

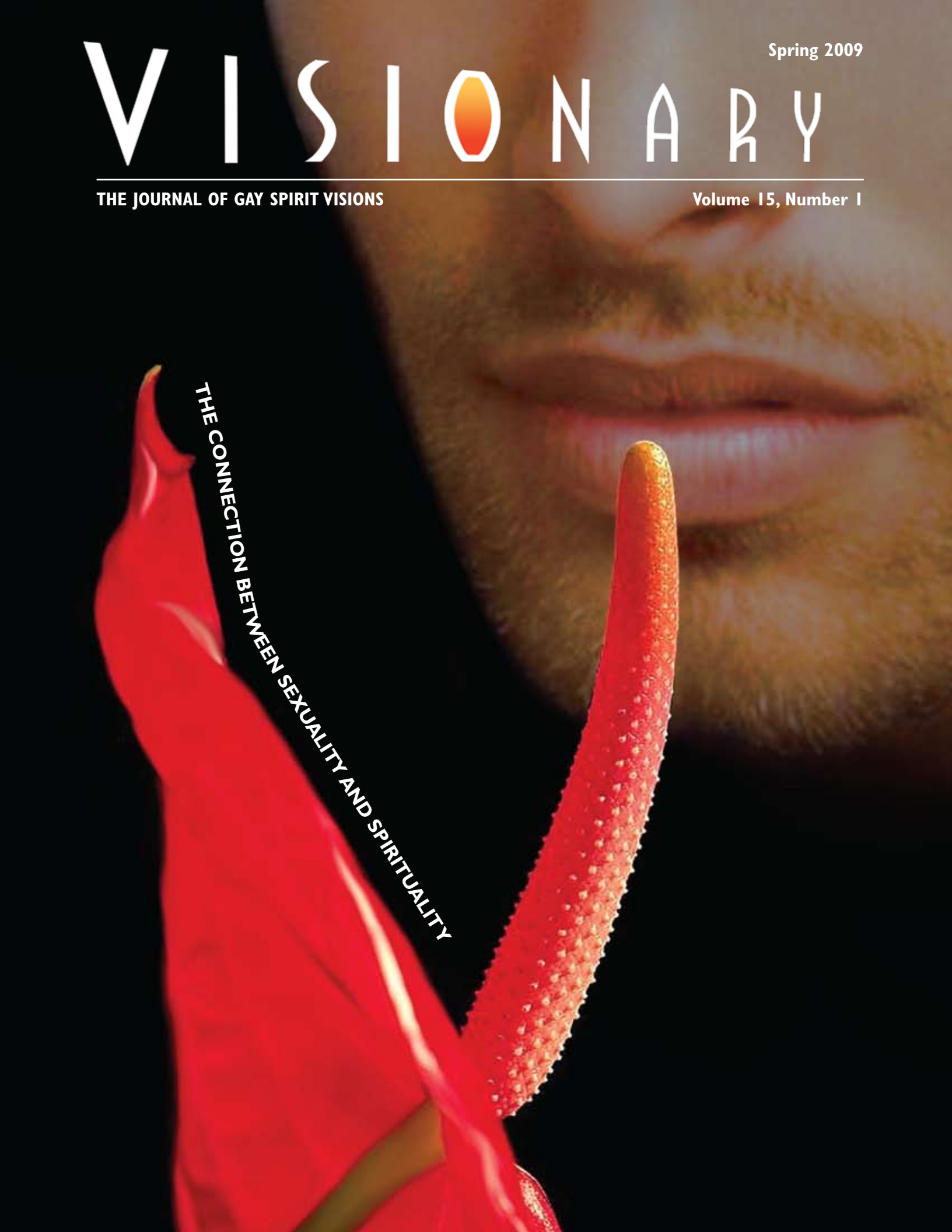
Spring 2009

VISIONARY

THE JOURNAL OF GAY SPIRIT VISIONS

Volume 15, Number 1

THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SEXUALITY AND SPIRITUALITY



VISIONARY

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ELDER'S PERCH

Gay Spirit Visions has lost another longtime member of our tribe. John Stowe died on February 3, 2009, at the age of 56.



By David Salyer

I knew some things about what John did—massage therapist, workshop facilitator, developer of flower essences, author, language instructor—but it was not until I attended his standing room only memorial service that I had any true sense of the juicy life he lived or the diverse range of folks he knew. Listening to his friends, family and colleagues reminisce, I worried that I hadn't known John well enough to write about him – we were not exactly friends, thus not particularly close; our paths rarely crossed outside the context of GSV. But there's no denying his impact on me.

I will, for instance, never forget our first encounter at the 1992 fall conference. Looking over the workshop schedule, I avoided anything that sounded too scary or risky, like *Erotic Touch* or *A Spontaneous Gathering of the Underwear Church*. John was offering *Coming In*: –“a series of visualizations, breathing and movement exercises designed to help participants get present and centered at The Mountain.” Deeming it innocuous, I showed up wholly unprepared for John, who moved gracefully about the room in a sarong and bare feet, directing us to breathe, move and get to know our bodies. Quickly assessing me, he massaged my shoulders and said, “You're so tight. Just let go.” Gliding away, he added “And I think you need to mess up your hair.” It was exactly what I needed to hear.

