



AYURVEDA ELEMENTS

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SEX, SPIRITUALITY & AYURVEDA

By Rama Prasad and Caroline Robertson

Ancient Vedic scriptures cite sex as the highest pleasure on the material platform yet, if misused, sex can be the strongest binding attachment preventing us from elevating our consciousness to a higher spiritual reality. Ayurveda, the science of life, sheds illuminating wisdom on the relationship between sex, health and enlightenment.

SEX IN PERSPECTIVE

"Sex lies at the root of life, we can never learn to reverence life until we know how to understand sex"
- Henry Havelock Ellis

Today's sex saturated multi-media portraying orgasmic shampoos, phallic cars and arousing soft drinks would indicate that we are a sex obsessed culture, reminding us that this is our primal drive in life. According to research revealed in "Sex, A Man's Guide," the average American teenager views sexual encounters on TV 14,000 times a year. Despite the hard sell with sex not everyone is buying the assumption that sex is the supreme goal of life. The increased quantity of exposure to sex is matched by the declining understanding of quality loving sex and its implications. Despite the sexual liberation movement, Master's and Johnson's sex research, the Hite Report and countless magazine articles, sex, for many, remains a dissatisfying and loveless encounter, motivated by lust or loneliness, often sadly devoid of true love, intimacy and pleasure. A recent Oprah Winfrey show on libido cited statistics that 40 million American women suffer from low libido. The audience was full of angst-ridden women who couldn't match their partners desire for sex. Resorting to testosterone creams and HRT, it was an unspoken assumption that low libido was a disease that required treatment. Everyone had bought the multi media lie that we are less than human if we don't have a voracious and insatiable sex desire. Does that mean Mother Theresa had a less fulfilling and meaningful life than say Hugh Hefner?

The Ancient Indian scriptures represented in Ayurveda help us to put sex in perspective. It advises judicious indulgence in sex. Emphasizing our faculty of discrimination concerning quality and quantity. Sexual union is portrayed as an experience with more profound implications than pleasure. It instructs us how to make sexual union a sacred consciousness expanding experience that opens up our heart to love ourselves and all beings with increased passion. It also teaches that sexual desire is ultimately a yearning for an unconditional loving relationship between ourselves and the divine. A spiritual connection that will satiate all our desires.

YEARNING FOR INTIMACY

The frenetic preoccupation with sex that characterizes western culture is often completely unrelated to sexual needs but more an expression of a thirst for intimacy, touch and tenderness. It is borne out of a need to feel loved unconditionally, as a baby is loved. This is reflected in lover's use of 'baby-talk' and seemingly immature interactions.

Obviously love and sex are not mutually exclusive. You can have loveless sex and you can express sexless love. The negative practice of loveless sex is having a dramatic impact on our society today. Soaring incidence of rape, necrophilia, sadism, masochism, paedophilia and incest reflect the incredibly destructive influence of the promotion of loveless sex. Unloving sex is not just available but socially acceptable - brothels, inflatable lovers and promiscuity lead us away from intimacy and sensitivity, towards a dehumanised, impersonal sexuality of perversity. Men often use sex as a tool of domination and power whereas women may use sex as a means to manipulate a man or as a love substitute. The choice to remain celibate or a virgin until an opportunity to have a meaningful union with a loving partner is often judged as naive or a sign of mental illness. We have under-valued and under-estimated both the destructive potential of loveless sex and the creative force of loving sex. It is for this reason that many spiritual philosophies share the advice given by Ayurveda, that sex should only be shared by a loving couple as true satiation only arises from the union of emotions, body and soul.

BONDING RELAXATION

In order to sustain the expression of love in a partnership a bonding relaxation exercise is recommended as a daily practice.

The couple lie together in the spoon position on their left sides to promote the flow of energy. The partner in need of the most nurturing should lie on the inside, enveloped by their partner. This allows the alignment of the couple's chakras and the exchange of loving energy. Both partners' right hands can rest over the inner person's heart. Lying comfortably together, close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing. Inhaling and exhaling together helps to create a harmony and synchronicity between one another. You may like to incorporate a soothing visualization to enhance the experience. Visualise a pink light flowing through your heart chakra and surrounding your bodies creating an aura of love and tenderness. This is to be done without any sexual interaction.

