

EXPERIENCING RADHA-KRISHNA
A GUIDE FOR ENTERING INTO THEIR PLAY
or CREATE YOURSELF IN AN IDEALIZED REALITY

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A HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION TO EROTIC SPIRITUALITY¹

Erotic spirituality is about love and discovering our spiritual identity in which we experience bliss beyond mere sensual experience. It seeks intimate communion with the divine while empowering us to re-enchant our lives and embrace the incredible mystery of existence.

We are sexual spiritual beings created in the holographic image of God-dess, Radha-Krishna, the Divine Couple. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism offers a contemporary body and sex-positive spiritual philosophy to counterbalance Christian and Hindu stoic puritanism, which causes suffering for so many. Our sexuality can be a window to the ultimate reality and make us whole. From the Stone Age to today, traditional cultures integrate sexuality into their spiritual world views.

While erotic spirituality may seem new and revolutionary, it has a long and varied history. It's reintroduction to our spiritual repertoire can only enrich and broaden our lives. It may seem like a quantum leap for those who have been repressed by centuries of sex-negativity, but it is well worth the effort to become free and whole.

If we are free, we must also be responsible in our actions. Remember, love puts the interests of the

¹ This chapter draws upon *Sacred Sexuality* by Georg Feuerstein and all quotes are from there.

beloved above our own. While some schools of sexual yoga advocate having a sexual partner other than one's spouse, I feel that sexual relations within a committed loving relationship involve the whole person more fully and thus provide more satisfaction and regeneration by mirroring the relationship of Radha-Krishna. We may describe such a relationship as an equal partnership.



We view ourselves holistically and integrate the needs of body, mind, and spirit in our lives. We realize the essential interconnectedness of all existence. We bridge the gap between the sacred and the profane thus healing the rift in our broken psyche and potentially healing our broken society as more people become whole persons.

Sad to say, it seems almost futile for most of us to try to change society when the rulers refuse to hear our voices. However, we can transform ourselves, and thereby transform society as well.

While most people do not speak of it, many more than we may suppose have had peak, transcendent experiences. Many of those experiences are triggered by loving, intimate, sexual exchanges in which the two partners experience true union and oneness on a much deeper level than mere physical intercourse. Sexual orgasm is as close as most people come to experiencing a unitive state of bliss in which we experience reality as it is.

Many religious traditions recognize sexual love as a major gateway to mystical experience or encounter with the divine. The more we become conscious of the divine pervading all existence and harness our sexual energy to connect us to the divine, the more effective a tool it becomes to connect us to the Divine Couple, Radha-Krishna. By transcending the dualism of sacred and profane, we ennoble life and raise it to the spiritual level. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism provides a philosophy in book one and a practice in book two that help us do just that.



Our Paleolithic forebears, about thirty-thousand years ago, worshipped the divine as the cosmic feminine, Great Mother, or Goddess who is the origin of all life. Female symbols juxtaposed with more peripheral male symbols in their caves suggest a developed sexual metaphysics and ritual expression of erotic spirituality, which manifested in somewhat egalitarian social relations between the sexes who were all seen as children of the Goddess as well as of their natural mothers.

They sensed the presence of a universal life force, which is known as *mana*, *prana*, *chi*, and many other names. They connected this life force with the sacred, fertility, and sexuality. They saw the world as full of magic, mystery, and wonder in a natural way few of us are capable of today.

In the Neolithic period, with the development of agriculture and domestication of animals, men gained more dominance and the Goddess took a virile male lover God. The prevalence of their myths and rituals in people's daily lives surely influenced their sexual relations. God-dess' union was considered essential for the fertility of all and was ritually enacted by their human surrogates. These persons transcended their ego identities and embodied the God and Goddess.

As male dominated, patriarchal, pastoralists gained control of the Middle East, India, and the Mediterranean, worship of their supreme male God gained prominence. Their warlike nature has ruled social interactions ever since, ravaging the earth with constant conflict and oppressing the feminine.

As these dominant males became aware of their role in the procreative process, the phallus began to be worshipped as the female organ had been for thousands of years before. Images of oversexed male gods with huge penises began to populate myths.

