



When
Lovemaking
Opens the Veil

Transcend

AN INTERVIEW WITH AUTHOR DR. JENNY WADE



BY ROB SIDON AND CARRIE GROSSMAN

➔ No self-respecting editors of *Common Ground* endeavoring to produce a sex issue are going to pass up the opportunity to interview San Rafael-based psychologist Dr. Jenny Wade, author of the book with a title that says it all: *Transcendent Sex: When Lovemaking Opens the Veil*. An articulate and confident researcher pioneering an esoteric topic, she has coined a phrase that has helped define a profound experience that can be equated with *unio mystica* — and this between the sheets.

A professor of doctoral studies and a management development consultant by day who works with clients representing household brand names, she is not the ethereal Marin author I secretly suspected. Her own personal experience in the hands of her lover some years ago led her to generate a research project, gathering 91 subjects who had experienced similar altered states during sex without the use of drugs or tantric practices. Needless to say, learning about a medley of altered-state experiences made for a lively interview.

Common Ground: What inspired you to write a book about transcendent sex?

Dr. Jenny Wade: Following a lifetime of ordinary yet rather great sex, I started having unusual experiences in my 40s. These surprised me. For example, I saw myself transported into another place and another time ... in history. It was alarming, actually. Once while making love, I had an experience of dropping

vana” experience, which seemed exquisitely funny, absurd, and perfectly natural all at the same time.

When I could finally speak, I told my lover about it. He acknowledged having transcendent experiences with me. Frankly, we were in fear of our sanity, but it was also the most glorious experience in the world. We opened to ecstatic and spiritual realms we had never even fathomed.

CG: The “nothingness of nirvana” is a powerful way to describe your experience. Were you a contemplative practitioner at the time? Had you ever had an experience like that before?

JW: I knew what nirvana was only from my academic research into spiritual practices. During the sex, one of the reasons I was laughing was because I was having a clearly Buddhist kind of experience when most of my spiritual practices were from a Christian contemplative tradition. I’m not a spiritual adept, nor a love goddess; I was brought up in a conservative Methodist and Southern Baptist home. I certainly don’t consider myself a particularly gifted or sophisticated lover. Since I’d had more than one experience, and my lover’s experiences were nothing like mine, I was surprised that there seemed to be no overlap between our experiences.

CG: Is that what compelled you to conduct a research project?

JW: That got me curious and determined to start studying this in a serious way. I wanted to find out what kinds of altered-state experiences people have during sex when they haven’t had specific training in Taoist or tantric esoteric practices. I was equally interested in how they understood what was transpiring.

CG: Did your findings reveal any explanation as to why only certain people have these experiences?

JW: I wanted to conduct my research in a way that would be fairly free from bias, so I deliberately chose people who had had non-ordinary experiences triggered by sex but who did not have a ready-made spiritual framework of explanation for what had happened to them. I had assumptions. For instance, that perhaps women would have more or different

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into the void — of pure white light, of nothingness. The world gradually reconstituted itself but in a different way than before. I was so amused that I had missed this all my life that I burst out laughing and couldn’t stop. I had gone into a “nothingness of nir-

transcendent experiences than men because their arousal curve is different, or that the states might be related to orgasm. The research findings confounded my assumptions — all of them.

In that sense it's exactly like direct spiritual experiences that happen to people outside of established religious traditions and practices. I found research subjects from everyday life, ranging in ages from 26 to 70, of all sexual orientations, mostly heterosexual from the U.S. — from about 24 states, about six percent outside the U.S. [They were] teachers, consultants, lawyers, writers, health care practitioners, salespeople, shop owners, hairdressers, media professionals, finance professionals — mostly ordinary folks who had grown up in average American homes, most of them with some kind of fairly traditional Judeo-Christian beliefs. Some were very conflicted about sex, and many of them no longer even believed in God. And then boom! One day they got ambushed in the bedroom by something unexpected. You never know what's going to happen, but it can permanently change your life and attitude about sex and spirituality.

CG: How would you define transcendent sex? What distinguishes it from normal, everyday lovemaking?

JW: Those who have had a transcendent sex experience just *know* it. It is unequivocally removed from ordinary sex; there's simply no mistaking it. There's a radical change in the people's lives. When you think about it, many of the things people do naturally during sex are similar to activities that create altered states. For instance, sex for most people involves some form of repetitive movement and repetitive sound, much like chanting or trance dancing. Have you ever been to the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem?

CG: Yes, actually.

JW: Well, then you've seen how during prayer, there is a repetitive bobbing movement that is associated with chant. Sometimes these practices can lead to states considered "a mark of attainment" in different traditions, such as an "experience of the Holy Ghost" in Christianity, or *satori* or *kensho* in other traditions. Various spiritual traditions have descriptions, such as seeing visions, the emanation of a halo. The Tibetans speak of extreme belly heat.

CG: A mega-orgasm?

JW: Ha! Not necessarily. One woman in my research described orgasm as a nuisance. She said, "I don't want to have that stupid little spasm because it distracts and brings me out of the state."