Benefits of this have been researched by sexologist Dr. Rudolf Von Urban who concluded that this practice creates a resonance effect called entrainment, an alignment of energy fields that triggers profound healing in both partners.

TANTRIC SEX

In tantra, sexual union is seen as a sacred activity whose ultimate goal is selfactualization. In the tantric tradition, sex is utilized as a means to raise the flow of energy from the base of the spine to the crown chakra thus reawakening one's dormant cosmic consciousness. This process is known as utsavam. (Ut means upward and savam means flow). Another concern of tantra is to integrate one's inner masculine and feminine polarities. This corresponds to Jung's exploration of our anima (feminine aspect) and animus (masculine aspect). The tantric tradition is very austere and requires strict discipline to follow specific rituals. True progress on this path can only be achieved under the strict guidance of a Tantric master. Translator of the definitive book on lovemaking for centuries the Kama Sutra, Alain Danielou said in regards to Tantric sex: "Only the ignorant attempt to learn mantras from books and practice rites according to what they read. It is necessary to follow the instructions of a genuine Tantric guru".

Exploring Tantric sex without expert guidance can lead to a disturbance in one's subtle body which may cause psychological and physical imbalances.

AYURVEDIC WISDOM

According to the Vedas, life can be divided into four main concerns: spiritual duties (dharma), economic development (artha), love or pursuit of pleasure (kama) and liberation from the cycle of repeated birth and death (moksha). Vedic literature states that the wise choose ways of acting that allow them to achieve the four aims of life without letting the pursuit of pleasure lead them to ruin. One is advised to practice all four activities at different times and in such a manner that they may harmonize together and not clash in any way.

With this aim in mind, Ayurveda advises one follow certain observances in order to gain the maximum benefit from sexual union and to avoid detrimental effects.

GUIDELINES FOR A QUALITY EXPERIENCE

For the perfect love tryst Ayurvedic scholar Sushruta recommends a full moon night in a bower of flowers, soft silk garments, sweet and intoxicating perfumes, light and nourishing food and sweet music - translated by Robert Svoboda

1. Choose a time when you are both relaxed and aroused. The best time for sex is before midnight to ensure sufficient rest is taken afterwards.
2. prepare a beautiful, peaceful and seductive setting that provides a feast for all your sense organs. Bathe in or anoint the body in essential oils of Sandalwood, Ylang Ylang, Patchouli, Neroli or Rose. Incense or oil burners with these scents also contribute to the erotic mood.
3. Dress in attractive, clean attire and wear a fresh flower garland.
4. A lubricant of equal parts ghee and honey may be used.
5. Play special Indian musical Ragas for a romantic mood include: Mishra Telang, Mishra Ghara, Mishra Bhairavi.
6. It is emphasized to take enough time and attention to pleasing one's partner. Both the Kama Sutra and the Ananga Ranga outline in great detail the art of foreplay and emphasize the importance of satisfying both partners' desires. The Ananga Ranga compares a woman to a fruit that only yields its fragrance after being rubbed with the hands. The Kama Sutra suggests that during congress

the man should make a point of pressing those parts of the body on which the woman turns her eyes and greatly elaborates on techniques of kissing, nibbling, sucking, fondling the hair, caressing and embracing. This contributes to the partner's ecstasy and satiation.

