

Foreword to *Transcendent Sex* by Jenny Wade

Why do people joke about sex? Is it because sex is... what? Too embarrassing? Too “dirty,” vulgar, raw? Anything that rabbits and weasels can do simply can’t be that great, and hence is worth at most a snicker or two? Is sex too intimate?—such that public discussion is met with giggles? Or is sex too real, too close to the truth, the hidden truth, of what we are?

When Jenny Wade first began her research on sexual experiences, we happened to be having the first meetings of Integral Institute (which is devoted to an “integral” or comprehensive approach to reality), which Jenny and I attended. One of the best things about all those meetings was that, at the end of each, Jenny would make an announcement about her research, something like, “I am doing a phenomenological study of mystical, spiritual, or transcendent experiences during sex. Anybody interested in being a part of this study, please contact me.”

Yes, the best thing about those meetings was listening to what everybody said after that announcement. On bathroom walls across the country, we could imagine what was being written: “For a good time, call Heidi. For a *really* good time, call Jenny.”

Still, why do we laugh at that? Surely the correct answer is that it is really funny. But philosophers, of which I am one, make a nonliving out of asking incredibly stupid questions, over and over and over again, until we get an answer so obscure and inherently ridiculous that the average person is forced to assume that it is really profound and... well, philosophical. So here goes.

I think we laugh at sex because it can kill us.

Okay, that is not as completely ridiculous as, say, deconstruction, but bear with me. Almost all major psychologists (who are people involved in a marginally less silly profession than philosophy) have at some point examined the meaning and function of laughter (perhaps most famously, Freud in “Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious”). They all

reached somewhat different conclusions, except that all of them agreed that we only laugh at something that is unnervingly significant. Even something as silly as, say, somebody slipping on a banana peel, is funny because it touches on the fact that anybody can, without warning and at any time, fall from the dignity of being an upstanding human to being a pathetic and total klutz.

Which is funny if it happens to that guy, not me. Aristotle (not known for his wit) once nevertheless managed to comment, “Luck is what happens when the arrow hits the guy next to you.” It’s often the same with humor: a horrible experience is really funny when it happens to the guy next to you. Somehow we have to be removed from the incident in order for it to be funny, which is why it is often said that “tragedy plus time is humor.” Well, Woody Allen said that in *Crime and Misdemeanors*, but I think he knows more about the subject than, say, Freud or Aristotle (ever seen a picture of either of them smiling?).

Sex is unnervingly significant, so we laugh. What is so important about Jenny’s research, however, is that it shows that whatever danger we thought sex held for us, it is even worse. Sex really can kill you, if by “you” is meant the ordinary you, the everyday you, the skin-encapsulated ego of your everyday persona. It’s not just that sex can be “mind-blowing”; it’s that sex can show you the face of God, the smile of the Goddess, the radiance of Spirit—and more unnerving still, not as a force or presence out there, but as your own deepest self and nature.

Welcome to the world of transcendent sex. As you will see in the following pages, spiritual experiences during sex are not confined to tantric yogis or mystical Taoists, but happen with astonishing regularity to all varieties of people—true believers and atheists alike, males and females, hetero and homo and bi—and with such general similarities that one can’t help but draw several far-reaching conclusions.

The first is that, despite what some religious authorities maintain, sex and spirit are not opposites but more like two dimensions of a single reality. Or perhaps different colors in the same rainbow of the miracle of existence. Sex might not be conducive to certain religious

beliefs, but it is definitely conducive to religious *experience*, spiritual experience, direct apprehensions of a living, luminous, radiant, unqualifiable reality that is what there is and all there is, a reality that can be—and is—often elicited in sexual activity.

The second is that, no matter how frequent or earth-shaking a transcendent sexual experience might be, it is seldom talked about. An astonishing 80% of the respondents in Jenny's study reported that they never told a single person—not even their partner—about the experience.

I'm sure they thought that if they did, their partner would laugh, yes?

To me, the enormous service that Jenny's work offers is that it can help the untold number of individuals who have had these types of experiences begin to come to terms with them; to understand that they are not abnormal or pathological; that they contain in many cases what even Aristotle would call the *sumun bonum*, the supreme good of life—namely, contemplation of (or even identification with) the Divine; but, nonetheless, these experiences are not to be sought casually or recklessly—they are dynamite, in every sense of the word.

As Jenny's research shows, these sexual/mystical experiences come in almost all varieties, and parallel in many cases the types of spiritual experiences available through other means—including experiences of God or Goddess, oneness with an all-embracing Reality or Light, identification with plants or animals, past-life visions, a sense of the sacredness of all Life, and so on. Like any altered state or peak experience, even a brief glimmer can be earth-shattering, life-changing, reality-altering experiences. The altered state itself might pass, but the meaning it brought lingers, a fine perfume in the air, reminding the person that Spirit is all and one, here and everywhere, even now, even here, in this body, on this earth, everlastingly. “And all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well,” as Julian of Norwich would say.

Jenny Wade is herself a developmental psychologist (see, e.g., her superb *Changes of Mind*), which means she specializes in the study of various stages of consciousness that

people demonstrate as they grow and evolve. The question naturally arises, what is the relation of those *stages* of consciousness to the *states* of consciousness such as the peak experiences in transcendent sex? It's an important question in that Jenny's research touches on a central issue in spiritual studies, namely, whether "genuine spirituality" involves brief and intense experiences, or whether it involves arduous and prolonged practice. The answer is almost certainly that it can involve both, and perhaps ideally ought to involve both. Experiences such as transcendent sex are authentic and genuine spiritual experiences, but in order to convert those *temporary states* into *permanent traits*, extended spiritual practice is usually required (such as that offered by meditation, contemplation, yoga, genuine tantric practice, integral transformative practice, and so on).

In short, a more integral spirituality would involve both states and stages. We have a fair amount of research on exactly that topic, research that suggests that the net effect of altered states or peak experiences is that they accelerate development through various stages of growth. There is no evidence that altered states will allow one to skip stages of growth, but they do accelerate their unfolding. The upshot of all that research is simply that the more often one is dunked into the Divine via altered states (such as transcendent sex), the more likely one will grow and evolve to a point where one can maintain that awareness of the Divine in a more permanent and enduring fashion. Combine states with stages and you are on the fast path to Spirit.

That is why sex can kill you. As the simplest, most accessible, most here-and-now transcendent experience that anybody can have, it is the most common doorway to the Divine, the most ordinary (in the best sense of the word) altered state that accelerates the stages of spiritual realization. The more one is plunged into the ocean of Spirit, into the ocean of infinite ease, the more one dies to one's smaller self, dies to one's ego, that finite and contracted and mortal coil, and finds instead one's own Original Face, one's own Godhead, one's own True Nature, prior to but not other to the entire manifest world.

And discovering *That*, we laugh—and laugh and laugh and laugh. It is truly the ultimate inside joke: You are That. In the deepest, highest, wildest part of yourself, you intersect Infinity, you are one with the radiant Divine, you are the luminescent Essence of everything that exists, the blazing realization of which brings such a shattering relief that henceforth you might never stop laughing. Or crying—at that point, they mean pretty much the same thing. But the ultimate cosmic joke is simply that *You're It*.

So I think we laugh for all those reasons.

And therefore, if you want a *really* good time, call Jenny. Or simply read the following pages, where your guide will take you through this extraordinary thing called sex, this extraordinarily ordinary thing called sex, and you might, rather literally, never be the same again. And you might never, *never*, stop laughing.