John and I served together on the Council of Gay Spirit Visions for about half a dozen years in the '90s. In preparation for the fall conference in 1996, there was the usual angst over who was going to host the annual talent show. During a meeting at someone's house, I stammered out a desire to be that person, halfway hoping no one had heard

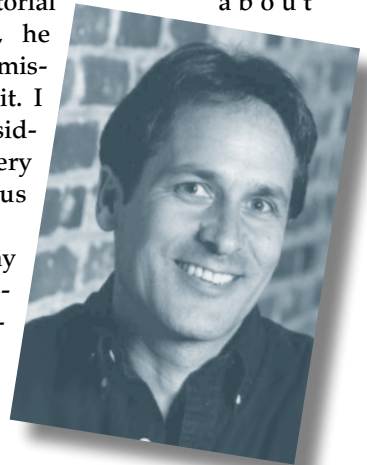
me. John, sitting on the floor, beamed up at me and said, “I think that's a great idea.” Frankly, I'm not sure anyone else thought so. But on the strength of his endorsement, I got the opportunity.

John decided to step away from the Council in 1998, calmly declaring to the rest of us, “you know how to do this.” But he proved to be an invaluable advisor right away. During the Council retreat at The Mountain in 1999, some of us thought it might be a good idea for a ten-year-old non-profit organization to have a mission statement. Ramón Noya, Matt Huff and I were sent off to the Lodge library to draft one. Seeking inspiration, we located a pay phone and placed a call to John back in Atlanta. The thing I remember most about that conversation is when he told us, “Be sure you put something in there about how we are men who love men.” John had just published his first book, *Gay Spirit Warrior: An Empowerment Workbook for Men Who Love Men*. Instead of being territorial about that phrase, he gave us permission to use it. I always considered that a very magnanimous gesture.

I have many vivid memories and observations about John. He was the kind of person who could make an entrance without the slightest intention of doing so. He could toss off a casual email so profound that you might feel inclined to save it for years. He could disarm most anyone with that radiant smile and a nurturing hug or touch of the hand. He knew the power of encouragement. And he could inspire you to put on your first sarong.

I may regret not knowing him better, but I am blessed to have known him at all. John Stowe was a gift to this Earth.

David Salyer is a retired journalist and HIV/AIDS educator living in Atlanta, Georgia. He has been involved with Gay Spirit Visions since 1992. Reach him at cubscout@mindspring.com.



Editors' Page

During the majority of my life sex and Spirit have been two distinct but separate parts. As a boy I saw Spirit as the type of God imagined by most Protestants. God ruled over his creation with authority, power and anger. He watched over us, always ready



By Al Taylor

to punish us for our shortcomings. My mom would always tell us God was angry whenever there was stormy weather. So my first impressions of Spirit were negative. As a boy sex was something else that scared me. I saw sex as something I had to do when I grew up. I thought when I grew up I should get married to a woman and then have sex with her to create children. I remember dreading this upcoming act of procreation in the same way you might dread having a tooth pulled. As a boy my only solace was that this act of marriage was many years away. My boyhood taught me to be afraid of God and sex.

Slowly I grew and became a teenager. At this point in my life I had joined a religious organization and was regularly learning even more details about the anger and wrath of God for my shortcomings. I knew that I could be forgiven for my sins, but only if I stopped committing them. It was during this period that I discovered masturbation. Once I discovered masturbation it did not take much longer for me to learn that if I thought of one of the jocks on the football team white masturbating it would lead to a bigger orgasm. After the orgasm came the guilt. I was a homosexual and my sin of homosexuality would send me to Hell. My teenage years were full of shame for being homosexual and fear of ending up in Hell. These thoughts would follow me into adulthood.

As a young man I abandoned Bible College and the Church, surrendering to my mortal instincts. I was 20 when I first had a man (Ken) touch me and I touched him. This act was the most intense thing I had ever experienced to that point. I immediately fell in love with

Ken. However, Ken did not fall in love with me. He was kind and thoughtful of my feelings but was not in love with me. It was during this time I left Bible College and began my long search for love by looking for love in other men.

After leaving Bible College I discarded anything I thought had to do with Spirit. From then on I believed I would find my salvation in the arms of the man I was destined to find! So Spirit was out and sex was in. This lifestyle would be mine for the next 25 years. I was running from God and running to men. I am sure you know the outcome - brief periods of joy followed by longer periods of sadness.

Then in 1996 I discovered GSV. Since then I have ever so slowly been discovering the connection between sex and Spirit. It is an ongoing process. But I know that in this process I am becoming a happier person.

Al has been involved with the brotherhood of GSV since 1996 and considers this to be a blessing. He may be reached at adtaccountant@yahoo.com.

Assistant Editor

Sexuality and Spirituality

In an earlier issue of the Visionary, I talked about how my sex addiction led me into spirituality, and how grateful I am. It is still a work in progress. There are times I masturbate and it's an act of tension relief; there are times I masturbate that are truly spiritual, honoring my body and the joy of existence. The same dichotomy exists in my life when I look at my history of sex with others.