The Athenians took phallus worship and male domination of women to an extreme. They are at the root of our long standing patriarchal, misogynistic social values--even influencing early Christian thought in that direction contrary to Jesus who elevated women in his ministry.

The ancients were generally much more comfortable with their bodies and sexuality than many people today. Sexual images and myths were not viewed as obscene or vulgar. Such ideas are

products of Christian puritanism and the Victorian Era, which still color our thinking today.

Images of male and female sexual organs are found in many ancient temples and sacred sites around the world. Many temples even offered sacred prostitution as a means to commune with the Goddess. This was not degrading to women in the way profane prostitution was and often still is. Its goal was to ennoble and free us from unbridled lust. It mirrored the more ancient annual fertility rites which reenacted the marriage of God and Goddess.

In 1950, India made temple prostitution illegal while allowing secular prostitution to remain legal. Where do you think the temple prostitutes went for shelter and employment? There is a long history of desacralizing women and sex as mediators of the divine. When I begin to discuss erotic spirituality, people often become a little nervous because they are uncomfortable with the idea of divine sexuality due to their uncomfortableness with their own bodies and sexuality as well. This is an ingrained response developed over millennia through individual and cultural repression often touted as the will of God.

The way society is today is not the way it has always been or must remain. While we have made many advances, we have also lost much. We can learn from the past and the present, take the best from both, and create a new social vision that is more whole, holy, and healthy. Universalist Radha-Krishnaism does this and offers an erotic spirituality combined with a body and life affirming philosophy.



The rise of male dominance had far reaching consequences from the throne room to the bedroom. Worship of the nurturing Mother Goddess became overshadowed by worship of the stern Father God. Sacred prostitution was desecrated. Women were reduced to the status of possessions. Ongoing wars provided an ample supply of slaves and common whores who were often brutally treated.

While severely overshadowed and sometimes driven into secrecy, the erotic spirituality of the Goddess could not be totally suppressed. In the Mediterranean area it manifested in various mystery traditions, which generally attracted women, slaves, and other disenfranchised persons. They continued the ancient fertility and erotic celebrations. Their often orgiastic ceremonies provided their followers with actual, liberating transformative encounters with the divine.



The early Hebrews, like other Middle Eastern peoples were polygamous, although they later abolished this practice. Scandalous king Solomon had over 700 foreign wives who taught him to pray to their pagan gods.

Before worshipping the patriarchal male God Yahweh, the Hebrew tribes worshipped various tribal

deities--chief of whom were the phallic god Baal and the goddess Anat. Although repressed by the patriarchy, strains venerating the Goddess continued into the esoteric school of the Kabbalah. Some of the early, ruling queens were instrumental in briefly reviving Goddess worship.

Guardians of the Mosaic law insisted that unmarried women be virgins, and those who weren't were burned or stoned to death. Even married women who were raped shared this fate. Some scholars believe Jesus' mother Mary was raped by a Roman soldier and would have been killed had her betrothed Joseph not overlooked this and accepted the child as his own. These patriarchal legalists strongly opposed pagan practices which included temple prostitution and worship of other gods and goddesses.

Ancient Hebrews and modern Jews regard marriage and marital sexual relations as a sacrament. The pleasure they give each other is considered a divine blessing. The relationship was patriarchal and the man was clearly in charge, but he was advised to enjoy sex with his wife. This is more positive than many relationships of the day.

The biblical *Song of Songs* portrays an earthy sensuality that made its inclusion questionable. Its wonderfully mutual and equal lovers are sometimes compared to the pagan myth of the sacred marriage of Baal and Anat.

While many people assume that Jesus was celibate, it is more likely that he was married to Mary Magdalene. He had many prominent women followers and associated freely with women of all classes including prostitutes. He enjoyed drinking, eating, and partying with all sorts of people to the dismay of conservatives.

For his day, Jesus' attitude towards women was certainly progressive--or even radical and subversive toward the status quo. He was an earthy kind of guy who lived close to nature with common people. He seems more concerned with bettering people's lives in the here-and-now than with pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by.