7. After sex a cool shower, a rejuvenative drink such as warm almond milk with a pinch of saffron and 1 tsp of honey and new clothing are advised.
8. Sex is not recommended during illness as it exhausts Ojas (the body's source of immunity and vitality). Sex can be practiced more frequently in winter than in summer. During pregnancy, menstruation and after a heavy meal sex is also to be avoided as it disturbs the natural downward flow of Air and Ether (Apana Vayu)

CREATIVE ESSENCE

"Ojas is the sap of our life energy" - David Frawley

Ayurveda classifies the body into seven bodily tissues (dhatus) known as plasma (rasa), blood (rakta), flesh (mamsa), fat (medas), bone (asthi), marrow (majja) and reproductive fluids (shukra). Products of the reproductive system are the seventh dhatu or bodily tissue. The sperm and ovum are considered very important, as they are the end result of the metabolism of the preceding six tissues. In this way the reproductive tissue is the cream of all the body's metabolic efforts. If the quality of the reproductive tissue is pure, then the greatest miracle of the body can be performed, that of creating a child. That same life-creating energy if directed inwards can facilitate renewal of our own body and mind.

The pure reproductive fluids (shukra) create the subtle essence called ojas. Ojas is not a physical substance but is more like the essential energy of the immune system. When ojas is strong and pure in our being we have a strong aura, bright eyes, strong immunity and mental clarity. Excess loss of sperm causes low immune function, weak digestion, lassitude and mental dullness.

Unrestricted sexual activity is regarded in Ayurveda as one of the acts most detrimental to health not because sex in itself is bad, but because it strains the nerves, exhausts the bodily tissues, increases vata (air and ether), thus creating dryness and irritability in a person and decreases ojas, the essence of immunity and vitality.

Eminent Ayurvedic physician Professor Subash Ranade shares a view held by Hippocrates when he stated: "Individuals who do not regulate their sexual impulses are more prone to loss of strength, weak immune function, and various diseases owing to depletion of vitality. Those who regulate their sexual energy will have increased memory, power, intelligence, health, and longevity".

Dr. Satyavrata Siddhantalankar, an eminent Yogi, is an amazing example of health and vitality in his nineties, much of which he attributes to following the Ayurvedic guidelines for sexual activity. In his book "From Old Age to Youth Through Yoga" Dr. Satyavrata quotes "The Encyclopedia of Physical Culture" concerning the impact of the loss of semen:

"One ounce of semen is estimated by some authorities as being equivalent in energy to sixty ounces of blood." Perhaps that can explain why men often collapse into an exhausted sleep after ejaculation, feeling sapped of energy. Author of The Tao of Loving, Jolan Chang agrees "When a man has ejaculated, it is like letting the air out of a balloon - he feels flat."

If ejaculation is avoided for a long period of time the sperm undergoes autolysis, breaking up and reabsorbing into the body to contribute towards a more youthful, vigorous body and clarity of mind.

We can learn a lot from animals who regulate and moderate their sexual activity. Even those infamous breeders, rabbits don't mate in autumn and many species such as wolves mate only for procreation, choosing a monogamous relationship for life.

TIPS FOR RETAINING SEMEN

With an aim to conserve and circulate energy through your body the following technique is used to prevent ejaculation.

At the point of peak arousal inhale deeply, place the tip of your tongue on the root of your mouth and tighten the PC muscle. Press firmly on a soft indent in the perineum located between the scrotum and anus. Exhale, relaxing the anal and genital muscles. If the urge for ejaculation continues, squeeze the frenulum (behind the glans penis) with your thumb and forefinger until the urge subsides. Imagine drawing your sexual energy from your genitals to your heart. Gently stroking your genitals to your heart. Visualise a warm pink glow moving from your genitals to your pelvis and to your heart. You can experience an internal blissful orgasm through this process, leaving you energized rather than depleted.

BODY-TYPE TENDENCIES

The Ayurvedic system of classifying one's pscho-physiological constitution according to the predominance of elements gives an interesting insight into our unique sexual behaviour. Our body-type can be determined by completing an Ayurvedic questionnaire or through consultation with an Ayurvedic physician. The three main body-types and their sexual characteristics are as follows.

Vata (air & ether)

A Vata lover tends to be erratic and romantic. Mental foreplay such as flowery poetry or stimulating discussion is the best aphrodisiac for Vata. Touch and sensuality is very soothing and relaxing for highly-strung Vata types. An oil massage combined with soothing music is the ultimate therapy to set the mood. Since Vata people suffer from dramatically fluctuating energy levels they are only interesting in making love when they have the energy, more often in the morning rather than the evening.