For me, the outcome depends upon my intention going into the act. This is the tricky part. Where spirituality shows up for me, is being able to source Spirit (or the Universe, or God, or Higher Power, or whatever you call your spirituality) and know my true, deep, intuitive intention. When I was younger and far from spirituality, I often fooled myself and had one intention in my head, when in my heart I was lying to myself, manipulating the world to get what I thought I wanted at that moment.

Today, I see my spirituality and sexual-

ity as having been a process of maturing and being willing to look at my shadows (what I repress, deny and hide). Today, when I choose to be sexual, either with others (rarely, sad to say) or with myself (regularly, gladly) I have the choice of having that become a truly spiritual experience, guided by enlightened intention.

I hope and believe you will find the following articles illuminating and interesting, as the men in our community share with you their views of sexuality and spirituality.



By Migs Halpern

Migs is in the process of moving to Fairview, NC, about 11 miles from Asheville, to a little private home on a private plot with mountain views. He can be reached at oso@mhalpern.com.





*Divine Love says there is an amazing grace found in nature.
A constant resurrection, an ever new spirit.
—Peter Grahame
from Contemplations of the Heart*

The 12th Annual GSV

**SPRING
RETREAT**
May 8-10, 2009

**The Mountain Retreat & Learning
Center, near Highlands, NC**

Year after year men tell us they love this event because of its loose structure—a nice balance of planned activities and free time. Get back to nature with a group hike, lose yourself in a meditative labyrinth walk, or just kick back in a rocking chair and enjoy the gorgeous view. The flexible schedule also gives participants an opportunity to offer spontaneous workshops.



Catch up with old friends, make some new connections and celebrate spring!

For more information and registration details:

www.gayspiritvisions.org/events/retreats.html

 **CALENDAR**

GSV POTLUCKS

GSV potlucks in Atlanta are held the fourth Saturday of the month at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted. GSV potlucks are drug- and alcohol-free events.

**Please check our site for locations:
www.gayspiritvisions.org.**



Hosting a potluck is a simple and effective way to serve GSV. Please let us know if you can host.

**Contact Kim Pittman at
service@gayspiritvisions.org**

GSV COUNCIL MEETINGS

The GSV Council usually meets on the 4th Saturday of each month at 1151 Sheridan Road, NE in Atlanta. It begins at 10 A.M. and usually finishes before 2 P.M. Any GSV brother is welcome to attend. We also encourage our brothers to consider becoming a council member. Please contact any council member for more information.

GSV GATHERINGS

The dates for GSV events in 2008 have been set as follows:

- Coming Out Spiritually, Evergreen Project Benefit
Saturday, April 25, 2009, 12:30–4:00pm (See ad, opposite page)
- Spring Retreat—May 8–10, 2009 (See ad above)
- Fall Conference—October 1–4, 2009 (Optional 9/30)

Gay Spirit Visions
Creating safe, sacred space for men who love men



Our Mission Statement

We are committed to creating **safe, sacred space** that is open to **all spiritual paths**, wherein **loving gay men** may explore and strengthen spiritual identity.

We are committed to creating a spiritual community with the intent to **heal, nurture** our gifts and potential, and **live with integrity** in the world.

We are **committed to supporting others** in their spiritual growth by sharing experiences and insights.

To fulfill these goals we facilitate annual retreats and conferences, sponsor social events, publish a newsletter, and maintain Internet-based communications for men who love men.

COMING OUT SPIRITUALLY

with Christian de la Huerta

A Workshop to Benefit the Gay Spirit Visions

Evergreen
PROJECT

Saturday, April 25, 2009

12:30 – 4:00 PM

Gay Spirit Visions, in collaboration with the **Atlanta Gay Men's Chorus** and **Oakhurst Baptist Church**, presents *Coming Out Spiritually*, a workshop with author Christian de la Huerta.

Today, LGBTQI people are reclaiming our sexual identities in vast numbers. Yet many continue to be shunned by religious institutions and struggle to define our place in the world. In our rejection by or of organized religion, many of us have become unintentionally closeted to our own spirituality—a condition that tragically diminishes us, our community, and society as a whole.

How do we evolve spiritually and reclaim our roles as healers, shamans and visionaries?

In this stimulating and inspiring afternoon workshop, Christian de la Huerta will help participants develop a deeper sense of identity, spiritual connectedness and purpose. You will learn skills to bridge the personal schism between sexuality and spirituality—and deepen the ability to powerfully reintegrate these two fundamental aspects of being human.

Through the generous support and cooperation of AGMC, Oakhurst Baptist and Christian de la Huerta, this workshop benefits GSV's **Evergreen Project**—a program that provides full scholarships to our annual fall conference for gay and bisexual men between the ages of 21 and 30.



