinion that such women are a rarity in the West. Although the bulk of his writing is set towards the task of producing a sexual metaphysic based on the "occult" properties of menstruation, it seems to be distant from women in that there are many references *about* women as the Priestess or Suvasini - but almost nothing from women themselves on this subject.

The focus of this issue of "suitability" is couched wholly, it seems, in terms of occult metaphysics. Nowhere is it mentioned that it is beneficial for all concerned to be working on their own sexual/emotional conditioning, or that empathic sensitivity to, and even understanding of ones partners needs and feelings could be paramount. It is these ordinary, Human qualities that are lost in the vast symbolic metastructures that Grant erects. One has the feeling that those who are not party to the ramifications of these "secrets" are not worth considering in terms of degrees of initiation Initiatory experience in areas of life other than the occult does not seem to matter Given this attitude, it does not seem likely that "Priestesses", at least in the way Grant seems **to** be depicting them, will "re-emerge", since women seem to be tacitly excluded from assuming a coequal role with males, as it is the latter who have erected the metasystem in the first place:

"As it is we can but preserve the formula, confident that the present magical revival will discover genuine Priestesses to serve our mass."

Aleister Crowley & the Hidden God.

Given the current developments in male and female consciousness, it is more likely that the "Priestesses" are already out there waiting for us men to get our act together!

It does seem to be a feature of male-oriented Magic that the emphasis is upon building these heavily intellectual metasystems, which are removed from 'everyday reality'. In contrast to this, "Women's Mysteries" seem to revolve around aspects of daily experience - birth, sexuality, creation, nurturing, menstruation and Death. It appears that "High Magic" is largely concerned with acting within an abstract "inner-space" that has few points of contact with the consciousness of daily experience. I feel that this distinction should be emphasised, as the whole character of Magic is changing. There is a movement *away* from it being a kind of developmental process which is seen purely in *occult* terms, that has nothing in common with other spheres of life This traditional attitude is being supplanted by the idea of Magic as a fully

integrative process of self-transformation. There has been a rekindling of the power of Magic in making connections, in communicating with, guiding, healing, and "reaching out" to one another, rather than an entirely personal inner-initiation. As 'the general emphasis of Magic changes, so too has there been a shift in attitudes regarding Sexual Magic.

Intimations of this shift can be discerned in the writings of Dion Fortune. Her influence upon developing Western Sexual Magic comes from her novels, rather than from her non-fictional output. The underlying theme in her works, especially *The Sea Priestess* and *Moon Magic* concerns the intense consummation achieved by the partnership between a man who is in some way "wounded" and a woman who, to further her own Magical intent, takes on the role of the initiatrix. The Priestess "Vivien Morgan" chooses her partner, initiates him and then withdraws. Fortunes writing displays levels of feeling; of intuition and cycles which was absent in the writings of her male contemporaries. There is a fine understanding displayed of how "magical" development blends with ones relationship to life-changes in general. Fortunes approach to Sexual Magic is concerned with interpersonal transformation rather than goal or inwardly-directed experience. Her treatment of Pan for example, in "The Goat-foot God" is more concerned with the inspiration and awareness of "a Greater Whole" than the rutting, phallogentric Pan that typifies Crowley's approach to sexuality.

The Return of the Goddesses

Over the last two decades, one of Humanity's oldest cultural influences has begun to be reasserted, in the return of the Goddesses. Within the Occult subculture, this has manifested as the growth of Wicca and Earth-based Paganism, and in the wider culture of course as the rise of Feminism and the articulation of female consciousness. Wicca places great emphasis upon Sexual Magic. Doreen Valiente, in *Witchcraft for Tomorrow* notes the similarities apparent between Witchcraft and Tantra: the emphasis on balance between the sexes, the central role of the Priestess as initiator and Earthly representative of the Goddess. The focus of Wicca is directed outwards - into Nature and awareness of cycles (both intrapsychic and Natural rhythm), rather than a highly abstract metastructure. So the emphasis upon Sexual Magic is towards fertility rites and participation in seasonal changes. Some Wiccan writers see their attitude to Sexual Magic as the *Hieros Gamos*, the sacred marriage between Gods and Humanity There is also the idea of Sexual Magic as a means of "passing power from initiator to new-initiate" (Galadriel, in *The Lamp of Thoth*, Vol.1 No.2). Again, this shows a shift towards harnessing sexuality as a means to a process of *engagement*, rather than simply being another technique for acquiring results

The rise of Feminism is also a very important factor in considering the shifting emphasis of Sexual Magic. John Rowan (1987) puts it in these terms:

"...women starting to notice that the whole thing (i.e. the Sexual Revolution against Victorian attitudes) had been organised by men, with male assumptions and male values, for the benefit of men. The way in which women had been supposed to participate was by being like men in every way".