Vata types should avoid sexual excess as it depletes their energy and strains their nervous system. Since their body's are drier than the other constitutions Vata types are advised to take regular reproductive tonics and rejuvenative drinks after fluid loss.

The ideal partner for a Vata Body-Type: One who keeps them motivated, relaxed and steadily focussed.

Pitta (fire & water)

Pitta can personify the archetypical hot Latin lovers. They have a natural passion and gusto for making love. Their ego- centered desire for strong gratification and stimulation can result in a lack of sensitivity and tenderness with their partner. Sex can turn into a competitive display of prowess for Pitta as well as a vent for suppressed hostility. Pittas have to consciously tune into the needs of their partner and avoid dominating or rushing them. Pitta types always appreciate visual stimulation hence gentle lights; nice garments and flowers will heighten their arousal. Pittas are the body-type most prone to impotence due to over-excess. They can avoid burn- out by channelling sexual energy into creative pursuits and taking cooling rejuvenatives and a cool shower after sex. Pitta needs to learn to redirect their emotions through their heart rather than through their genitals.

The ideal partner for a Pitta Body-Type: Someone to took them calm and relaxed.

Kapha (water & earth)

Ancient figures of the fertility goddess exemplify the qualities of a Kapha lover. These body-types are made for love. Embodying the ideal qualities of endurance, affection, sensuality and sensitivity, Kaphas can be both mother and lover to spouse. They have abundant fertility, making them "good breeders." This explains why in India the chubbier body build of a kapha is a desirable feature in a partner. Calm, gentle and romantic lovers they can become boring and lazy if unmotivated. Kaphas are also the most likely type to become co-dependant and clingy. They need constant encouragement to develop their own interests, exploring new avenues of self-development.

The preferable partner for a Kapha Body- Type: Anyone with enthusiasm, passion and motivation.

PHASES OF SEX THROUGH LIFE

Ayurveda divides life into four main phases during which the role of sex changes. The purpose of these phases is to bring an individual fulfilment and satiation of their material desires so they may then transcend material attachments and ultimately attain spiritual enlightenment.

The typical phases of life are as follows:

1) Youth Brahmacharyam	Birth up to 25 years	celibate student phase
2) Prime Gaarhasthyam	25 years to 50 years	family life; business
3) Maturity Vaanaprastham	50 years to 65 years	retire from worldly duties
4) Sunset years Sanyasam	65 years until death	renunciation

BRAHMACHARYAM Birth - 25 yrs

Brahma means the knowledge leading to self-realisation and charya means regimen. This is the stage of life where one learns to control one's senses in order to focus on study and attain a ripened understanding about life. Brahmacharya is also the third rule of social conduct (Yama) advised in the eight limbed path of yoga.

Vaanaprastham is the period during which work and family obligations are slowly reduced in preparation for the period of total renunciation or sanyasam. Ideally at this time one's children are mature and independent and one is financially secure. The body is starting to show signs of aging, a reminder that death is inevitable and preparation to face it must begin. The ancient epic "The Mahabharata" illustrates human's unwillingness to face the reality of death when the epic's hero Yuddhistira is questioned in order to save his brother's life. The Yaksha asked Yuddhistira "What is the greatest wonder in the world?" to which Yuddhistira replies "Day after day and hour after hour, people die and corpses are carried along, yet the onlookers never realize that they are to die one day, but think they will live forever. This is the greatest wonder of the world." Vaanaprastham is the phase of life when one starts to seriously prepare for this reality, a time when one may retire from employment and dedicate one's time to philanthropic pursuits leaving plenty of time for contemplation and meditation.