For more information and to register online, go to:
www.gayspiritvisions.org/workshop

Cost: \$50 (*register in advance online; space is limited*)

Location: Oakhurst Baptist Church Fellowship Hall, First Floor
222 East Lake Drive
Decatur, GA 30030

More information about the AGMC's "Shaken, Not Heard" concert series featuring Christian de la Huerta, go to:

www.agmchorus.org

THE CONNECTION
BETWEEN
SEXUALITY
AND
SPIRITUALITY

On Becoming a **SEXUAL HEALER**

I remember as a little boy growing up on a tobacco farm in North Carolina listening to the men in the fields under the hot summer sun talk about their sexual conquests, each one trying to outdo the other's story. As they boasted and teased each other with their fantasies and stories up and down the tobacco rows, I would find myself sitting up on the tractor, immersed in a feeling of kinship with them, even though I had no stories of my own to share. I would also notice that each time it happened, I would be taken into a place of deep longing—a deep internal yearning—for something which, at the time, was unknown to me and yet at the same time felt so very familiar.

That same yearning took me, over the next forty-some odd years, in many different directions. It drew me into exhilarating/terrifying sexual exploration games of "show me yours and I'll show you mine" with my fifth grade classmates on Saturday afternoons. It inspired an idealistic college freshman to reject the prohibitions and exclusivity of his childhood Protestant religion because "it just didn't make sense." It drove a confused and image-conscious young man of twenty to run blindly in denial into a marriage and a life of conformity. It caused an ambitious and curious medical student who wanted to help people and to every day be a part of the biggest miracle on the planet to pursue a career in Obstetrics and Gynecology, bearing witness constantly to the power of creative sexual energy and to birth itself.

Indeed, it was that yearning that caused my body to betray my own mind and my own morals to seek itself out in connection with other men. It was that yearning that refused to be silenced through infidelities and failed relationships, accusations of being a slut and hours of therapy, shame-filled SAA meetings and endless nights of loneliness. It was that yearning that kept me driven and seeking more, attempting to find happiness in material things and more awards, and then when that didn't work, turning to more esoteric and spiritual pursuits.

And it was that very yearning that led me in 2001 to call for an appointment in response to an ad in a Portland, Oregon newspaper that offered Tantric Bodywork. I didn't really know what

Tantra was about but I knew that it had something to do with sexuality and spirituality - and that was enough for me.

To say that that experience changed my life would be a drastic understatement. For in that blissful hour and a half that I spent on that gifted man's table, I found what I had been yearning for. I found God - and it was in me.

My Tantric guide told me after the session that he sensed in me the innocence of The Garden of Eden but that I would have to undo years of learned shame in order to access it fully. He invited me to lunch, during which we got to know each other, and he shared with me his own personal journey into the world of the sexual healing arts. I left there deliriously hungry for more and at the same time, cowering in awe, confusion and fear at all this new information and the sheer power that I had experienced.

Initially, the fear won out and I promptly put my head in the sand and returned to my routine life, rationalizing away my experiences as some kind of freak accident.

And then the yearning returned. It was louder this time, more visceral, and more persistent. It would not take no for an answer.

I began attending Body Electric workshops, doing Breathwork sessions, then Tantric workshops, and then Sexual Healer Conferences, where one of the facilitators (who would later become a good friend and mentor) asked me if I had reached "the point of no return." "Yes," I said. "I have."

I had indeed. I could not get enough. I read and studied and listened and attended more workshops. And suddenly the Universe seemed completely



By Ian Ellington



aligned with me. EVERYTHING became synchronistic. (I finally had to let go of the idea of coincidences.) It seemed that everywhere I turned the Universe supported me. I had powerful dreams and met powerful teachers. Suddenly, out of nowhere, I would get new insights and clarity, have access to certain knowing and truths, and experience bursts of creativity and intuition. I became aware of new sensations in my body, an intense vibrational orgasmic energy that would rise up from my pelvis and lower spine and sweep upwards through my body, jerky and erratic at first, and then over time became a more subtle, riveting hum. I learned that this new sensation was the awakening of Kundalini, the Life Force energy, often described as "the closest energy to God."

And then one day, returning from a Tantric initiation in Hawaii, flying somewhere over Kansas, came what I can only describe as THE CALL. "It is time for you to do this work," the loud voice said. "Me?" I said. "I'm not ready. I don't know enough. I don't know how." "Just do it!" the even louder voice said. And there was no room for negotiation.

And so I continue to midwife. The scenery has changed. The body parts are different. The hours are better. I don't have to wear scrubs anymore. But the witnessing is still there. The sounds coming from clients are often the same.-as they give birth to themselves. Just like my patients before them as they brought new life into the world. And just like the many men and women who speak the name of the Most Holy at the moment of orgasm, I now hear client after client shout - or sometimes whisper, as if they are somewhere far, far away - "God. Oh my God."

"Yes, it is", I say softly, smiling. "Welcome Home, my Brother. Welcome Home."

Ian is an Erotic Healer, Physician, Usui Reiki Master, Shamanic Breathworker, Tantric/Taoist Bodyworker, Sacred Intimate, and the former Atlanta Coordinator for The Body Electric School. He draws on all of these disciplines to carry the message forth that our Sexual Nature is our Divine Right, our Erotic Energy is the Life Force, and awakening fully to this Erotic Energy in our Bodies can be a pathway to Healthy Living, Heightened Pleasure, and Higher Consciousness.