The Church Fathers changed all that. They confused holiness with asceticism and celibacy as so many religions tend to do. Women starting with Eve were portrayed as the source of evil and temptation. Orthodox Christianity became a sex-negative religion.

The one instance where a woman is elevated is in the divinized mother of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Many Mediterranean sages and heroes of the day--such as Pythagorus, Plato, and Alexander the Great were considered to have had virgin births. Great love goddesses of the day, such as Venus, Ishtar, Anat, and Astarte were all considered virgins even though they engaged in acts of sexual creation. However, Mary was considered asexual, although historically she had several children besides Jesus.

Here, the Mother Goddess is transformed into an ascetic, asexual model of virtue that could be used to further subjugate women in this world while promising to elevate them in the next. By the mid-fifth century, she was elevated to the position of Divine Empress, Maria Regina, who sits at the right hand of God.

In the twelfth century, she became the Bride of Christ and the object, along with Jesus, of the bridal mysticism of Bernard of Clairvaux, Ramon Lull, and Catherine of Siena. This is reminiscent of the pagan, divine marriage of the Mother Goddess and the Divine Son-Lover. She became the merciful mediator between suffering humanity, the distant Father God, and the stern, judgmental Son. She embodied divine love.

This did not stop the suppression and abuse of medieval women which peaked in the witch hunts of the fifteenth century. They could not live up to the standards of purity set by the Virgin Mary.

Just as Jesus was considered the new Adam, the Holy Mother became the new Eve--Mother of All. It was Augustine who solidified the doctrine of the fall of Adam and Eve. Jews did not look at it that way, but rather as just another step in the evolution of humankind.

Happily, more sex-positive spiritual trends developing within Christianity are working to heal the male/female, body/spirit, nature/spirit, and God/Goddess splits that have plagued us for millennia.



The amazing victory of the life-denying, sexually repressive Christian Church over the pagan sects of the Roman Empire climaxed in the Middle Ages. People's sexual repression, shame, and guilt led to an unparalleled mass psychosis that lasted for several centuries and still affects us today. The suppression of the erotic life force elevated the death instinct, which manifested itself in witch hunts, crusades, and ruthless persecution of those labeled as heretics.

However, the old pagan sensibilities continued in certain underground currents which surfaced as the troubadours, Cathars, Waldensians, and Christian love mystics of the twelfth century.

The French troubadours and German Minnesingers nurtured a chaste love for a married noblewoman by mentally worshipping her from a distance with no hope of union. They cultivated the deep longing of love in separation which simultaneously devastated them and led them to the heights of ecstasy.

While they worshipped their chosen love in a manner similar to worship of the Virgin Mary, Radha, or the Goddess, being products of their times who exclusively tied their emotional attachments to their chosen lady, they most likely did not carry this into their liaisons with more available women.



The Christian, bridal love mystics are closer to the spirit of Universalist Radha-Krishnaism. They sought divine love and union with a divinized Jesus. They often used sexual or erotic images to express their spiritual longing. The goal of erotic spirituality is for the mystic to attain a unitive experience with the divine by cultivating a spiritualized eros.

The love mystics passion was as intense as that of the troubadours but not as tragic. They believed union with the divine beloved was attainable. This hope and desire got them through their frequent dark nights of the soul and dry periods. Their love was primarily love in separation with rare experiences of divine union. The love mystics flourished from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries, overlapping the time of Chaitanya (fifteenth to sixteenth centuries) and his early followers who developed a similar style of devotion.

Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), a significant early love mystic, was influenced by the *Song of Songs*. For him, God is love and the path to God is learning to love. He saw the human soul as the Bride and Christ as the Bridegroom giving this orientation the name bridal mysticism. He considered the Bride as the pinnacle of human divine love. Her very being is love. He believed we could not experience God's real nature, but that we each realized God according to our capacity.

Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) wrote a theology of an ensexed universe in which women are

viewed much more positively than her contemporary religious conservatives would acknowledge. She saw God's love as maternal. Georg Feuerstein says, "She even boldly compared the trinity to the three components of sexual intercourse: strength, desire, and the act itself. Hildegard was thus an early, if still very cautious, feminist. (119)"

The beguine mystic Mechtild of Magdeburg (c. 1207-1297), wrote:

Then the Most Beloved goes toward the Most Beautiful in the hidden chambers of the invisible Deity. There she finds the couch and the pleasure of Love, and God awaiting her in a super-human fashion. This what Our Lord says:--Stay, Lady Soul.--What is your wish, Lord?--That you should be naked.--Lord, how can this happen to me?--Lady Soul, you are so "co-natured" in Me that nothing can be interposed between you and Me. Never for one single hour was any angel given the honor that is bestowed on you for all Eternity. That is why you must cast off these two things: fear and shame, as well as all exterior virtues. It is only those that you carry within you by nature that you must desire to feel eternally: these virtues are your noble desire and your insatiable hunger which I shall satisfy eternally with My infinite superabundance. (120)

In our own time, which suffers from overdeveloped intellect and underdeveloped feeling, we have the love mystic and social reformer, Ernesto

Cardenal. Erotic love continues to form a small but vibrant part of Christian spirituality.



Similar developments took place in other traditions during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Kabbalists such as Abulafia spoke of:

the ascending human force, which is met or kissed by the descending divine force, “like a bridegroom actually kisses his bride out of his great and real desire. (122)”

The Kabbalists also re-imagined the indwelling of God on earth as being feminine and related to him like a wife in archetypal male-female sexual union. That indwelling spirit is like the Holy Spirit in Christianity.

Feuerstein says,

According to the thirteenth-century *Zohar*, the classic text of Jewish mysticism, sexual pleasure brings delight to the feminine power of the Divine. Moreover, because of the perfect parallelism or homology between microcosm and macrocosm, a couple’s sexual pleasure was thought to even magnify the peace in the world. (122)

Unlike their ascetic Christian counterparts, the Jewish mystics embraced their wives and the world while contemplating the Divine. Spanish Jew Hildai Crescas viewed creation as “an overflowing of God’s love. (122)”

Sufi mystics extolled God as Beauty, the Beloved, and Love. Rumi advises us to always be a passionate lover. Many Sufis were married, but unfortunately, there is an inherent gender inequality in Islam.



As early as the eighth and ninth centuries, the Alvars of South India, intoxicated with Krishna devotion, sang like young maidens longing for the Beloved. The *Bhagavat Puran* describes Krishna's erotic play with the village girls of Braj while it maintains the traditional Indian patriarchal, ascetic tradition.

Jayadev's twelfth century *Gita Govinda* introduces a new level of erotic spirituality that easily compares with Christian bridal mysticism of the day. This wonderful Sanskrit poem, which was meant to be sung in the royal courts with musical accompaniment, introduces Radha -- Krishna's most beloved girlfriend in his youthful Braj pastimes. It is often interpreted allegorically as the loving relationship between the Divine and the devotee in a manner similar to the *Song of Songs*.

However, in course of time, Radha rose from an exemplary human devotee to Supreme Goddess. Radha-Krishna's love affair becomes the model for the exchange of love in the eternal Braj, which we meditate on constantly. Radha-Krishna's whole entourage help arrange their divine union.

Jayadev explicitly and beautifully describes their love play in a way that inflames passion in the heart but simultaneously transforms it into passionate natural love for God-dess. His intention is to raise the energy level of his listeners and readers and direct that erotically charged energy toward a natural yearning for union with God-dess.

Jayadev inspired many later poets who greatly expanded the poetic literature describing Radha-Krishna's erotic play. Krishna Chaitanya thoroughly relished hearing the *Gita Govinda*.



Having neolithic roots, Tantrism was extremely popular with Indian Hindus and Buddhists by 1,000 C.E.. Tantrism sees the world as a manifestation of God-dess, whose divinity shines through all things if we have the vision to see it. God-dess' presence "in and as the cosmos (136)" allows us to attain God-dess realization in the here-and-now.

While the left-hand path features ritual physical sexual union as its core practice, the right-hand path sees the union symbolically or allegorically like most European and Middle Eastern love mystics. For them it symbolizes the union of the archetypal male and female cosmic principles within ourselves.

