



THE COSMO- EROTIC UNIVERSE

ABSTRACT

A Return to Eros is a tour de force of the kind that comes along once in a generation. The way this volume brings Eros to consciousness as the fundamental force, direction, and “purpose” of reality on all levels and all quadrants, really is the discovery that now underlies, directs, and “explains” the sacred purpose of cosmogenesis, the birth narrative of the New Human. It’s the second coming of humanity for the first time in history incarnate as a fully embodied sacred sexual being. It’s the early stages of next evolutionary unfolding. *A Return to Eros* forms the basis of evolutionary spirituality. It captures the glory of its conscious experience from the inside out in the sexuality and Eros of the evolutionary unique self.

- *From the Foreword by Barbara Marx Hubbard*

An Excerpt from A Return to Eros

By Dr. Marc Gafni & Dr. Kristina Kincaid

The Dancing Master: An Erotic Story

A Tibetan story wonderfully evokes the erotic experience we are exploring together.

Reports had reached the young Dalai Lama that a certain master of Kung Fu was roaming the countryside of Tibet, converting young men to the study of violence. Rumors even began circulating that this Kung Fu master was an incarnation of Shiva Nataraja, the Hindu god in his aspect of the Lord of the Dance of Destruction. The Dalai Lama decided to invite the master for a visit.

Pleased with the invitation, the Kung Fu master strode into the Dalai Lama's ceremonial hall some weeks later. The master was beautiful indeed, with thick blue-black hair falling down over the shoulders of his black leather suit. "Your Holiness," he began, "be not concerned. I would not think of doing you harm."

"Well, when you do want to harm," asked the Dalai Lama, "what kind of harm can you do?"

"Your Holiness, the best way to show you would be for you to stand here in front of me while I do a little dance. Though I can kill a dozen men instantly with this dance, have no fear."

The Dalai Lama stood up and immediately felt as if a wind had blown flower petals across his body. He looked down but saw nothing. "You may proceed," he told the master of Kung Fu.

"Proceed?" said the other, grinning jovially. "I've already finished. What you felt were my hands flicking across your body. If I had done it in slow motion, extremely slow motion, you would have seen how each touch of my hand would have destroyed the organs of your body one by one."

"Impressive. But I know a master greater than you," said the Dalai Lama.

"Without wishing to offend Your Holiness, I doubt that very much," said the Kung Fu master. "Let him challenge me, and if he bests me, I shall leave Tibet forever."

"If he bests you, you shall have no need to leave Tibet." The Dalai Lama clapped his hands. "Regent," he said, "summon the dancing master." The dancing master entered. He was a wiry little fellow, half the size of the master of Kung Fu and well past his prime. His legs were knotted with varicose veins, and he was swollen at the elbows from arthritis. Nevertheless, his eyes were glittering merrily, and he seemed eager for the challenge.

The master of Kung Fu did not mock his opponent. "My own guru," he said, "was even smaller and older than you, yet I was unable to best him until last year when I finally caught him on the ear and destroyed him, as I shall destroy you when you finally tire."

The two opponents faced off. The Kung Fu master assumed a jaunty, indifferent stance, intending to tempt the other to attack.

The old dancing master began to swirl very slowly, his robes wafting around his body. His arms stretched out, and his hands fluttered like butterflies toward the eyes of his opponent. His fingers settled gently for a moment upon the bushy eyebrows.

The master of Kung Fu drew back in astonishment. He looked around the great hall. Everything was suddenly vibrant with rich hues of singing color. The faces of the monks were radiantly beautiful. It was as if his eyes had been washed clean for the first time.

The fingers of the dancing master stroked the nose of the master of Kung Fu, and suddenly he could smell the pungent barley from a granary in the city far below. He was intoxicated by the aroma of the butter melting in the Dalai Lama's fragrant tea.

A flick of the dancing master's foot at the Kung Fu master's genitals, and he was throbbing with desire. The sound of a woman singing through an open window filled him with exquisite yearning to draw her into his arms and caress her. He found himself removing his leather clothes until he stood naked before the dancing master, who was now assaulting him with joy at every touch.

His body began to hum like a finely tuned instrument. He opened his mouth and sang like a bird at sunrise. It seemed to him that he was possessed of many arms, legs, and hands, and all wanted to nurture the blossoming of life.

The Kung Fu master began the most beautiful dance that had ever been seen in the great ceremonial hall of the Grand Potala. It lasted for three days and nights, during which time everyone in Tibet feasted and visitors crowded the doorways and galleries to watch. Only when he finally collapsed at the throne of the Dalai Lama did he realize that another body was lying beside him. The old dancing master had died of exertion while performing his final and most marvelous dance. But he had died happily, having found the disciple he had always yearned for. The new dancing master of Tibet took the frail corpse in his arms and, weeping with love, drew the last of its energy into his body. Never had he felt so strong.

What a holy tale of Eros. The darts and lunges of emptiness and violence become the erotic soarings of fullness and love. The great mystery tradition of Hebrew wisdom is about a radical and profound path toward becoming just such a dancing master. It is about the dance with Eros, with Shechinah, the dance with the Goddess Divine.

Eros has many expressions. Each expression is hinted at in the temple mysteries.

Now that we have sensed at least a fragrance of Eros, how do we find our way back to it? Through what doors might we return? This is the great mythical question of all the mystical traditions. We are exiled from Eden. Eden is Eros. How do we find our way back to the Garden?

The answer is startling and beautiful. The way back to Eros is through sex. Sex is the portal for the return to Eros.

The Secret of the Cherubs

Reality Is Eros

Now that we understand that Eros lies at the heart of the temple mysteries, we can turn to the core question: If, as we have seen, the essence of the temple (and of every journey of spirit) is Eros, not sex, then why is sex such a prominent feature of the temple? This chapter will begin to unfold that information, which lies at the heart of the mystical Secret of the Cherubs.

The Secret of the Cherubs tells the story of the relationship between the erotic, love and the sexual. Sex models Eros. Erotic sex models what it means to be radically alive in every single facet of our lives. This is the new sexual narrative that is an affront to shame. The Secret of the Cherubs shows us the way to erotically reweave the very fabric of our lives in more vivid patterns, sensual textures, and brilliant hues. This is the path of what we have called Hebrew Tantra. Hebrew Tantra is both the invitation and the divine demand that we re-eroticize our lives.

The Secret of the Cherubs tells a new sexual story, one we have alluded to that now needs to be spelled out in its full erotic delight.

All great mysteries arise in response to powerful yet simple questions. If we were in a classroom, with the blackboards whitened with sketches of cherubs and notes on Eros, Shechinah, and sex, I would at this point step back and ask for questions, for all good spiritual maps should give rise to questions. Slowly a hand would be raised in the classroom . . . a second hand . . . a host of hands. The questions would begin: "If all that you have said so far is true, if Eros is not sex, then why in the temple of Eros is the centerpiece two sexually intertwined cherubs? Why sex? Why wouldn't the temple use some other image of Eros? Wouldn't a statue of a runner who has become the wind or a painter engrossed in his colors be a more fitting figure to perch atop the Ark? If Eros and love are, as you say, more than sex, then why does the temple insist on using a blatantly sexual image?" I would add a question of my own: "What is the magnetism of the cherubs and the Ark that has so fascinated the world for millennia?"