SEXUALITY/ SPIRITUALITY

A life lived deeply and fully is a life consciously connected to one's spirituality and one's sexuality, practicing both with a respectful sense of awe and compassion. The sexual/spiritual component can awaken the body, mind and spirit trilogy to wonders, wonders which I feel many of us are searching for and wanting to experience in our lives. Healthy, open and creative sexuality is a birthright and we, as spiritual, physical beings, can choose to engage in these forms if we are willing to be all we are meant to be. It is not necessarily an easy choice, as many of us come from a background or environment which has displayed and embraced certain negative beliefs around sex and its function and purpose in our lives. Guilt, fear, and self worthiness issues have all contributed to a collective dysfunction of this luscious gift we humans call sexuality.

One suggested way to transform misperceptions and unhealthy ideas concerning sex is learning how to appreciate, elevate and honor our creator-given five senses of taste, sight, smell, hearing and touch. The enjoyment of taste in all its various forms of salt, bitter, sour and sweet can aid us in a conscious development of a more meaningful spiritual sexuality. Our other senses of sight, smell, hearing and touch contribute also to heightened awareness of our human sexual nature and the power it possesses. At the ending of day during a sublime setting of the sun, our vision can be witness to unfathomable beauty. Color, form and light impress our sight and spirit as the glowing sun quietly vanishes below the horizon and illuminates the surrounding clouds. We are reminded by and reinforced to the connectedness of all life by this spectacular event. And life contains the beauty of sex.

It has been my personal experience, as a Tantric yoga participant, that my

creative sexual expression is vital to my spiritual wholeness. My journey on this unique spiritual path has led me to work with individuals who want to integrate their own sexuality with their practiced spirituality. Men who wish to experience healthy intimacy with another have requested Tantric sessions in the hopes of opening themselves to higher states of bliss and deeper states of consciousness. Some of the men I have encountered have experienced sexual abuse or live with sexual addiction. Working with them using a Tantric approach can benefit them greatly by leading them to healthier non-habitual ways of expressing sex and experiencing orgasm. The key to my practice is patience, acceptance and compassion. With these definitive intentions all else flows perfectly into place and healing can happen on multiple levels, including the spiritual. For most, once this heal-

ing is tasted, doorways to greater exploration and connectedness are accessible and walking through them leads to new insight, meaningful friendships and better, more enlivening sex. It is all everyone's for the asking. Step forward, show up, and be present. Spirit will do the rest if you are open to the allowing! Give yourself over to seeing beauty, hearing magic, and smelling bliss, tasting excitement and touching the divine. You will thank yourself if you do.

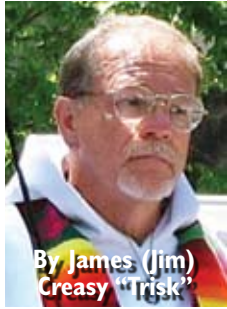
I wish to express my gratitude for the gifts from Spirit. I am truly blessed with an enchanted life.



By Jerold Soder

“HEALTHY,
OPEN AND
CREATIVE
SEXUALITY IS A
BIRTHRIGHT”

Jerold is presently experiencing the culture, climate and beauty of Costa Rica. He can be reached at manhealer@hotmail.com.



IS THERE A SACRED DIMENSION TO OUR SEXUALITY?

Yes, I believe one's sexuality may be approached spiritually as a sacrament.

When I was confirmed in The Episcopal Church, I memorized the definition of a sacrament from The Catechism: The sacraments are outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace. This was in my early twenties when I was making a transition from Evangelical Christianity to Anglican Spirituality. In so doing, I went from two infrequently observed sacraments to a spirituality characterized by frequent participation in many sacramental acts. Anglicans have a rich heritage of rituals and ceremonies all of which are sacramental in nature. The Evangelical Protestantism I left approached worship and theology almost exclusively through the spoken and written word. The sacramentalism with which I fell in love provided me with a way to literally experience the Divine rather than rationalize it.

I soon felt called into the priesthood of the Episcopal Church. In my seminary studies of Sacramental Theology I encountered the concept of *universal sacramentalism*. The underlying concept is that through our senses of touch, sight, taste, smell, and hearing, sentient beings experience and become conscious not only of the material world but also of spiritual reality.

What is more experiential and sensual than sexuality? Seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting, and hearing are all quite essential in our lovemaking. The biblical phrase "to know someone" is more than a mere euphuism for sexual intercourse. Through sexual intimacy we come to know the other person and ourselves; and I would add God to that list. Sex is not just a biological function necessary for procreation. The spiritual dimension of sexuality allows us to not only join physically with another person, but to unite with them on a spiritual level. It is through this union that we enter the spiritual realm and encounter The Divine.