CG: These states seem to offer a direct experience of Spirit, however one conceives it.

JW: Most large studies of sex turn up spiritual experiences, and most large studies of spirituality turn up sex [*laughs*]. But this linkage has been hidden from the public eye, just as near-death experiences happened but were not talked about until they were recently "discovered," so to speak. Now ... investigative pieces [are done] on respected news channels.

Most of the people I interviewed said they had never told anyone else about what happened to them in the bedroom — not even their lovers — because they were afraid of being called crazy or of having a deeply meaningful spiritual experience mocked. The same was true about near-death experiences before they became part of the public conversation.

Mystical experiences happen every day in the bedroom to a significant proportion of the population. People who have experienced a transcendent episode during sex usually believe they have tapped into divine forces, even if they are atheists or agnostics.

CG: Were any of your subjects declared atheists?

JW: These experiences are so extreme they change people's views of sex and spirituality. One woman was what you would call a devout atheist, yet she was obviously conflicted. About transcendent sex, she said to me, "I can see God the way I see blue."

CG: Whoa! Not a very convincing atheist, at least not anymore.

JW: One man, a professed agnostic before his experiences, is now a dedicated Zen practitioner. Part of the main reason I've done this research is to help people come to terms with their changed lives. That lovemaking [is able to] trigger intense episodes featuring characteristics found in the highest documented spiritual states can be very disconcerting and far from the purview of ordinary psychologists.





CG: Even with all of these connections between sex and spirit, there is often a great divide between the two.

JW: The controversy surrounding the combination of sex and spirit has kept one of the most powerful forces of ecstasy and personal transformation in the closet for centuries.

Historically, some spiritual authorities have attempted to control the body's appetites and deny sensuality out of fear that these things divert us from the established path. The pleasurable aspects of sex gradually changed from a celebration of divine forces to a distraction from spirituality — and from a distraction to a hazard. And in some religions, a sin.

Of course, many indigenous traditions took a more holistic and encompassing view, but those were bastardized by colonization. In old Norse traditions, the word for sex translates to “take a journey together.” Native Americans knew of “sex-magic.” In Kabbalistic Judaism, there are sacred texts related to sex. In their priesthood, rabbis are supposed to marry and have sex on the Sabbath to replicate the sacred union between the male and female energies that sustain the world. This is part of the Holy day experience.

CG: And didn't ancient tantra from India stem from a pre-existing structure?

JW: Yes, but it was not what I call Marin tantra [laughs]. Anyway, the original tantra was a countercultural movement from strict asceticism. Originally, tantric adepts sought to experience God in *all* things, notably the opposite of what was originally forbidden. So they ate meat, drank alcohol, had sex. In some of the crazy-wisdom extreme versions, people even ate shit. Literally.

CG: No, not your typical Marin communion [laughs].

JW: There are hazards in every path, of course, and sex is one. Churches provide socializing influences via such taboos, or sins, you can say. But no matter how hard societies tried to stamp out the divine play of sex and Spirit, how could it disappear? Transcendent sex has always been a well-kept secret, perhaps driven underground, but like any secret, it leaks out.

CG: Is it something that can be taught?

JW: There are many practices people can use to facilitate their ability to have transcendent

sex, and I include them in the book. I don't teach this, otherwise you'd possibly have already heard of me on *Oprah* by now [laughs]. But it's important to remember that the capability to have transcendent sex is an innate human potential — normal and natural to tribal cultures.

The great news is you don't have to study tantric lovemaking or special esoteric arts to be carried into other realms during sex. You certainly don't have to be a sex god or goddess. The good news: For many people, the ordinary act of lovemaking may be the most widely available trajectory into higher states of consciousness.

CG: That would make the world a better place, but there must be a shadow element to this.

JW: Just as contemplative practices involving abstinence and asceticism are un-right for everyone, so too are paths that employ the body — whether they involve dancing, the martial arts, sex, etc.

The research clearly shows that such otherworldly sexual experiences can come upon people unawares. While meditators and tantric practitioners may be deliberately cultivating altered states, lovers experiencing transcendent sex are caught unprepared, particularly when their worldview has generally blocked such possibility. Such an opening of the veils, so to speak, from their normal reality can be a shock necessitating psychotherapy. It's important to understand how powerful such a sexual encounter can be.

And worst of all, someone who is vulnerable to opening in this way can also be easy prey to ill-intending sexual predators who can be contaminating and manipulative.

Transcendent sex is not the end-all of lovemaking, nor does [experiencing] it mean that you are enlightened. It can come just as simply, possibly even more so, from casual sex, so it's not about your partner being a soulmate or anything like that. It's not about “true love” in the personal sense of the word. Since you never know how the lightning bolt of grace may strike, the heaven of these experiences is that they are, well, random. 🐾

Dr. Jenny Wade's book, with a foreword by Ken Wilber, is published by Paraview Pocket Books. To learn more, visit transcendentsex.org.