The Greek historian Thucydides reminds us that when words lose their meaning, culture collapses. A movie called *Raiders of the Lost Ark* goes blockbuster toward the end of the twentieth century. But why is the lost Ark so precious to us? Why are people so passionately committed—willing to risk it all—to recover the Ark? Why does the Ark have sexually entwined cherubs adorning its cover? These same cherubs appear in a sacred text in the book of Genesis guarding the entrance to the Garden of Eden. What precious secret do these cherubs hold in their embrace?

Quest for the Grail

Think of King Arthur and his valiant knights, who are all committed to the great quest for the Holy Grail. The grail is a goblet, in the mystery tradition, in the shape of the feminine yoni. In some Middle Eastern languages the very word for "grail," *kos*, connotes the wetness of the feminine yoni. The phrase "My cup runneth over" alludes to this hidden meaning in the mysteries of the grail. Arthur's knights of the round table are in devotion to the saving of the damsel in distress. For the grail tradition, this refers to the "redemption of the Shechinah"—the Goddess—which is the liberation of Eros. The table is round, a circle, alluding to the curves of the feminine. The popular *The Da Vinci Code* novel evokes the Mary Magdalene tradition, which sees Jesus and Mary in sexual embrace. Both the knights of Camelot and the Magdalene mysteries are sourced in the Secret of the Cherubs. Indeed, Jesus and Mary are no less than the cherubs above the Ark. The voice of God cannot be heard other than through their embrace. A church that denies Magdalene cannot hear the voice of God. Then, of course, there is the source of it all, Solomon, the great builder of the Jerusalem Temple, who marries a thousand wives. In the cherub tradition, the thousand wives symbolize the great erotic project of Solomon. The intention of his project was no less than the restoration of Eros to its proper position as the North Star of our lives.

Solomon, Wisdom of Solomon, Ark, lost Ark, grail quest, Temple in Jerusalem, Mary Magdalene, cherubs, damsel in distress, Da Vinci code—all of these are words that have lost their meaning in our culture. All of them are allusions to Eros. All of them have their source, in one form or another, in the Secret of the Cherubs, which lies at the epicenter of Solomon's temple. In recovering the meaning of the lost words, we both return to Eros and evoke the possibility of a new human and a new culture.

Contrary to the tenets of classical religion and much of psychology, Hebrew Tantra insists that sex is integrally related to love and Eros. Let's look again, one step deeper, at these three words and their relationship to one another. When we use the word love in this book, we mean what we referred to earlier as outrageous love. Outrageous love is the ceaseless inherent creativity of the cosmos that

animates and seduces all of reality to ever higher and deeper emergence. Hebrew mystics teach that the universe in every second is always making love. The Kabbalists' word for it, *zivug*, connotes the outrageous erotic coupling that characterizes the cosmos at every level of reality. Outrageous love is Eros. Eros is love writ large, which is the essence of existence itself.

A New Dimension of Eros

Eros, as we have seen, is the experience of radical aliveness.

Now let's point to a new dimension to Eros. Inextricable from the erotic experience of radical aliveness is the powerful drive for union, the drive to make contact. One succinct definition of Eros therefore might be: Eros is radical aliveness passionately seeking contact. The drive for contact is, however, not merely an additional dimension of Eros. Radical aliveness is how the drive to contact feels.

Now let's add yet another dimension of Eros: Contact always births something new. New intimacy, new creativity, new emergence. We can now reformulate our definition of Eros. Eros is radical aliveness, passionately seeking contact, which always births something new. The erotic equation might be formulated as $\text{Eros} = \text{Radical Aliveness} + \text{Contact} + \text{Creativity}$.

Now we turn to sex. The sexual expresses the fundamental eroticism of all of reality, from the subatomic to the celestial to the human. But sex does not exhaust the eroticism of nature. The sexual is an expression of Eros; it is not the whole of Eros. Eros is the inner texture of reality that lives awake, alive, and aware in every moment. To wake up to Eros is to wake up to the shocking yet stunning realization that the universe is passionately making love all the way up and all the way down creation. Sex in the human realm is an expression of that same core yearning for contact—Eros—that drives all of reality. Sex is cosmic Eros performed in the flesh.

Cosmology tells us that we are made from stardust in constant equilibrium—attracted and held together by gravitational pull, kept apart by centrifugal force. We are partnered and yet separate—all part of the great cosmic Eros of reality.

Four Dimensions of the Secret of the Cherubs

Let's now state clearly the four major dimensions to the Secret of the Cherubs. The first dimension is that God is Eros. For the mystics, God is identical to reality, or life. To say that God is Eros is to say reality is Eros or life is Eros. The second dimension is that the sexual is an expression of the Erotic movement that characterizes every level of the cosmos. The third dimension is that the sexual in its ideal form models what it means to live radically alive and on purpose, in every other nonsexual dimension of life. Sex models Eros. It is in this precise sense that the sexual is the seat of all wisdom. The fourth dimension, central to the cherub mystics, is that conscious human sex actually transforms reality itself. Human sex does not only participate in the Eros of the cosmos; it is much larger than that. When human beings perform the cosmic Eros in their own flesh with the intention of *tikkun*—the healing and transformation of all that is—then, in the language of the mystics, a "great evolutionary fixing" takes place in all worlds above and below. For the cherub mystics, the miracle of life is not realized in some future world. The wonder of life is that we've met and been together in sexual union, making love here, "in this halfmade world, where love is yet to take its hold."⁶ When we are together with the intention of restoring wholeness in a world of broken hearts, then we are living the erotic life.

Eros is the very aliveness of the cosmos expressed in all of its potency. When that potency awakens in you, your life becomes naturally good, true, and beautiful, and you become appropriately powerful

beyond imagination. This is not a surface power that you wield against others, but a depth of power that allures others into the noble grace of your own full potency. When you awaken to the fullness of your own sexual power, you have the ability through your own erotic life to participate in the healing and transformation of all that is.

For the cherub mystics “the sexual union of man and woman” both models and participates in the more primal union of Shechinah (the divine feminine) and Tiferet (the divine masculine) . By masculine and feminine, we do not mean man or woman but rather two essential forces of the universe. These universal cosmic forces are often referred to by the cherub mystics as lines and circles. They are different faces of the greater union, the force of divinity that courses through the cosmos and our own bodies. Their integration is the highest erotic expression of a healed world.

Now comes the truly radical insight! The human being is responsible for effecting the uniting of the masculine and the feminine in the God force. Entrusted to us is the sacred task of erotically merging the Shechinah and Tiferet, the Goddess and the God. We are the erotic mystics invested with the power to influence the force in powerful and profound ways.

This is possible because we reside in the undivided heart of God. It is not that we have power over God; rather, we have power as part of God. In our sexing we unite and balance the Shechinah and Tiferet poles within us. We heal the split in divinity. This is a sacred Tantric practice to unify, balance, and integrate the Shechinah and Tiferet, the circle and line poles within ourselves and in all of reality. We are bridge and balancer. It is we who bring home the exiled Shechinah. This erotic activism is modeled by the sexual but not exhausted by the sexual. That is what we mean when we say that sex models Eros. When we live the erotic life, in every dimension of our existence, then a tikkun, a “great evolutionary fixing,” takes place in all worlds. The twelve faces of Eros, each modeled by the sexual—which we will unfold in the second half of this book—are the path to living the erotic life.