Communion, community, unity, oneness; to me these are characteristic of a spiritual experience. In a sacrament we lose our sense of being alone; we become aware of being part of something greater than ourselves. Jesus said, "What you do unto the least among us, you do unto me." Martin Luther King said in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail", "We are bound by an inescapable garment of mutuality, whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." In fact, all of the great religions of the world say something to this same effect. It is the way we express our love of God and to God. It is also the way we know we are loved and that we are of value. By loving another person, by caring for them, by lessening their pain and suffering, by giving them plea-

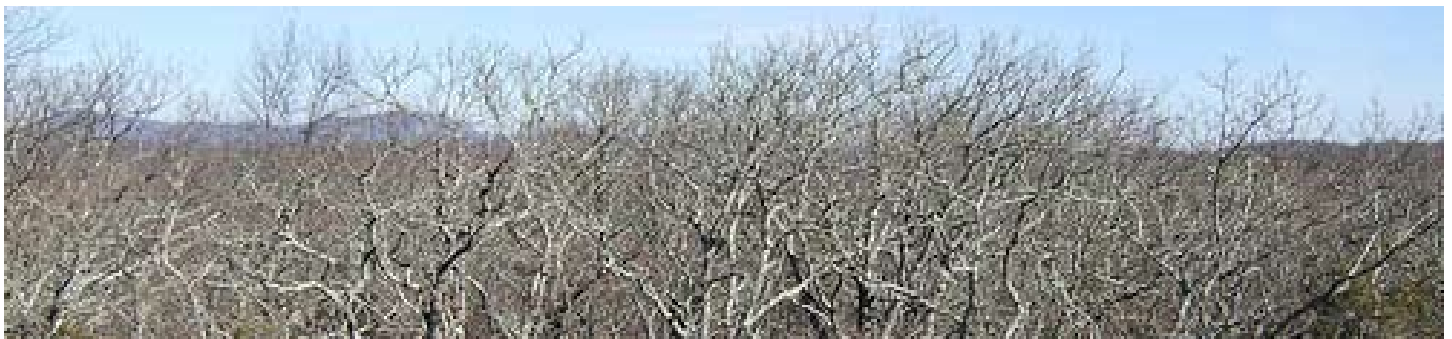
sure, by making them happy, we also do the same to God.

My experience with The Body Electric School helped me understand the role erotic energy plays in life. It led me to realize that the pleasure we give others and ourselves during sexual arousal not only energizes us individually; it can also channel, focus, and release powerful, positive energy. It has the same effect on us and the universe as does prayer and meditation.

An important aspect of spirituality is getting to know one's self – *To thine own self be true*. Most of us also consider getting to know another person to be a spiritual experience. The great mystics of history identify a spiritual experience as an encounter with the divine essence of the universe (God?). In a sexual experience we feel and know ourselves, we get to know the other person, and we encounter The Divine. This to me is sacramental. That which we experience with our senses during sex is the "outward and visible sign" of an inward and spiritual grace.

Jim (Trisk) is a retired priest of the Episcopal Church with a Master of Divinity degree from Episcopal Divinity School, Cambridge, MA. After leaving active parish ministry in 2002, he served as Victim Service Officer for the District Attorney of Jefferson County (Birmingham) Alabama. Since retiring he has been on a spiritual journey that has taken him beyond the confines of orthodox Christianity. His studies and interests in recent years have focused on earth/goddess-based spirituality, mythology, symbolism, shamanism, Native American spirituality, and tarot. During the daytime he works as a handyman, offering his services in Opelika and Auburn, AL.

James (JiM) Creasy, 334-663-8049, trisk47@gmail.com



Connecting SEX & SPIRIT



This is what I believe:

Everything is connected. Not at some high philosophical level of feeling empathy with someone else, but literally – at the cellular and subatomic level. The stream of thought I have taken to heart in physics posits that the smallest ultimate particle of matter isn't a particle of matter at all—it's a vibrational 'string' of energy. In my worldview, then, if we are all just clusters of vibrating bits of energy, there isn't a clear distinction between my 'bits' and yours – or the ones in my desk, or my cats, or the tree in the yard, or a star in a neighboring galaxy.



By Dave Cable

As a bundle of vibrational energy, one of the ways I can most efficiently (and, by the way, pleasantly!) increase the level and quality of that energy and focus it is through channeling erotic sensation in combination with conscious breathwork. The result is sometimes as described as a "full body orgasm." I learned to do this through the work of The Body Electric School, but there are a number of books and experiential workshops that provide

similar insights. (There are a number of Body Electric graduates in the GSV tribe if you are curious and start asking around. *The Multi-Orgasmic Man: Sexual Secrets Every Man Should Know* is one book that offers a good tutorial; check out The Garden of Ian website – www.thegardenofian.com - for another path.) Quite simply, the end result is that I can experience heightened states of erotic sensation and awareness that extend for hours and at levels of intensity I had never thought possible before becoming tuned into this mode of energy work.

So where does Spirit enter the picture? For me, through intention. When I combine breathwork with erotic play to create a channel of intense energy and then combine all of that with a specific intention, I create a link between myself and the focus of my intention. (This is not to say I can't just toss one off like the next guy, but that I do have options beyond that). This channeled energy can be shared with another person (the 'traditional' way we tend to express sexuality in our culture). But it can also be with a place – I create erotic play rituals to bind myself with places of power such as the waterfalls at my friend Peggy's farm (where I have requested my ashes be scattered); The Mountain and WildWood Retreat Center are other examples. I use this channeled energy and intention to link myself with companions who no longer exist in these limited four dimensions – or to those who are far away. I can channel this energy with specific intention to heal the planet by providing positive vibrational energy around me. And I can create intense connection with Spirit as it dwells within my self. In this mode of thinking, I am a healer providing nurture and sustenance to the universe by increasing the flow of positive and loving energy. Every session of erotic energy work and full body orgasm heals the planet.