The Horned God.

The growth of Feminist ideology saw women demanding self-definition in their *own* terms, and a recognition of a female culture that is as important as that of male culture. Awareness of the necessity of this process has been growing steadily, not only at the socio-political level, but also as a Spiritual endeavour. It has showed up the glaring omissions in the "traditions" of Patriarchy-derived Occult systems. There is now a resurgence of Women rediscovering, and recovering their own "Mysteries" as evinced in the work of Lynn Andrews, Barbara Walker and Monica Sjoo and others. A particularly important crossover for the development of Magic is the work of Starhawk, who provides a Feminist approach to Spiritual/Transpersonal development for both women and men. Her book *Dreaming the Dark* connects the values of Wicca with a developing Feminist/Therapeutic current.

sexuality is seen of in far wider terms than techniques and metaphysics (which can be seen as being bound up with male values of prowess & potency). Starhawk writes of the idea of the archetypes of Goddesses and Horned Cod providing possible re-evaluations of male and female, - beyond the constraints of Patriarchal culture. Exploring one's sexuality through these archetypes is a way of transcending our cultural mores about masculinity and femininity. sexuality is understood as "a deep connecting power" (Starhawk, 1982).

This is a far cry from the "traditional" ethos of Sexual Magic. The focus has shifted from a "bits" approach, to Sexual Magic as a distinct set of techniques; to an emphasis which regards sexuality as just one aspect of a whole process of transformation. This is very close to the idea of Sexuality as a means to "Liberation" mentioned earlier. But of course, such Liberation is not only Spiritual, but sexual, social and political.

Sexuality & Intimacy

Sexual Magic as a path to Liberation is a core idea within Tantric philosophy, but does not seem to have been widely explored in Western Magic. It involves the redefinition of gender stereotypes, exploring relationships beyond the cultural confines, and exploring personal sexuality. Exploring sexuality becomes a means to knowledge, both of self and others. This *Gnosis* (Knowledge of the Heart) can take us beyond our cultural norms and limitations, to actively engage in the realisation of the post-patriarchal individual

Very closely linked with this process is the recovery of Love from its imprisonment in consumer-romanticism. Western ideas of Love have become gradually warped by the concept of Egotistical possession, so that the language of Love is equivalent, to a large degree, to the language of ownership. Love bound by rules, duties, morals and projected by television and commerce serves to maintain the alienation of men and women from themselves and each other. The transformational power of Sexual Energy thus becomes destructive, maintaining the wedge driven between self and other, mind and body, Ego and Exo.

However it is possible for Love to be discovered despite these cultural blinds. This is the experience of Love as a Spiritual, inwardly-felt quality. again, this idea is emphasised in Tantra, but not in Western Magic (until fairly recently). It appears in the concept of Courtly or Sublime Love idealised by the European Troubadours, considered as heretical by the church. This Sublime Love is spoken of as a positive force that reaches out *towards* others, taking them on a

journey of expansion.

The key to Sublime Love is the "Deep Trust and Intimacy" experienced by the partners involved. Again, this recalls a Tantric idea, that the partners in acts of Sexual Magic be *beloved* to each other. This recognition (when it has actually been stated in Western writings on Sex Magic) tends to have been formerly restricted to statements that Sexual Magic is only valid when carried out by long-established ("married") partners, or else it becomes somehow "Black". This refers of course to Sexual Magic purely in terms of genital activity.

However, when the focus of attention shifts from a narrowly-defined view of Sexuality, to one of intimacy (of which physical sex is only one aspect), there also opens the possibility of intimacy in relationships other than those of conventional exclusivity. Close intimacy can develop within a "closed" magical group, without it necessarily moving into what we would otherwise call wife-swapping or group sex. Intimacy and Deep Trust in a group setting are powerful generators of a Group Gestalt which acts as a tribe or clan to each participant. To the prurient, this will be dismissed as an excuse for orgia, but exploration of intimacy can lead to a greater sense of involvement in both the group, and the wider process of transformation. The emphasis is shifted towards mutual growth and development, rather than the pursuit of sexual Conquests that appears to be so rampant in modern Occult groups. Indeed, the exploration of intimacy could almost be a necessity for Magical groups, where there undercurrents of sexual dynamics (attraction, anxiety, jealousy etc.) which develop when members become attracted to others outside their usual relationships, can quickly destroy a groups coherence. Ritualised Sex in a group setting is only destructive when there is a lack of trust and intimacy between those taking part.