This fourth core dimension of the Secret of the Cherubs makes natural sense in light of contemporary science. Modern chaos theory grounds this activist principle in the material world in a phenomenon called “the butterfly effect.” For example, the gentle breeze from a butterfly’s wing on one side of the world can, two months later, be the “cause” of a windstorm on the other side of the world. If that is true about the effect of a butterfly, then imagine the impact of human beings consciously coupling—performing cosmic Eros in the flesh—with the intent of healing and transformation. For the cherub mystics, this kind of erotic activism is a core principle of human ethics.

Let’s look more deeply at each of these dimensions. Eros is the fundamental movement in the universe toward contact. Sex is an expression of the core Eros of the cosmos. Sex is the drive for contact, the drive to bond, to connect, to be intimate. Sex is an expression of the drive to greater union, which is the creative essence of reality itself. In union, we all come home. But for the erotic mystics in the cherub not the boredom of perpetual rest but ground for ever greater and deeper union. Sex models the ecstatic urgency, which is the feeling of the drive to union.

In union, two separate parts do not fuse but rather make contact through intimate bonding to create newness. This newness is the greater union, the higher love, which is the yearning of reality’s Eros. From quarks, to atoms, to molecules, to cells, to early organisms, to plants, to animals, to mammals, to ideas themselves, this core drive for contact is the Eros of all of reality.

Said differently, the great realization of the spiritually incorrect Tantric masters is that reality is allurement. Allurement is the quality of attraction, which is the very fabric of existence. From

electromagnetic attraction to gravity to rungs of evolutionary emergence to the intellectual sex between ideas that generates newness—all of reality is moved by the intense allurements for contact, which generates new creations.

Way before sex appears on the scene, allurements are at work throughout the cosmos, attracting all expressions of creation to each other. From the first nanoseconds of the big bang to the first quarks that generated your body, to your own life, unique allurements are what drive all of life. Who are you if not your unique set of allurements? Your physical structure is the composite of the allurements that caused its atoms to form into molecules, its molecules into cells, and its cells into organs. Everything in creation is attracted to everything else, and this urge to know each other, to communicate, to join and make something greater, is the allurements that lies at the very heart of life.

Sex is an expression of this erotic drive. In human sex, Eros becomes conscious of itself. In conscious human sex, all levels of one's being are brought into higher union. This is the new sexual narrative that we have called sex erotic. Cosmic Eros is enacted in the flesh. Sex erotic transcends and includes the physical. The human being becomes the creative drive of the cosmos, all levels of body, mind, emotion, and spirit moving toward union. This is the core of the Secret of the Cherubs. We will go deeper into this truth about the nature of reality in our conversation about allurements, which is the third face of Eros.

Hieros Gamos

The esoteric term for the great love affair of the cosmos is Hieros Gamos. The Secret of the Cherubs is the primary source of this great mystical secret. Hieros Gamos is Latin for "the divine marriage." The divine marriage is the hidden mystical doctrine of the spiritually incorrect Tantric masters in virtually all of the great traditions. What does the divine marriage mean? It is not about God going shopping. Hieros Gamos is the hidden way of saying nothing less than "God is Eros." Or we might say even more directly, reality is Eros.

At every level of existence, two expressions of reality seek contact with each other to birth not only new but also higher and deeper orders of existence. These two forces used to be called masculine and feminine, but they are not gender specific. We can no longer exclusively identify them with men or women. They are two energetic qualities of the cosmos that live in all of reality, including in every human being. Borrowing a term from the erotic mystic Isaac Luria, we call these cosmic forces lines and circles. In Luria's evocative image, every moment of reality, on all levels and in all worlds, is born from the [unique] interpenetration of lines and circles that takes place in that moment.⁷ In other words, all of reality is erotic union.

Lines and circles were qualities of reality way before any gendered masculine and feminine existed. Line qualities include the forces of autonomy, independence, thrusting, and direction. In physics, these forces express as the particle (in contrast to the wave), centrifugal force, and the force of repulsion that opposes attraction. Circle qualities include the forces of allurements, attraction, reception, and cycle. In physics, these forces might be expressed as the wave (in contrast to the particle), centripetal force, and the quality of attraction that opposes repulsion. Physicist Niels Bohr insisted that a wave and a particle cannot exist separately from each other but are in a complementary both/and relationship, a sacred marriage of energy and matter.

The primary forces of lines and circles were already well known to the ancients. They are identified in the great traditions as God and Goddess or King and Queen. In Hinduism, they are called Shiva and Shakti, in Taoism yin and yang. In Kabbalah, they are known by many terms, including Shechinah and

Tiferet as well as the upper waters and the lower waters. In ancient Egypt, there were earth and sky. In the grail tradition, the knight with his linelike lance seeks the Holy Grail, the circlelike chalice. While these traditions often had markedly different visions of what constituted masculine and feminine, in all of them the goal is Hieros Gamos, some form of divine marriage in which the polarities are integrated into a larger whole. In science it was Niels Bohr who insisted that a wave and particle cannot exist separately from each other but in complementary both/and relationship, a sacred marriage of energy and matter.

Sex Erotic

All of this forms the matrix of the new sexual narrative: sex erotic. Evolutionary theory, systems science, the new physics, the Kabbalistic Secret of the Cherubs, and the ancient knowing of Hieros Gamos all come together to weave this new sexual story. Reality is erotic. Human sexual Eros participates directly in the erotic nature of the cosmos. Or, said differently, human sexual eros models the great Eros of the cosmos at every level of reality. Reality is Eros, God is allurements, reality is allurements, the sexual models the erotic, God is Eros—all of these are potent expressions of the new sexual narrative for our time.

None of the classical sexual narratives—sex positive, sex negative, sex neutral, or sex sacred—have the capacity to address the fullness of our sexual experience. All are true, but only partially. Moreover, none of these four narratives is an affront to shame. It is only this fifth sexual narrative, sex erotic, the sexual story for our time, that has the potency to deconstruct shame. When you understand that at its source, sexual desire arises in you as the allurements of life itself yearning for contact, shame is eviscerated. The universe is erotic, motivated and animated by allurements and attraction. The sexual drive is but an expression of the core evolutionary Eros that moves all reality. It is only this spiritually incorrect but scientifically accurate understanding of reality that can birth a sexual narrative that honors the radical dignity of our desire.

From Ethics to Ethos

If you are with us up to this point, it will be self-evident to you that “reality is Eros” has absolutely nothing to do with inappropriate sexuality. Reality is Eros takes radical sexual ethics as a given. It addresses the next step beyond sexual ethics, upon which all sexual ethics depend. It is the articulation of a sexual ethos—that is to say, a sexual story that is true both to spirit and science and to our own deepest experience and yearning.

Reality as Eros is an ethos that speaks equally to liberal Protestants, progressive devout Catholics, Orthodox and liberal Jews, Southern Baptists, Colorado New Agers, singles, hipsters, Millennials, yuppies, and entrepreneurs of every color, nationality, creed, and orientation. Reality is Eros has nothing to do with whether you are monogamous, celibate, or polyamorous. It has nothing to do with your particular sexual style or code of behavior. The knowing that reality is Eros is, however, is core to your most fundamental vision of reality, and therefore your core experience of both your sexual and your erotic self. A complementary way of saying this is that God is Eros or God is love. Reality is love. Not ordinary love but outrageous love, the love that is Eros.