David lives in Atlanta with his companion of 27 years, John Hilinski. He has completed the Sacred Intimacy coursework with the Body Electric School and Joseph Kramer's online course in Masturbation Coaching. David is particularly interested in developing rituals and safe space for gay men to explore their own relationships between sexuality and spirituality.



THE EROTIC GODBODY

I've really struggled with what to say about the link between sexuality and spirituality. I think all I can do is share my experience, so here goes. I came out as a gay man when I was 22 and a junior in college. My introduction and acceptance of being gay began on a Wednesday evening at a gay bar in Columbus, Ohio. I had run into an old friend from high school. When I asked him about going "out," he replied that he only went to gay bars. I said, "Let's go."

I was scared to death to walk into that bar. After many cocktails I finally felt at ease. I knew of no other gay men except my school friend. There were no gay organizations or clubs that I was aware of, nothing except a few gay bars located in the abandoned parts of downtown. I always had to get drunk to stay in the bars. Those early coming-out years were marked by sexual experimentation fueled by alcohol abuse, gay bars, dancing, poppers and trying to find someone to love me. My spirituality/sexuality link was around zero. I was asleep and I didn't know I was asleep.

My main coping mechanism to numb the guilt and shame of being gay was bulimia, which I "discovered" the week I came out. I stayed trapped in that addiction for 9 years before I began recovery and another 7 years of on-again-off-again abstinence and relapse.

I stopped drinking in 1984 because my doctor told me I had damaged my liver by contracting hepatitis B through sex with a man. My doctor said I needed to quit drinking for a year, so I did. In the meantime I bottomed out with the bulimia and started 12-step recovery in Overeaters Anonymous.

In recovery, I had to re-learn how to have sex without addictive substances. My boyfriend at the time was patient with my mood swings. At times I was very depressed and withdrawn without my former coping mechanisms. The only way he could reach me was through sex. I still had no concept of a link between spirituality and sexuality. Expressing my sexuality with sex was something

that felt good for a while, and then it was over until the next time. In my mind they were separate. My concept of spirituality was very ethereal, impersonal and located in a remote cosmic location and stayed that way for many years.

Fast-forward to 2005 when I got up the courage to attend my first Body Electric CBE (Celebrating the Body Erotic) workshop. Suddenly my old idea of a higher power being far away seemed outdated and abusive. I had often heard in meetings of people sharing about being a child of God. I thought I believed that but I think I was just parroting that concept. After Body Electric, I felt like a child of God. I started believing every single part of me was made by the Divine. That included my sexuality, dick, balls, perineum, ass and what I did with them. Body Electric helped me remove the yellow crime scene tape I had placed around my genitalia and sexuality. It was replaced with a deeper acceptance of whom and what I am, a man who loves men.

Jump to fall of 2008 when I fell into the deepest depression I have ever experienced. I hurt all the time, my libido went to nothing and I felt terrified of everything. I spent lots of time "thinking," which only made the depression worse. Most of my thoughts were about how this condition was totally unacceptable to me, what I did to bring this on, and what I would have to do to not feel this level of pain. I felt powerless over the depression and my life was unmanageable; I often thought of killing myself. One of the things that pulled me out was some new medication, (along with a meeting a day for 90 days, a new sponsor, therapy, walking, praying, journaling, and surrendering to feeling miserable). One side effect of the meds is a lowering of sexual function. I'm very grateful for the



By Jeff Burkholder

meds and the people who helped me recover, and most of the time I don't mind losing sexual function in favor of not being suicidal.

I've been looking at other ways to express my sexuality and spirituality. I have monthly contact with Body Electric graduates at our "Full Moon" gathering of Taoist erotic massage that helps keep my heart open and reminds me I am one breath away from the spark of God. I use my eroticism, sexuality and spirituality in my work as a photo stylist and graphic designer by combining shapes and colors into something more beautiful than it was before. When I sang with the Atlanta Gay Men's Chorus, I pictured transforming my erotic energy into vocal energy. I now see the connection between my erotic energy, spiritual energy, heart energy, divine energy and creativity.

I love what James Broughton said in his keynote speech at the 2nd GSV Fall Conference. The conference theme was "Celebrating the Erotic Godbody." "...For a moment place both hands over your genitals. Not to conceal them, but to cherish and to praise. This is the creative core of your Godbody, the place of instinct, impulse and transformation. Concentrate on your phallic glory. The penis is the exposed tip of the heart. The penis is the wand of the soul. Whatever its shape, size or shame, it is your holy birthright. Praise it. Give thanks for its awesome powers. Its energies permeate every corner of your temple, connect all the chakras, the highest to the lowest. Phallus, perineum and anus form the trinity at the root of your torso's experience...'