An American Psychologist, Mosher (1980) researching into intimacy found that 'the level of intimacy a person experiences is related to the degree of expression, awareness, and interpersonal contact that is experienced during sex. According to Mosher there are three levels of intimacy; *Ego-centred*, *Surface-centred* and *Core-centred*. Ego-centred involvement only concerns Egocentric gratification; one's partner being at best an instrument to fulfil physical or status needs.' Surface-centred involvement centres on sexual performance and pleasure, both of self and partner. Core-centred involvement however is typified by the desire to open oneself fully to the partner, or at its "peak" the experience of Bliss and loss of Ego-boundary. There is also 'the implication that once a new level (or depth) of involvement is attained, that those formerly experienced are in future, no longer wholly satisfying in the way they might once have been.

It is this "Numinous" experience of sexuality which most closely corresponds to the Tantric experience of Sexual Ecstasy. But in Western Society, the energy liberated by such experience tends to be diverted into the culturally accepted channels of expression - those which maintain the boundaries of Egocentric involvement. Attachment in terms of possession, with all its attendant anxiety and Neurosis. If these constraints can be transcended (which obviously will take a long time and good deal of effort) then the intensity generated can facilitate a "breakout" from the inertia imposed by society. Lovers can find enough support and energy in each other to reject the cultural limitations and seek new forms of living, free to move in *any* direction. Obviously, blissful sex cannot of itself wipe away a lifetime of conditioning, but it can be an

impetus towards further development in *all* areas of awareness. Sexual bliss is a powerful Gnosis for imprinting a new vision of reality, as recognised by Timothy Leary in his theory of Neurological circuits. A first experience of the Numinous often marks the "trigger" for an individual's transformational journey, and each subsequent experience of bliss provides further impetus for the process. It is the "heat" generated by such alchemical processes which moves the psyche from a condition of static identification (Ego-centric) to one of engagement and flow (Exo-centric). Starhawk writes of this sexual alchemy as:

"...an exchange of energy, of subtle nourishment, between people. Through connection with each other, we connect with all".

The Spiral Dance

It is important to note that psychic structures cannot be "wiped away" completely by the transformational process, but they can be built on, and replaced by structures that are more adaptable, open to uncertainty and change. For men this involves letting go of the male Ego, and what John Rowan calls "surrendering to the Goddess".

"Experiencing the Goddess through us, completes men and brings them into our world."

Alathea the Shamoon

This "surrendering" or willing sacrifice is the beginning of a process of psychic death, which leads ultimately to rebirth into a world of participation and engagement. For males, this psychic meeting with the power of the Goddesses - in the form of the Dark Destroyer (for example Kali, Hecate or the Morrigan) has a powerful transformative potential. The Goddess in her dark aspect is the gateway to the Underworld, the place of psychic dissection and restructuring. This aspect of woman appears in Patriarchal culture as the male fantasy of the sexually uninhibited woman also linked with the anxiety-creating image of woman as castrator and devourer.

If Will can be directed towards change, then any Magical process involving psychic restructuring can lead to change in outward areas of life - interpersonal and social. The power of the Goddesses (Shakti in Tantric terminology) as experienced by men, opens us to an experience of empowerment (power not couched in male terms). We can recognise that the possibilities of transformation lie within us, which should lessen the tendency to project Ego-centric needs onto women. The reality of this Goddess-experience is difficult to deny or rationalise away, once it becomes immediate and heartfelt. This experience of Devi must surely begin to loosen our cultural conditioning. It is part of the *painful* process of absorption and rebirth - a rebirth into participation.

The Way Forwards?

Liberation implies the freedom of the whole being, at all levels and in all areas of action. It is a change which is fundamental and total. It is not enough to ignore or try and wish away our current situation. The necessity of "obedience to awareness" is brought home with every update on our headlong plunge to self-destruction. In many ways this essay is a statement of my

personal views of Sexual Magic, as a way of uncovering, energising and realising our potential to evolve as Humans. The insights gained through the process of transformation give us glimpses of future possibilities, which we can then attempt to live towards. At the moment we know very little about what it means to be male or female, beyond the boundaries of Patriarchy. Growing up, or evolving is a hard and painful struggle, but we cannot resist it forever. Magic is a possible avenue by which we may at first glimpse, then realise these possibilities. This to me, is the essential nature of "Love Under Will".

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