The reason that we add the words outrageous love—as we noted above—is because it has a power that the word love does not have by itself. Outrageous love is caring, compassionate, and kind. But outrageous love also has a fierce quality. This is the quality that the word outrageous connotes. In English, we do not have a word that captures the quality of reality that seamlessly arouses, attracts, allures, enchants, shatters, demands, and delights. We are so overwhelmed by the power of this quality

that we assign to it a word—outrageous—that is on the one hand confronting and demanding and on the other raw delight, desire, and amazement. Outrageous love is Eros.

Eros is not just sex. Sex is too small a word to contain the wholeness of Eros. Sex merely points toward Eros. Eros is so much greater. The erotic is the pulse of God beating at every level of reality. So, by Eros we do not mean human sex, but rather the cosmic Eros of which sex is but one potent expression.

If we trace sex to its source we realize that the body electric is plugged straight into God. Once you discover that current, you will never be the same.

Loving the Moment Open

One of the principles that emerges from chaos theory contributes to a deeper understanding of the Secret of the Cherubs, and it is this: Every moment is either open or closed. Alfred North Whitehead, the great philosopher, reminds us that the “creative advance of novelty” is a defining feature of the cosmos. This means that reality opens to novelty in every moment. Or, as physicist Stuart Kauffman points out, we live in a ceaselessly creative universe. At the human level, the evolutionary impulse that drives the universe toward new depth moves us from unconscious growth to what evolutionary biologist Julian Huxley calls “conscious evolution.” In Hebrew, the word development or evolution is the same word as opening. To evolve means to open. To awaken to conscious evolution is to come to realize that there is only one great human choice in every moment: to open or to close. The Secret of the Cherubs integrated with the leading edge of science informs us that the moment and the human being are not separate from each other. In every moment we have the choice to be open or closed. In other words, we have the choice to actually love open the moment—EVERY MOMENT—and the moment opens, or we can choose to remain closed, and the moment remains closed.

When we stay open in love we are pulsing alive in the flow of life. We then have the capacity to love the moment open. When the moment is opened, new life is created. If the moment remains closed, the potential new life is stillborn. It is therefore a simple evolutionary truth that to open or to close is no less than to love or to die. Those are the two evolutionary choices available in every moment.

Creation Every Second

The reason that in every moment you must decide whether to be open or closed is because every moment is new. In every new moment you either love the moment open or you let the moment love you open. To love the moment open is to penetrate the moment. To be loved open by the moment is to let the moment penetrate you. That is what it means to be open and alive. The alternative is to be closed and dead.

The pivotal insight that every moment is a new quality of intimacy is core to the realization that reality is Eros. The erotic explosion in which the unmanifest becomes manifest is not a onetime event. Said differently, the big bang or creation did not happen once upon a time. It is—both mystically and scientifically—happening right now.

Eros is the initiating energy of the cosmos, the evolutionary impulse that creates all worlds; countless planets; myriad suns, moons, and stars; and every single particle of cosmic dust. Originally, creation, or the big bang, was thought to have been a onetime, initiatory event, an erotic divine implosion in which the primal line bisected the primal circle and the cosmos poured forth. Mystics and leading-edge quantum field theorists tell us differently. The erotic Hebrew mystic Levi Isaac opens his commentary with a radical assertion: creation is happening every second. The great flaring forth of reality is enacted

anew every moment. As some quantum field theorists put it, reality flashes in and out of existence every moment. The very force of Eros, which is divinity, is constantly pouring through existence. God is Eros!

My (Kristina) eighth-grade science teacher, who was an avowed atheist, used to say, “You can’t get something from nothing.” He was only partially right, however. Within the atomic world, governed by the classic laws of physics, indeed, everything comes from something. But both the universe itself and the subatomic world—which contains the core building blocks of all of reality—literally come from nowhere. Reality is *creatio ex nihilo*—something from nothing.

In the language of the cherub mystics, we might say that reality was ecstatically exploded into existence by source. Creation is not from nothing but from no-thing. They call this *yesh me-ayin*. *Yesh*, “something,” comes from *ayin*, which is best translated as “no-thing” or “the realm of pure possibility.” But this erotic explosion that births reality is not a discrete event. The pulsing throb of outrageous love is the constant nature of reality, right now and now and now. Reality births new intimacy and new possibility in every moment.

All of reality as we know it is created out of subatomic particles. Quantum physics tells us that these particles flash in and out of the quantum field in every second. They are constantly popping in and out of existence. The particles pop out of our time, space, matter, energy, and the reality that we know into what is technically called a virtual state. This is a state of pure potentiality. It is in this sense that God is referred to by mystics as the possibility of possibility. Pure potentiality fiercely loves reality into existence in every moment. The two sexually intertwined cherubs above the Ark in the Holy of Holies represent the constant movement of pure potentiality loving reality into existence anew in every second. This rhythm of reality is the core nature of all existence.

The brain operates in much the same way. Millions of separate signals throughout the brain are constantly flashing on and off. The place in the brain in which reality “disappears” before it turns back is in the synapses between neurons, the empty space that scientific language refers to as the gap between all neuronal connections. In the language of the cherub mystics, we might say that the gap is “the space between the cherubs.” Mind the gap, for it is where creation mysteriously takes place.

According to neuroscience, there are some quadrillion synaptic connections that flash in and out of reality in the adult brain. It is in this gap that creation mysteriously takes place. Reality thus flashes in and out of existence through the perpetual Eros that emerges in the spaces in between. In the sacred texts of the Secret of the Cherubs, “the voice of God speaks from the space between the cherubs.” The voice of God is no less than the constant ecstatic creativity birthed from pure potentiality, activated from synapses “in between.”

What is so vital to realize is that this is not a onetime event but is the constant nature of existence.

In Hebrew, the implication of this perpetual Eros—the constant hidden intercourse of the cosmos—is captured in the word *zeman*. *Zeman* has three related meanings: “time,” “invitation,” and “radical readiness.” The implication is that every moment in time is a new invitation. There is unrelenting optimism in this insight. The very depths of reality can be recreated in every moment. Yesterday can never define today. New possibility is constantly available. The pure potentiality of this moment births that which did not exist a moment ago. All trauma can therefore be healed. All pain can be transformed in the new moment.

What is required for that transformation is the third meaning of zeman: radical readiness. The image of a runner primed to sprint at the beginning of a race is helpful here. "Ready, set, go." It is that sense of being fully entered by the moment and fully penetrating the moment with your readiness that embodies the understanding that reality is zivug, reality is Eros. This is what St. Thomas knew when he said, "The dynamic pulse and throb of creation is the love of all things for the infinite." We might slightly reframe the end of the sentence to say, "the love of all things within the infinite." There is nothing apart from the infinite field of pure potentiality yearning to emerge. All of reality is penetrating and being penetrated all the way up and all the way down. All of reality is constantly making love with itself. This love awakens from hardwired instinct to human choice when we move from unconscious to conscious evolution.