Any superfluous material possessions may be given away at this time and a couple may choose to move to a simple, peaceful dwelling, keeping possessions to a minimum. During this time interest in sexual activity naturally declines as one has come to a state of sexual satiation and developed a greater attachment for less sensually oriented pursuits. Plato once quoted an old man on this subject who said "In old age you become quite free of passions of this sort and they leave you in peace; and when your desires lose their intensity and relax, you get a release from slavery to your many passions."

Society today is highly suspicious and even panicked at the hint of any weakening of the sexual drive but the opposite is true in Vedic culture. People who have naturally raised their energy and interests above that of sexual pleasure and developed a higher consciousness are revered as the highest models of wisdom. With age, interest in sex naturally declines, despite many deluded people's attempts to retain their sexual drive with the use of endangered animal's parts such as tiger's penis' and rhinoceros' horns as aphrodisiacs. A constant preoccupation with sex is not healthy; nor is it in humanity's highest interest. Sexuality should never be suppressed or a source of guilt yet as one's passion to enjoy another's body subdues with age one naturally turns to more enduring and enriching ways to relate to one's partner. The lasting union is marked by a shared passion for life, not just for sex. This is the process of Vaanaprastham.

SANYASAM 65 to death

"As advancing age cools his passions he turns to think of his creator, to study religious subjects and to acquire divine knowledge."
- Ananga Ranga by Kalyana Malla

Sanyasam means "selecting the most appropriate path." This is when the inward journey really begins. At this time the husband and wife see each other purely as partners in the journey to self-realization. They will have minimal contact in physical matters and aim to spend their time wholeheartedly propagating and investigating the highest spiritual truths of life. Sometimes they may choose to live separately as they fully absorb themselves in spiritual practices and pilgrimages to holy places. This is the time for burning up one's vasanas or innate material desires.

Not everyone is expected to enter the sanyasa phase of life as it requires a strong dedication and desire to devote oneself fully to spiritual life. Traditionally this path is only taken up by true spiritual warriors, those driven to experience the rare nectar of complete spiritual surrender.

CELIBACY

Some rare souls choose to skip the gaarhasthyam and vaanaprastham phase of life and take to the austere, celibate life of sanyasam for their whole lives. Such people are known as goswamis (male) or goswaminis (female) translated as "masters of the senses." In contrast most people are in the unfortunate position of being gods' or "servants of the senses", having to pamper to their sense's every whim just to feel some relief from suffering caused by sensual hankering. Renunciates don't see their path as austere or difficult as they experience transcendental pleasure far superior to enjoyment offered through any temporary, limited material pursuits.

Healthy celibacy doesn't indicate an absence of sexual energy it simply shows that the celibate has learned to redirect that energy into other areas of life. Celibacy does not rule out intimacy of human friendships as it is not a question of uprooting sexuality but of becoming sexual in a different way. On the other hand unnatural, repressive celibacy can create serious psychological damage and a perverted attitude towards sex as Krishnamurti elucidates "Chastity of the monk with his vow is worldliness as long as his urges are present."

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CONSCIOUS CONCEPTION

"The natural man has only two primal passions - to get and beget"

-Sir William Osler, physician

Ayurveda instructs couples in great detail concerning the methods to conceive a child with strong health, intelligence and spirituality. The Vedic scriptures count procreation as one of the main fourteen rituals (samskaras) of life. The ritual of conception is known as Garbhadhana samskara or "placing the seed in the womb". A couple is advised to purify and rejuvenate their body and mind in order to create the strongest child possible and to reduce the probability of passing on the handicap of genetic disease patterns. The child's constitutional strengths and weaknesses are fixed at the time of birth so responsible parents can follow all measures to give their child the healthiest start in life.

A couple should consult an Ayurvedic physician or Ayurvedic pediatrician (kaumara bhritya) at least six months prior to conception in order to undergo the necessary purification and rejuvenation treatments. The duration and nature of the preparatory therapies depends on the health status of the couple. In order to attract the type of child they desire most the couple spend months before conception practicing specific affirmations and visualizations to welcome the child into their lives. The spirit that chooses to enter the womb of the mother is determined by the parent's consciousness at birth. This can determine whether the couples will conceive a child with a lovable, compatible nature or a difficult child bearing many psychic and physical problems.