Georg Feuerstein explains:

Whereas mainstream Hinduism tends toward puritanism and life-negating asceticism, the culture of the Vedic tribes of circa 1500 to 1000 B.C.

was clearly life-affirmative and sex-positive. They loved music, dance, and gambling, were not at all averse to inebriation, and prayed for a hundred years life on Earth, many children, and plenty of cattle. As one Vedic hymn exhorts, "O men! Lift, lift up the penis, the bestower of satisfaction! Move it, dig deep for the acquisition of wealth [in the form of progeny]!" While some of the prayers have a symbolic content, many others are to be taken quite literally.

The Tantric adepts have always claimed that their new teachings were really only a restatement of the old Vedic religion. This claim has never sat too well with the brahmins, the custodians of the Vedic heritage. It is true, however, that an examination of the ancient *Vedas* yields Tantra-like elements. In fact, the *Vedas* contain a rather elaborate sexual symbolism. (138)

Similarly, Universalist Radha-Krishnaism mines the riches of the ancient perennial wisdom and presents them in a contemporary manner to create a life-affirming, sex-positive spiritual path for today. Sometimes the past holds the keys to the future. Just because certain views seem to have been around forever and dominate today's thinking does not mean they are best, right, or useful. My primary approach to Universalist Radha-Krishnaism is to remove the detritus accumulated over the centuries and explain what remains in contemporary language to present a more workable, sustainable model for spiritual growth now and in the future.



Tantrism was instrumental in elevating the status of women to that of men by seeing them as incarnations of the Goddess--the divine feminine archetype who is much more accessible than God, the divine male archetype. Goddess worship is the most important feature of Tantrism, which sees the dipolar nature of God-dess as Shiva-Shakti or Radha-Krishna.

The *Brahma-samhita* 9-10, describes how Shiva-Shakti in the forms of the male and female generative organs united to birth the world and the living entities. On the other hand, the *Brahmavaivarta Puran PKh* 2-3 describes how the universe is birthed by the copulation of Radha-Krishna.

India became dominated by the Vedic priestly theology which emphasizes Undifferentiated Oneness and worship of a pantheon of male deities who displaced the earlier female Goddesses. Tantrism reintroduced the Goddess and re-popularized her worship. This revived some ancient neolithic beliefs. Tantrism represents an earthy, indigenous tradition of Mother Goddess worship such as was practiced by the great pre-Vedic Indus Valley civilization.

Goddess is at once a nurturing, protective mother, a spiritual change agent, and a destroyer of ego. God-dess, the archetypal male and female principles, govern desire, manifestation, and change, which cause the manifestation and dissolution of the cosmos. All is God-dess' play.

God-dess, Shiva-Shakti, or Radha-Krishna are ultimately one unitive whole. Their eternal union is the ultimate bliss. They exist within us as anima and animus, and when we mystically unite both sides of ourselves, we also attain wholeness and bliss. This is the goal of the Tantric practitioner. Krishna Chaitanya is considered the perfect union of Radha-Krishna in one body.

Different tantric schools advocate different means of attaining this goal. It is a spiritual path which may or may not involve sexual practices, but it is not to be confused with material sense gratification. Transmutation of sexual energy from the mundane to the divine is an alchemical process of the highest order.

Tantric sexual union is an emotional and spiritual experience. Lust strives for orgasm. Tantra heightens sexual energy and uses it to break through to the spiritual dimension and experience mystical union with the divine. This is often described as raising the feminine *kundalini*, *shakti*, or serpent energy from the base of the spine to the top of the head where it unites with the masculine Shiva--pure consciousness. This process invigorates the whole body with increased conscious energy, strength, and vitality.

As above so below. What exists in the macrocosm also exists in the microcosm. God-dess, Shiva-Shakti, Radha-Krishna, and their union exist within us. We are intimately related to them. Tantrism employs a magical attitude toward the world and

blurs the line between spirit and matter, good and evil. Practitioners enjoy the pleasures of this world along with spiritual bliss. They are not separate.