I am a beginner at learning and consistently putting into experience the powerful connection between spirituality and sexuality and shamelessly, lovingly using all of my potential. That's why I must keep coming back to GSV, 12-step meetings and absolutely commit to not going back to sleep again. I encourage you to explore your own Godbody today.

Jeff designs and photo styles a catalog for a direct mail and online retailer. He and Joe, his significant other, live in Atlanta with their little dog Tinker. Contact him at jeffb Burkholder@earthlink.net.

SACRED Compassionate INTERACTION

HOW I SEE IT

The spirit that resides within knows itself more fully through human expression." This is a quote that has no author other than a voice from within me. In my observation and understanding of natural human expression, sexuality and its action mode, sensuality, course through our nervous systems, minds and hearts at all times. Sensuality is the indicator that the five senses are alive and active within us all. This signal from the sensual side triggers almost anything we can fall in love with or lust after including a decadent meal, engrossing ourselves in music, walking on the beach at sunset, being enthralled by gorgeous "eye candy," holding someone's hand or being in an ecstatic trance. I have finally learned to honor these senses and my God-given sexual nature as well. Peter Kump puts it this way: "Focusing on life's two greatest sensual experiences, food and passion...What wonderful delicious fun." When I analyze this I only come up with one premise: if God has wrapped these two great gifts and put them under the Christmas tree of life, and I open the one containing food and honor it as a prized delight in which I often indulge, then why would I deny myself the one containing sexuality and all its passion, seeing that they both came from the same Divine source?

I believe that everything at its core is *creation interacting with Creator*. I like the words of the spiritual teacher Osho who taught that the highest refinement of love is compassion and it is this quality or nature that outshines all others. Osho, like many other spiritual teachers, professed that compassion centers on love expressed through unconditional sharing and on giving for the sheer joy of the act including the personal satisfaction that it so often brings. He explained that it's the fullest extension of the Divine



By William Tolo Perry

which can be exchanged between two beings, human or otherwise. Understanding this has shed new light on my sexuality and all its ways of expression. For me sexuality is another avenue to explore and develop my spiritual side. From this premise I have a whole new understanding of healthy sexual expression which is a far cry from just satisfying my raw sexual urges. This impostor expression, which can be a vain attempt to give and receive love or compassion, is sexual/sensual activity in its compulsive, non-involved, even addictive form. I know that the path of compassion in all its various forms can lead anyone out of this stuckness.

Through my involvement with the Tantric Way, Taoism, Body Electric, Rudy Ballentine, George Miller, Jer Soder, Ian Ellington, Hunter Flournoy and a host of other teachings, teachers and sacred intimates, I have come to understand and enjoy the privilege of being able to enter into "sacred compassionate interactions" that have no time frame or limit. They can occur in an hour's connection between two or more trusting, flowing, healthy individuals, not necessarily when the "chemistry is right," but when the opportunity to be truly compassionate arises and each participant seizes the moment, surrenders to the mystery of its deeper meaning, and *heeds* the call from another dimension.

“Cease trying to work everything out with your minds, it will get you nowhere. Live by intuition and inspiration And let your whole life be a Revelation.”

—Eileen Caddy
One of the Founders of Findhorn

I like this formula and it works for me. When I have claimed love instead of compassion to be the highest form of sexual connection, it has often gotten convoluted by my runaway desires and I have to keep asking, "Where is the spirituality in this?" I find that answer when I am able, with all honesty, to evaluate a situation momentarily, not from some old immature belief still lingering in my

subconscious mind telling me lies, but from a place of inner Truth. That intuitive voice always tells me the same thing: stay in the present moment and explore the mystery of it all. I used to then ask the question: Am I in lust or am I in love? Actually, what I have learned is that if I answered yes to either question I was in trouble, for both can be controlled by my untrustworthy emotions and therefore be less than honest. If I can but bypass these old unspiritual formulas and limited thinking, then relief and clarity are in sight. I finally learned to do this by realizing that the highest expression of the Divine is compassion and by putting aside everything unhealthy from my past and by going with the flow of the present. Then in sincerity I give and receive some spiritual service through the process of sexual attraction and the interaction that may or may not follow.

The outcome for me for saying *yes* to a new way of approaching my sexuality is bliss. The connection becomes a blessed event that, as a mere mortal, I will never fully comprehend or understand at this point in my evolution. I then stand in the mystery and glow of it all. Sometimes these sexual interactions lead to lifelong friendships and at other times failed or successful relationships of either a platonic or romantic nature. Compassion as service to mankind has even led me down the path of being a sacred intimate myself. The outcomes and lessons are endless. In any case it is the saying *yes* that counts, no matter what the mind or human emotions say. I find great reward in going into autopilot mode and letting my senses delight in the new spiritual connections that I find waiting "wrapped or unwrapped" under God's Christmas tree.

William Tolo Perry has moved on from being a spiritual educator, counselor, retreat director and writer to developing his artistic talent, which includes photography, arts and crafts, painting and poetry. He now resides in a small beach town in southern Costa Rica. He can be reached at toloperry@gmail.com. (Tolo is his spiritual name that he now uses fulltime.)

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