Spiritual practices are given to the parents which includes reading from scriptures about auspicious offspring and reciting mantras in order to purify and focus the couple's awareness on the purpose of the sexual union.

The most auspicious time for conception should be calculated by an astrologer (Jyotishi) in order to avoid any malefic planetary influences. Three days after the completion of menses or at the time of ovulation is also recommended as the best time to conceive. For eight hours before conception the couple practices meditation and affirmations as directed by the Ayurvedic physician, this includes a clear perception of the qualities they would like their child to possess.

The couple can take light, nourishing and cooling foods during the time before conception in conjunction with the prescribed reproductive tonics. After preparing the room and one's body in the manner described under guidelines for a quality experience, a ritual offering of incense, flowers, water and food can be made to the appropriate source of spiritual inspiration and protection. A mantra to be chanted before conception follows: **"ATHIRASI AYURASI SARVATAH PRATISHTASI DHATA TVA DADHAATU BRAHMA VARCHASA BHAVA."** It translates: "May our child, a divine gift from the creator, be blessed with longevity, sacred wisdom, bliss and be welcomed by all." This empowers the act with a very positive and definite vibration, creating the most conducive environment for the soul to enter the womb.

When the atmosphere is most conducive and stimulating for union the man ascends the bed with his right leg and the woman with her left leg. The couple then unite to share a loving and blissful climax. The Ayurvedic text Charaka Samhita states that the best position for conception is the woman lying on her back with the man on top. The Kama Sutra elaborates by suggesting the woman's legs wrap around the partner and they hold together in a tight embrace, increasing the pleasure for both. It is this sense of ecstasy and contentment along with one's focused intention that will imbibe the child with a healthy and secure mental and physical constitution.

SEXUAL TONICS

"The aim of virilization is to enable a couple to produce a healthy progeny who can help them to perform their **dharma** (life's mission)"

- Chakrapani, the commentator of Charaka Samhita.

The branch of reproductive tonics in Ayurveda is known as Vajikarana. The word "Vaji" means one with perfectly healthy sperm or ovum. So the term "Vajikarana" means that which produces healthy sperm or ovum.

The main aim behind this concept is to ensure the production of a healthy, intelligent, well-motivated child by ensuring healthy parents and full sexual ecstasy at conception, the time when the child's constitution is fixed. To ensure this Ayurveda advises full bodily purification before virilization treatment. Vajikaranas are tonics to both the male and female reproductive organs and they also excite the sexual organs which is more relevant to men since they have to maintain an erection for conception and they lose more sexual fluids than a woman does.

A general male tonic is ashwagandha and a female fertility tonic is shatavari.

MAKING LOVE

" When you perceive yourself as spirit, you will not simply feel love you will be love"
- Deepak Chopra

Since the sexual revolution we have come to analyze the mechanics of sexual technique yet failed to appreciate the emotional and spiritual implications of sex. In our pursuit of pleasure, the role of sex has been grossly overemphasized. Having sex without making love is a shallow and dissatisfying experience. When we make love as a means to expand our heart, our every action, every sound, every caress will express our loving feelings and it can be a transformative experience. However, when most of us reflect on the pleasurable experiences in our life it has nothing to do with what goes on between the sheets. Experiences that reinforce the loving connection with our family, friends, strangers, nature and a higher force bring us ultimate pleasure.

Vedic wisdom warns against giving undue preference to one aspect of our being, thereby neglecting to develop our full potential. The world's oldest scripture, the Bhagavad-Gita 11.37, states that lust is the greatest enemy as it leads to self-absorption, anger and deluded meaning in life. It calls for a 'love revolution' where we channel our energy towards the service of all beings. This will result in deeply fulfilling, long-term pleasure. Increasing our capacity to give and receive love is life's greatest lesson and challenge. To achieve this is the true sign of spiritual evolution as "in the evening of life, we will be judged on love alone," St. John of the Cross.

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