Every moment waits for you to love it open. To love the moment open you must be fearlessly present, facing everything, avoiding nothing. In denial, the moment closes. In radical recognition coupled with audacious yet humble embrace, the moment opens. For the cherub mystics this is what it means to continuously make love with the divine one. This is what it means to live an erotic life, to be an outrageous lover. For the cherub mystics, the human being who awakens into full consciousness incarnates the throb and pulse of evolution.

Remember the story of the dancing master in chapter four? Had the Kung Fu master merely killed the dancing master with his superior skill, the moment would have remained closed. Even if the old dancing master had succeeded in besting the Kung Fu master, the moment would not have fully opened. No new quality of consciousness would have been achieved. It was only when a new dance emerged, in which the dancing master and the Kung Fu warrior were both transformed, that a new quality of consciousness was birthed into reality. Both the dancing master and the Kung Fu fighter claimed the full aliveness of his being as each met his unique destiny.

We are all dancing masters. When we succumb to smallness, contraction, corruption, or unlove, the moment closes. When we expand into the full aliveness of our Unique Selves, we have the power to love the moment open and to receive the potent promise of that specific instant in time. When we talk about loving the moment open or letting the moment love us open, we are not talking about a sweet or even a gentle movement. We are talking about an intensity of presence, receptivity, and thrust that opens the moment to meet the implicit creative demand of its and our raw potency.

A Sexual Universe

We live in a sexual universe. From subatomic particles to the plant world, where the birds and bees are symbolic of the great pollination dance, to animals, plants, and humans, to the celestial attraction between planets, the fundamental structure of reality is allurements and attractions that create profound contact at every level of the evolutionary chain. This is what we mean by Eros. We live in a universe driven by allurements. In that sense, we could say that reality is Eros all the way up to the highest spirit forms and all the way down to the smallest subatomic particles and the most essential forces of the universe.

A Cosmos Driven By Eros

We live in a cosmos driven by Eros. The universe is a perfect, interconnected whole that at the same time seeks greater wholeness. The universe is radically alive, infused with presence and infinite vitality, even as it is infinitely intimate and whole. Everything rests in the beingness of spacious perfection.

And yet the universe is driven by evolutionary Eros. The cosmos is not only being but also becoming. Whereas being is characterized by harmony and equilibrium, becoming is characterized by a kind of

ecstatic urgency and disequilibrium. Evolutionary Eros is constant becoming. It is the inherent, ceaseless desire for more and more contact and creativity. Consciousness yearns for contact. More contact always births new creativity. New creativity creates new babies of all kinds, or what science calls new evolutionary emergents. This is not an accident but the essential, sacred nature of an erotic universe. This is the lure of becoming that animates and drives all existence.

Walt Whitman caught a glimpse of this reality in his poem “Song of Myself”:

Urge and urge and urge,

Always the procreant urge of the world.

Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always substance and increase, always sex,

Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of life.

Why Sex Is the Ultimate Model

The sexual models the erotic for two simple reasons. First, because reality is Eros. Second, because sex or allurements is the structural nature of reality, Eros all the way up and all the way down, it is utterly natural that the sexual models the erotic. It is almost self-evident that Eros should be the seat of all wisdom about reality. How could it be otherwise? Sex models the Eros of all reality, which inherently seeks more and more contact, mutuality, recognition, union, and embrace.

To paraphrase the evolutionary mystic Teilhard de Chardin, the fragments of the world, driven by the forces of Eros, seek each other so that the world may come into being. Desire is, at its most fundamental level, the desire for contact. Contact always births newness. The new thing might be a baby. Or it might mean a new level of intimacy. New might mean new creativity or possibility. In what evolutionary theorist Matt Ridley calls Idea Sex, “new” means new insight and new discovery that comes from intimate contact between ideas and people who are attracted to each other. Sex is an expression of the evolutionary Eros. The desire for contact is an expression of the core nature of the evolutionary Eros that drives all reality. This Eros animates every dimension of life. Sex models Eros means that sex is the arena where the ecstatic urgency of our drive to make contact is most apparent, most obviously pleasurable, and most self-evidently creative.

Eros

From Fear to Liberation

Eros—as we will see more clearly in the unfolding of the Secret of the Cherubs—is the core nature of reality, all the way up and all the way down the evolutionary ladder. When Eros awakens in us, it expresses itself as the radical drive for contact and connection. It is not a uniquely human impulse but rather the impulse of all of reality becoming conscious of itself in us. When we feel our Eros we feel radically alive and at home in the cosmos. We are filled with an unmistakable telos. We begin to live purpose-driven lives, which drip with the nectar of Eros itself. Our lives become teleroptic.

Eros Is Our Birthright

Our bodies and hearts know that Eros is our birthright. It is not merely an intensifier of the ordinary. Rather, it points to the extraordinary energy

at our core, which is the true marker of our deepest desire. The failure of Eros is the loss of aliveness that psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich correctly diagnosed as the “emotional plague of man.” It is not the loss of a particular privilege or experience. It is a deadening of all experience. The disconnection from Eros is cause for the loss of our unmediated knowing that life is good. When we become alienated from Eros, we forget our true identity and lose our dignity. We forget that we are good children of the universe that seeks our transformation. It is in the dignity of Eros that we recognize the glory of our true situation. It is in the dignity of Eros that we are personally addressed by reality. It is in the dignity of Eros that we know that we are needed, desired, and chosen by all that is.

Bypassing Eros Creates Abuse

The loss of the larger sense of Eros reduces Eros to mere sex. This, by its very nature, creates the rupture of contact and severing of connection that fosters the abuse of sex in all of its forms. Sex is abused when it is cut off from the larger context of Eros in which it lives. When sex is disconnected from the larger Eros, it cannot help but collapse on itself because we are asking far too much from it. Sex then implodes in every form of addiction and abuse. It is only when sex becomes a portal to the unique potency that flows through us from source—what we have called sex erotic—that the dignity and delight of Eros are restored.

When sex is cut off from our total being, from our deeper wholeness, and we ask it for favors it cannot grant, then Eros is degraded. It devolves from a blessing that bestows joy to an abusive curse that inflicts suffering. Abuse may appear as sexual harassment, rape, name rape, or false sexual complaints. Abuse results from the denial of our core equation, Reality = Eros. To deny Eros is to deny reality. Eros then reappears in degraded forms of sexual acting out or in the weaponizing of sex through false sexual stories. We must always remember that arousal is not consent and regret is not rape.

We must always stay connected to the goodness of Eros. Our disconnection from the aliveness of reality’s inherent Eros results from our exiling of the larger Eros that animates all of reality into the constraints of merely sexual Eros. Sexual Eros comes alive when it begins to enact cosmic Eros. This is the narrative of sex erotic.

Shame and Guilt

Let’s now revisit the principle that we introduced above. Shame is the root of all evil. Shame is different from guilt. Guilt is a healthy human emotion that arises when we have done something bad. Shame, by contrast, is the experience not that we have done something bad but that we are bad. Shame is the feeling that we are somehow broken and cannot be fixed. More often than not, shame is rooted in something sexual. Self-images of control, artificial dignity, status, appropriateness, and more all need to be surrendered at the altar of the sexual.