The Chinese equivalent of Tantrism is Taoism. The ancient masters practiced controlling the vital forces within the body and using sexual energy. The Tao is the Way that leads us directly to the goal. The Tao is the ultimate creative principle pervading and energizing all things like Cosmic Consciousness, the Ground of Being, which is ultimately indescribable. We all participate in it, but the wise attune themselves to it and its flow.

Lao Tzu recommends that we allow the Tao to work through us as its instruments. Thus we are not doers but agents of ultimate reality who spontaneously live in harmony with it. The primordial masculine and feminine dipolar principles of *yin* and *yang* dynamically exist in natural harmony. They also symbolize the eternal union of God-dess, Shiva-Shakti, and Radha-Krishna. Practitioners seek to experience this union within themselves.

According to Feuerstein, "The Taoist practitioner stokes the furnace of his or her sex glands to create the heat necessary for the inner alchemical process of transmutation. (165)" This increases the vital energy which unites with the spirit to create an immortal embryo which has been called the "golden

flower," which we nurture to form an immortal spiritual body.

Feuerstein says:

we must tread the razor's edge of spontaneity without egoic motivation or attachment. . . . Taoism has made a unique contribution to our understanding of the play of psychosexual energy in the body. It has also furnished us with a wonderfully dynamic concept of reality, which meshes neatly with contemporary notions of the world as process rather than static object. (167)



After nearly two thousand years of repressing what they termed our lower nature, certain Christian elements seek to recover a more whole, integrated perspective. Allan Watts was one of the early influential writers who proposed a "body-positive spirituality. (179)" Watts wrote in 1958 that since we do not know what humans really are, we are certainly also ignorant of human sexuality.

In even earlier writings while he was still an Anglican priest, Watts tried to revive mystical Christianity and develop a perennial philosophy by combining Christian and non-Christian ideas. He wrote:

Full of mysterious and infinite life, the Eternal Now lies beyond every concept and image, but is yet the source of all images. The very idea, the very word 'God' may indeed distract us in the

process of realization because it is still a symbol, a concept, standing between us and the Reality--Now! (179-80)

Watts decried the church's excessive use of guilt, which unfortunately is not exclusive to the church. He sought a body-positive morality to transform the world and the flesh rather than deny them. He realized mystical union with God includes all normal human functions including eating, drinking, and sex which thereby becomes ennobled.

Andrew Greeley pointed out that our sex drive enshrines our desire for mystical union. He claimed that the unity a couple seeks is the same unity which eternally exists in God-dess. They yearn to experience the union of the archetypal Male and Female, which exists eternally in androgynous God-dess as well as in us, who share God-dess' psychological androgynous nature as Carl Jung taught. Greeley approached divine sexuality as play and playfulness. He said, "Stoic sexuality--puritanism--is not Christian sexuality no matter how much it may claim to be. (181)"

Theologian Dody H. Donnelly wrote:

Spirituality must be sexual if it is to be *human* spirituality. We love God either as ensexed and embodied creatures or not at all. We love God as humans who are men and women all the time in everything we do.

Why do some people want to keep the Spirit (God) in the parlor while making love in the bedroom? The best sources seem to suggest that

God likes bedrooms, too. In fact--can we possibly emphasize it enough?--God *invented* the bedroom's activity. So making love can celebrate God's creativity in our own design as human lovers. . . .

God not only loves us in and through our sexuality but, of course, delights in our own human lovemaking. That love of beauty, union, and creativity is the sexual drive itself and God's gift. Sexuality is an aspect of our deeply human yearning for fulfillment and meaning, for God. In its total pervasion of our lives, *eros* is the source of life and fuels all our loves--including our love for God!

Through our unique personalities we're called to shine back to God the joyful experience of loving and being loved sexually and spiritually. That response may be simply our daily amazement, wondering, yearning, expectation, and stunned delight at nature's wondrous bounty of dazzling color, scent, and sound--God's daily wooing of our hearts. We know the Beloved is near, indeed, resident within us always. (183)

We can know certain things on a bodily level that cannot be known mentally. When we fully live in harmony with our body, senses, and their deep wisdom, our spiritual realization becomes enhanced and manifests more fully in our lives as we accept our current condition and learn to love ourselves.