Because the sexual challenges our conventional sense of identity, to heal shame we must articulate the new sexual narrative of sex erotic. In sex erotic, the sexual models the erotic. It is paradoxically the greater Eros that illuminates and eroticizes the small eros. Shame is when sex stops short of infinity. We heal shame when we realize that the sexual does not regress our identity but rather it expands and evolves our identity. The sexual, as we will show when we discuss the twelve faces of Eros, offers us a glimpse into who we might be if we realized who we already are.

The Universe Feels

The universe feels, and the universe feels the pulse and throb of Eros. It feels the intensity of desire and passion that is expressed in the word erotic. The greatest human desire is to participate in the Eros of

reality. But we are afraid of the feeling of the erotic. It makes us feel out of control or vulnerable in a way we would rather deny or repress. It is only by entering the pounding surge of Eros and tracing it back to its original divine source that we begin to live the erotic life. But if we bypass the pounding surge it will demand its pound of flesh. The feeling of erotic desire is the incessant longing of the universe to meet other forms of itself in order to birth new creations from the joy of that contact.

Recovering Our Memory of Zivug

The great zivug of the cosmos has been forgotten. We forget that we live in a reality whose core principle is allurements. For the Greeks, the loss of knowledge is the source of all evil. For the erotic mystic, the loss of memory is the source of all evil. Our failed memory of zivug is the source of great pain and confusion. On the one hand we forget that, according to the leading edge of quantum theory, reality is coming in and out of existence in every second. Mystics call the interior of this same phenomenon “constant creation.” Constant creation is the outrageous love, what the mystics call zivug matmedet — perpetual Eros—which fiercely and tenderly loves reality into being in every second.

However, it is not only that we have forgotten. In addition, our denial of the erotic is so desperate and intense that we have forgotten that we have forgotten. And yet, in the midst of our amnesia, we yearn to participate in the Eros of the cosmos. Anything less will not satisfy us. We yearn for what we have forgotten, and so we cannot explain our yearning to ourselves. We no longer understand our innermost drives. We have lost touch with the radical yearning for intense contact that is the axiomatic desire of reality alive in us.

Fear of Eros

Why are we so afraid of Eros? The erotic, at its core, is the primal drive to make contact. It is the urge to merge—at least temporarily—with another being. It is an urge that is so intense that we are willing to give up much of our vaunted sense of dignity and self to accomplish it. But we are afraid of this urge because it undermines our sense of identity. The illusion of being a self-sufficient, separate being, independent and autonomous, is significantly challenged or shattered by Eros. We assume that this undermining of identity is regressive. Therefore, we fight it—personally, religiously, and culturally—with everything we have, because identity is the lifeboat we desperately need to feel safe in the world.

But what if the undermining of identity catalyzed by the erotic was not regressive but expansive and evolutionary? What if we really understood that Eros is the stirring within the infinite awakening as our arousal? What if erotic desire in all of its expressions simply reminded us that we are interconnected—that we need each other? What if the beds of our delight invited us to the practice of our devotions?

That is what we mean when we say that sex models Eros. This is the hidden Tantric teaching of non-rejection that appears in every great tradition. In Hebrew Tantra—the Secret of the Cherubs—we enter desire and trace it to its root, the ceaseless creativity of the cosmos that is perpetually birthed through ever more intimate contact. Desire is the doorway into the elemental Eros and allurements that drives all of reality. Desire models the great yearning for connection and contact.

Because we can't see that Eros is a doorway, we make it into a closed room with no way in or out. We then proceed to identify the erotic with its most degraded forms, hence our intense and even desperate fear of the erotic.

The Secret of the Cherubs is simple: we degrade Eros because it makes us feel out of control, but hidden in the erotic is the very source code of the cosmos itself. Reality itself is Eros. Awakening to our sexual

longing models our desire to live a fully erotic life in every dimension of existence. The Secret of the Cherubs is that the great Eros of the cosmos is hidden in the small eros of sex.

Shrinking From Aliveness: The Fear of Pleasure

The Carousel Nightmare

Our close associate, Holly, whom we have worked with for many years, brought a recurrent childhood dream into our Holy of Holies space.

(The Holy of Holies, you may remember, is the term for the inner sanctum of the Jerusalem Temple. In working with students at our Tantric institute, we refer to our study space, also, as “the Holy of Holies.” It is a recreation of the “space between the cherubs.” It is neither a therapeutic nor a coaching space, and certainly not any form of guru relationship. It is an ecstatic yet rigorous context where we meet, as fully autonomous spiritual friends. Our intent is always to support the full emergence of the Unique Self of the person doing the work.) Here is Holly’s dream:

As a child, I had a recurring nightmare of a carousel spinning very near me, with its lights, colors, bells, and shouts of adults on painted horses reaching for the brass ring. Sometimes the riders succeeded and sometimes they reached for the ring in vain, carried around the circle until another turn for glory or another shot at victory was lost.

I didn’t know much about carnival rides yet—I was three and had only ridden a couple of times on an actual carousel, with the brass ring mechanism offering its prizes high above my reach. I loved riding painted horses, but I had that dream countless times, waking up screaming and drawing someone, parent or babysitter, to my room. I had no words to explain, just fear enveloping me as I saw myself swept under the wheel of the carousel or dragged aboard it, circling endlessly with no control over its direction or my own.

In my earliest memories, this dream was somehow familiar to me—I knew I had had it before—but what I remember on one particular occasion is my father coming to my rescue, standing beside me near the window, holding a stuffed toy bunny that was my frequent companion in waking life.

I imagine the words my dad must have used, “Wake up, Holly, it’s just a dream. I’m here. Mom’s downstairs. You’re safe.” I remember him asking with a gentle and quizzical smile, “What is this dream that scares you about?”

I remember feeling it was impossible and maybe useless to explain. I had probably tried to describe it before, and I could see that it was upsetting to him to see me so distraught. So instead, I invented a more solvable problem. “I dreamed that I lost my bunny,” I said tearfully. “I couldn’t find him anywhere. He was gone.” My father held the missing bunny out to me. “But look, he’s right here!” he reassured me. I took the bunny under my arm, thanking Dad for returning him to me. He had solved the problem, and I went back to sleep. But of course, it was a false problem—and the carousel spun on in my dreams.

I don’t entirely know what the carousel dream was about, but I had it frequently. And I seemed already to know there were some things it was better not to talk about.

In our conversations, Holly added the following reflections about her dream:

I was learning not to feel, or more accurately, not to know or to admit to what I felt. I still did feel it, of course, or I wouldn't have had a recurring nightmare about it, but I hid it even from myself—a terror and attraction that I could not explain.

As our conversation deepened, Holly began to grasp the dream's meaning:

As I look back on my carousel dream, I think what frightened me was what frightens us all at times: the threat of being crushed by the enormous and potent energy of the world. Of course, I had no words for this. Just to feel it takes courage. We are all ambivalent about it—something attractive and alluring, something scary and dangerous.

As we worked with the dream together over the years, its meaning came into clearer focus. The carousel represents Eros. The carousel moves in a circle. The circle is a classic expression of the primal Eros of nature in its cycles. It is potent, enlivening, and sometimes deadly. The brass ring—another circle symbol—is the prize of erotic fulfillment. It always seems just beyond our grasp. The horse—a potent symbol in classical myth—represents the raw experience of radical aliveness. The dream is about the fear of Eros. The carousel, with its colors, lights, and sounds, is deeply alluring, but it is also seriously frightening.

Holly's fear that "envelops" her is that she will be "swept under the wheel of the carousel or dragged aboard it." That is the fear of being overwhelmed and destroyed by Eros. This is the primary fear of Eros. Then there is a secondary fear of Eros, that of "circling endlessly with no control over its direction or my own." Holly understands that Eros is both "attractive and alluring" even as it occurs to her as "scary and dangerous."

Naturally, Holly could not share the dream with her father. The father principle is order and safety. Holly intuitively knew, even though she could not express it in words, that she could not share either her attraction or her fear of Eros with the person who represented safety and order in her life. So she lied. She told her dad she lost her bunny. This was a problem he could solve. He retained the illusion that he was in control and could make his daughter happy. Holly, however, in hiding the dream, split herself off from Eros—both her own and that of the world, for the two are indivisible.

Holly's father represents the values of conventional culture, which seek to protect the child against Eros. The fear of Eros held by the father is transmitted to the child. Because all children seek the blessings of the father, the child naturally adopts into her psyche the father's fear of Eros.

In the earlier stages of life, Eros is very bound up with pleasure, and specifically with the most basic pleasures of food and sexuality. A key subset of the fear of Eros is naturally the fear of pleasure. Wilhelm Reich was not wrong when he wrote that "the pleasure of orgasm and the pleasure of living are identical" and that "extreme anxiety" about sexual pleasure "forms the basis of a general fear of life."⁸ Fundamental pleasure is a core quality of Eros.

Pleasure is one of the twelve faces of Eros that we will explore later in this book. At this point, let us simply consider pleasure from the perspective of our fear of it. A very young child intuitively knows that cosmic Eros is expressed in pleasure. Pleasure is the child's natural early connection to the larger field of Eros and existence. But, as we saw with Holly, our parents often rupture that intuitive currency of connection.

Parents and the Separate Self

Our parents call our separate self into existence. The default identity of most people, the separate self is our sense of being a skin-encapsulated ego. We experience ourselves as ultimately separate from each other, from nature, and from spirit. Our identity as a separate self is not actually a true identity. As we will see in later chapters, it is not our ultimate identity. It has been called by some of the wisest among us “an optical delusion of consciousness,”⁹ but it remains the persona of most people most of the time. This identity is only transcended if a person evolves her consciousness and undergoes a genuine developmental identity transformation.

We will talk about this in depth in our chapter on uniqueness (the fifth face of Eros) and in our final chapter on union. But for now it is important to note that both our fear of Eros and our first experience of separate self are inextricably linked and virtually always come from our parents.

Our parents, hopefully, love us. But they also see us as fragile separate selves in need of protection. On the one hand, this is good, for they are inspired to protect us and to teach us how to protect ourselves. This is one basic aim of education. We learn how to navigate society so we will be able to “take care of ourselves.” Because our parents experience us as vulnerable separate selves, they move to limit our unmediated contact with the forces of nature, both human and elemental. We are taught from birth the rules of navigation that will buy us safe passage through the turbulent and dangerous Eros of existence.

Part of the protection they afford us, against our will, is the protection from pleasure. Pleasure is seen by society (and by our parents as representatives of society) to be part of the inexorable force of reality that might seduce us away from our responsibilities or otherwise sweep us away. So when Holly is allured to the carousel, she knows—even though she has no words for her knowing—that she cannot share that truth with her father. Her fear of pleasure gets tangled with her desire to receive her father’s blessing. The result is that the fear of pleasure—a corollary to the fear of Eros—goes underground. She cannot express it, even to herself. But it remains an omnipresent if unconscious force in her life that appears recurrently as the carousel dream.

Pleasure represents—not just symbolically but also experientially—the world beyond the separate self. We see that in our own daily experience. Pleasure attenuates the experience of separate self. When we feel pleasure, the boundaries of separation soften. The simple experience of eating relaxes the anxiety of separation. That’s why our love of food goes far beyond the need to sate our actual hunger. Like food, sex also eases the pain caused by the sharp boundaries of alienation and loneliness.

Addiction and “Negative Pleasures”

In its unhealthy expression, this quality of pleasure, which relaxes separation anxiety, is the source of addiction. For example, when we are feeling depressed or lonely, we may feel drawn to eat or to masturbate. In the pleasure that is aroused, we are able—even if only for the duration of the physical sensations—to feel less scared and alienated.

When physical pleasure is misappropriated as our sole source of Eros, it becomes addictive and therefore ultimately destructive. Because our original relationship to pleasure is distorted so early in our lives, it loses its ability to hold us in its lap. The primal pleasures of eating and sex are sharply regimented by our parents, who impose myriad cultural rules and restrictions. As a result, we do not feel the spacious holding and radical affirmation of our belonging that reality intended to communicate through pleasure. We do not feel pleasure caressing our hearts and whispering in our ear, “You are honored and

desired by all that is. You are a good child of the universe. You deserve to live an erotic life filled with every sacred pleasure.”

Too many of our parents communicate in countless ways that pleasure by itself is not good. One of their most subtle messages is that pleasure is not a good in itself but is rather a reward for doing something good. Cleaning up your room is the good act; your reward is ice cream. Parents writ large as culture have long ago lost touch with the elemental insight on Eros and pleasure that lies at the heart of the cherub tradition: “God saw that it was good.”

When the parent moves to control the child’s life impulses, then the child starts to turn away from life. This is the beginning of the exile of Eros. The child begins with open hands, shouting a resounding “yes!” to life. But when that “yes” is sharply rebuked, then the child closes not only his hands, but also himself. The natural energy of Eros distorts, and life turns in on itself.

Since reality is Eros—one core expression of which is pleasure—a vacuum of Eros or pleasure is intolerable. So the child begins to fill himself with what might be called “negative pleasures.” Both the term and the idea are rooted in key passages in Freud’s writing. When you lose contact with the larger erotic life force, you turn away from life. You take the energy of pleasure back into yourself, where it twists and distorts. It appears as withholding, anger, resentment, and inappropriate aggression. The natural erotic current of “yes” energy is turned into “no.” The child defines herself by protecting her separate self from all that is outside of her boundary. At the same time, her natural allurements to Eros and pleasure is disowned and goes underground.

Materialist psychology tries to subdue Eros and pleasure by identifying it with personality dysfunction or neurosis. But pleasure is not an aberration from reality. At its core, the pleasure principle is the reality principle. The rupture of our experience from Eros and pleasure is therefore a primal alienation from reality itself.

Denial, as psychology has well documented, always demands its proverbial pound of flesh. Denial of our essential erotic nature will always create distortion of the most tragic kind. As social philosopher Norman O. Brown writes in explanation of Freud, when taken too far, the alienation from Eros is the path of sickness and self-destruction. The repression of libido turns the lack of Eros into pain.

Wilhelm Reich calls this alienation from Eros the emotional plague of man. When man’s erotic force is blocked, it turns in on itself, seeking expression. The result, he says, is that “man can murder, rape, and pillage.”¹⁰ Reich was perhaps Freud’s most brilliant student. Reich broke with Freud over the latter’s inability to understand the cosmic nature of Eros.