As theologian Paul Tillich remarked:

An *agape* in which there is no *eros* has no warmth. *Eros* without *agape* lacks discrimination. They belong together and cannot be severed.

Matthew Fox presents life as a blessing rather than a curse. His creation spirituality is full of mystery, humor, and play. His *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ* was the basis of my Christology paper in seminary. He encourages us to invite the divine child to come out and play. He sees playfulness as natural to *eros* and both of them at the heart of worship. He says:

I believe that the Western church, following in the spirit of St. Augustine, basically regrets the fact that we are sexual, sensual creatures. . . . But there is another tradition besides St. Augustine's regarding our bodiliness and deep sexual natures--the tradition of *praise*. It is time that the voice of the churches joined the voices of the other creatures to praise the Creator for the surprising and imaginative gift of our sexuality. (185-86)

He describes the "Cosmic Christ--the Being who 'can be both female and male, heterosexual and homosexual,' and who 'rejoices and is intimately at work and play when lovers make love.'" (186)"

We can learn much from efforts like these as we free Radha-Krishna devotion from its inherited puritanical cultural constraints.

I have presented just a few examples of the innumerable manifestations of erotic spirituality over the millennia. One common thread they share is the use of sexual energy for spiritual purposes. Sexuality was first linked with the Goddess. Then it became a manifestation of the union of God and Goddess in human form. This perspective makes sex much more than a matter of the flesh. As Feuerstein says:

To speak of sex as energy means to acknowledge that the human body is arising within the vast dimension of psychosomatic energy, which makes up the quantum reality of physical existence. According to the animistic world view, which we inherited from the Stone Age, everything is ensouled, or alive with energy. Traditional concepts such as *prana*, *ch'i*, *od*, *mana*, *orenda*, *manito*, *tirawa*, *imunu*, *ntum*, and *meghe* all imply that there is a dimension to life that is dynamic or energetic and that has primacy over the material realm. (189-90)

In the early twenty-first century, most of us are out of touch with our own bodies, out of touch with nature, and thus out of touch with this subtle energy which permeates everything. Yet many of us seek a connection to a subtler, idealized, spiritual plane to give our lives meaning and hope. Natural devotion helps us learn to function consciously on the spiritual plane, communing with and relating to God-dess.

This spiritual experience does not require negation of our physical experience, but rather sees the physical in light of the spiritual, thus

spiritualizing everything, including our sexuality on both the physical and subtle levels. It maintains constant union with God-dess on multiple levels, grounds the spiritual in the material and elevates the material to the spiritual.

We live consciously as incarnate spiritual beings at home in our body and world. We love and care for ourselves, our neighbors, and the environment as manifestations of God-dess. Ultimately, there is nothing but God-dess, and our love is a manifestation of God-dess who is love itself. In this way, we become whole, healthy, holy persons of spirit and vitality who transcend duality.

This path of natural devotion has its dangers. It is not for everyone. It is best engaged in by persons who have a courageous, heroic nature, are self-disciplined, strong willed, and totally surrendered to God-dess with intense desire for mystical union with him-her.

It is an embodied, incarnate, grounded spirituality that sees the body as a temple for the worship of God-dess whose form it is made in. We learn to live as agents of the divine and work to make this world a better place for all. It is a process of transforming ourselves and our world through our daily living and loving. Natural devotion breaks down the barriers between the sacred and the profane using our passions spiritually rather than repressing them.

I agree with Georg Feuerstein's conclusion:

I also believe that we need to articulate a distinct spirituality that involves guidance but not intrusive authority; discipleship and the willingness to learn from anyone but not mindless submission to a master; self-discipline but not excessive self-mortification; self-knowledge but not obsessive self-watching; and constancy but not dogmatic adherence to principles or practices. Above all, the new spirituality should overcome the dualistic opposition between heart and brain, body and mind, Heaven and Earth, God and creature, and one person and another. It should appreciate that life is a palette splashed with colors: Reality, or the numinous, irrevocably inheres in and *is* all things. (212-13)

I call this new spirituality Universalist Radha-Krishnaism or natural devotion.