The hidden fear of the full power of Eros remains with us throughout our lives, expressing itself in many ways. One way the fear manifests is in our relationship with pleasure. Whenever we go to engage pleasure, the original “no” of culture or parents shows up. That first “no” was sharp and painful. We experienced it not as a “no” to something external to us but as a “no” to our essential selves. Our core desire, our most primal “yes,” was rejected. The pain of that originally rejected Eros is reawakened every time we move toward Eros or pleasure. The original fear of Eros, learned in our earliest years, is layered with the pain of rejection that our original erotic “yes” occasioned. The fear of Eros is thus a kind of double loop that shapes our entire lives.

Fear of Eros fosters the alienation that lies at the heart of our culture. Freud is a primary example of this disconnection from Eros that has contributed so much to our modern disease. Freud identified the

pleasure principle as being characteristic of the earliest stages of life before a child matures. At maturity, he argued, the reality principle supplants the pleasure principle: the ego then guides the id as the child's new North Star. Should the pleasure principle reappear inappropriately in the child's life, that is considered "regressive." But this Freudian philosophy sets up pleasure and Eros in opposition to reality. In fact the opposite is true: Eros is the very nature of reality all the way up and all the way down the chain of being. To set up a semantic field in which pleasure and reality are antonyms is a potent expression of our fear of Eros. To return to Eros, we must therefore establish the core principle of reality as Eros. That is the intent of these chapters.

The Hidden Light

There is a beautiful teaching in the cherub tradition about the hidden light. It is written that when God created the world, he hid the most intense light until the time of the world to come, when it would be available for the righteous. Simply read, this is a mythic story about the anthropomorphic God saving the really good stuff for the really good people at the end of time. The cherub mystics, however, read it differently. The world to come is the space of liberated consciousness that is already present right now. The righteous are those who are able to access that liberated consciousness, the full intensity and beauty of the hidden light.

"But where," ask the cherub mystics, "is the light hidden?" They answer elliptically, "The light is hidden in the darkness." By "darkness" the mystics mean the same thing that Eastern sages refer to as ignorance—the blindness of unconscious drives. Blind need or desire is the nature of the sexual in the experience of the vast majority of people. It is when the sexual wakes up to its true erotic nature that the hidden light is revealed. Said directly: For most of us, the great realization of Eros is hidden in the small eros of the sexual. Eros is the ultimate nature of reality. Reality desires ever greater contact and ever greater intimacy. This is true on every level of reality, from the subatomic all the way through the human. This is the "hidden light" secreted in the darkness for the "righteous ones" in the "world to come."

The great gnosis of reality as allurements—reality as Eros—is hidden in the sexual. The hidden light is too intense for ordinary reality. Ordinary reality is—as it should be—based on boundaries and separation. But on a deeper level, we are all so profoundly interconnected and interdependent that the notion of separation becomes ludicrous. Imagine if you met a person and you could clearly see all the myriad lines of connection between you. Imagine if you could see through the veil of separation and witness the thousands of seemingly random events in previous generations that were intended by the self-organizing universe to bring you together with this person, in this precise moment, for this precise meeting. Imagine that you also were able to hold in your mind's eye the dazzling meshwork of allurements holding your world together. You would see level upon level of stunning beauty and symmetry, beginning with the atomic level and then moving to the chemical, cellular, biological, and cultural structures of allurements at each level of reality.

Holding this paradox between our radical uniqueness as distinct beings and the realization that we are not in any way separate from the seamless coat of the universe is what it means to be awake. This is the hidden gnosis that animates the erotic life.

This knowing is hidden in the erotic. The erotic in its degraded forms is precisely the darkness that the mystics referred to. When Eros is in its degraded form, we are repulsed and filled with shame. The edifice of our nobility and goodness seems shattered by the irrational urges that threaten to overwhelm

many of the values and principles that we hold so dear. As cultural critic and sexual therapist Esther Perel once remarked, “We long to do at night what we protest against during the day.”

Desire is politically and socially incorrect. The solution, however, is not to act on every desire. Sex requires a radically awake sexual ethics that protects every man and woman from every form of unwelcome sexual advance. Rather, what we need to do is to trace Eros back to its source. Degraded Eros must not be bypassed but excavated. We need to find the root of our desire, which is desire itself. When we trace our desire back to its source we realize that it is not personal to us. Rather, allurements are the nature of reality itself. Reality then awakens in us personally.

But allurements are not only the nature of reality—it is also the glory of reality. All parts seek to make contact. All parts yearn for ever greater mutuality, recognition, union, and embrace. It is only in the evolved human being, however—the superior man and woman—that desire awakens to its true nature. In humans, Eros awakens to itself. We move from unconscious desire to conscious desire. We move from chance to choice. More than that, we realize that sexual desire models all desire. Our deepest desire is for radical aliveness, contact, and creativity. We yearn to awaken as outrageous lovers. Said simply, we long for Eden. We long for the return to Eros. This is the hidden light to which the cherub mystics refer, the light hidden in the darkness of Eros in its most limited and even degraded of forms.

Orgasm: The Extreme Light

One of the core expressions of the erotic is orgasm. It has been playfully suggested that orgasm derives from the Hebrew word *mugzam*, “extreme light.” This is the hidden light to which the Zohar refers. Orgasm triggers an intensity in consciousness that is not sustainable within what we normally experience as ordinary life. Orgasm is marked by a sense of radical vulnerability and openness, an extreme sense of connection, the obliteration of ego, and the radical intensification of pleasure. All of these are at odds with our story of how ordinary reality should feel.

The word orgasm itself has been exiled to the sexual. Orgasm, however, refers to a moment of radical clarity and aliveness in which all the masks drop. In these moments the natural devotion and delight that exist between us all is nakedly revealed.

The great philosopher of dialogue Martin Buber wrote a book of Hasidic stories that he titled *The Hidden Light*. They are stories of rare and intense contact—of outrageous love—between human beings, and between humans and God. They are “orgasm stories,” tales of extreme light that attracts and allures us beyond ordinary consciousness. These are stories of Eros even though there is no sex in them. They are stories of Eros because they describe moments when all walls fall down, allowing for radical contact while at the same time retaining the irreducible dignity and uniqueness of every individual in the tale. In these holy stories—stories of holy Eros—the invisible lines of allurements that animate all of reality in every second become visible to the naked eye. The curtains of the Holy of Holies are drawn back, the intertwined cherubs are revealed for all the pilgrims to see. Whereas Buddhist meditation might be said to focus on awareness, many of the meditative practices of the cherub mystics might be said to focus on allurements.

To wake up is to begin to integrate the extraordinary truth of orgasm consciousness into our seemingly ordinary lives. This is the hidden light secreted in the hidden teaching of the Secret of the Cherubs.

The teaching is secret because it threatens the fabric of ordinary existence. It challenges the very core of our limited experience, with its contraction and separation. The Secret of the Cherubs locates the

gravitas of our human experience in the dignity of Eros. This is the erotic realization of awakening: that we are all interconnected, that we all yearn for contact, and that we all need each other.

When we cannot access the dignity of Eros, then we experience the erotic as undermining our dignity. That is the source of our radical fear of Eros. We reject the Secret of the Cherubs because, like the intensity of orgasm, the erotic intensity of our true interconnectivity simply overwhelms us. Our dignity lies not in the posturing of a separate self but in knowing that we are an inextricable part of all that is—and all that is desperately needs our service. All that is needs our outrageous love, our erotic potency.