

The Legacy of Lilith: Reclaiming Women's Untamed Erotic Potential
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The scene is set on a stage with the audience in a semi circle watching as a dark figure emerges from behind a screen. She is wearing a luminous black and silver dress, accenting her figure, her skirts billowing in a full circle. She wears black leather boots and has enormous wings that float behind her. She raises her head and with a voice resonant with power she tells us:

I am Lilith, Dark Goddess of untamed erotic power. I am the Goddess of feminine wild instinctual knowing, free of restraints. I am the creative power of the Void.

In the past, Millennia ago, I was the Great Goddess of all the Semitic people. It was I who brought agriculture to them and protected midwives and children. This was before the dark times when the feminine was repressed. In Biblical tradition, I was cast as first woman, created simultaneously with Adam, but I fled paradise and my controlling mate.

Now I want to tell you what really happened.

In the beginning, Adam and I enjoyed our wild sexuality and lived as partners in the magical, sexual, pulsing dance of life. But something happened and he began to change. He acted as if he was the wiser one and could tell me what to do. And worse, he criticized my wildness (I was a woman who ran with the wolves to be sure).

*And then the day came when he insisted that we make love with him on top, weighing me down and restricting my movement, making me passive. Although I was always one for variety, he persisted in this request; he refused to let me get on top as well. I knew he wanted to dominate me in a way that felt disrespectful, out of balance and denying my own eroticism. And so **I refused**.*

He complained to Yahweh, who came against me and I shape shifted into a dark bird and flew away. Of course, they replaced me with a more compliant Eve who was supposed to be submissive, self-sacrificing and chaste. But even she got the blame for acting on her own and eating of the fruit of wisdom.

In Medieval times you will find references to my name as a fearsome demonness. I was supposed to be responsible for men's wet dreams and I was accused of stealing babies. But it is all a pack of lies to keep women from trusting in their own instincts.

Now, I am returning to your consciousness and I am your free, untamed, and independent self.

Call on me to help you reclaim your erotic potential. Call on me to reclaim your creative power and your wildness. I am Lilith, the ancient one.

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This archetype of Lilith with its powerful narrative is really about the descent of women's eroticism. Hearing her story can change women's understanding of their collective history and inspire women to reclaim their erotic potential.

Around the third millennium, BCE, cultures worldwide began to shift from an acceptance of feminine sexuality as natural and abundant, to be celebrated and honored, to a thing to be feared and controlled. From the ancient ways, women's sexuality was gradually repressed until feminine erotic energy was completely subjected to severe control in the increasingly dominant patriarchal cultures. It took until around the 1st millennium, BCE for women to become completely subservient.

For most of the last three thousand years, the sexual roles for women were limited to two options, neither of which was by the woman's choice. They were either chaste breeders for preferably male heirs, and entirely owned by their husbands. Or, the other option for sexual expression for women was to offer themselves as play toys and pleasers of men, but these women were always in a class of outcasts. We often romanticize the Courtesans of Venice and the Hetaerae of Greece, but let us make no mistake that these women could and did lose their livelihoods and their lives in a moment of political expediency, without any protection or power.

We cannot talk about reclaiming women's unbound eroticism without acknowledging these historical roots.

I am not a theologian, but let me mention that the attitudes towards women, their assumed inferiority, wantonness and responsibility for the fall of man are inextricably entwined with the views about feminine sexuality throughout the first millennium BCE and onwards through the Christian era until only about 40 years ago

Let me take a moment to recap the history of women's sexuality in just the last two thousand years. In the Hebrew Apocrypha, there are abundant denigrating references to women and their feared ability to ensnare men with their wiles. These attitudes also appear in the writings of the Jewish philosopher, Philo in first century of the Common Era. And in the letters of Paul to the Ephesians, Paul exhorts the women of the church "wives be submissive to your husbands"—5:22-24. This phrase was repeated in the wedding ceremonies of countless generations of brides. I remember hearing it at my Catholic girlfriend's wedding in the 1960s and being shocked. And this was a friend who went on to become a state congress woman in Massachusetts, no less. In Paul's letters to the Corinthians, he exhorts women to veil themselves in church, never to teach, and to stay silent unless they are at home. By the fourth century AD, it gets even worse with the writings of Saint Augustine who despised the body and declared emphatically that women had no souls. This notion of women prevailed in the Christian cultures worldwide for centuries.

Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, notions of uncontrolled female sexuality as dangerous and evil abound. If you know your witch history, much of what snared women into torture and death were lurid descriptions of their sexual escapades with the devil or his minions. This seemed to be a sort of twisted pornography, perpetuated by the *Malleus Malifacarum*, the popular manual on how to catch and torture witches.

During these centuries, Lilith was portrayed as a Demonness and was blamed not only for men's nocturnal emissions but also their inability to feel aroused by mortal women. She was a bit of a catchall source of blame for sexual indiscretion and she was a

great excuse for erectile dysfunction. In addition, babies were routinely hit on the nose if they giggled in their sleep because it was believed that Lilith was about to kill them. I supposed this functioned to wake them, but of course it reinforced women's fear of this fearsome feminine archetype. Clearly unbound feminine sexuality was frightening.

During most of the patriarchal time period, roughly from the 1st millennium BCE until present times, sexuality and spirituality were separated and, until very recently, they were considered antithetical. In contrast, for millennia (prior to the repression of women, so for perhaps 30,000 years) sex and spirit had been viewed as intertwined. This linking of sexuality and spirituality was always present in cultures where ever the feminine was honored.

How can we not see that this widespread culturally reinforced negative view of women, a view that has lasted for over 3,000 years, is foundational to the loss of women's erotic expression? How can we not understand that this wound to women's image is at the source of women's self doubt and mistrust of their sexuality?

To reclaim women's free erotic expression, we need a new narrative about women and we need to resurrect the ancient archetypes of women as powerful sexual beings in their own right. This is the promise of ancient archetypes and new ones we can create. One of the reasons I love using the Lilith archetype is that it succinctly makes the history clear. It says "women were not always this way."

There are ancient images of Lilith, an example of one can be found on the internet and is from a Sumerian Terra Cotta plaque of the mid 3rd millennium BCE. It is a characteristic hybrid bird-woman, similar to those found in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages at archeological sites documented by Marija Gimbutas. Lilith is clearly depicted as a lovely and voluptuous woman, with wings and birds feet and she is guarded by owls, symbolizing wisdom and lions representing power. She holds the Rod and the Ring which are standard symbols of Sumerian royal authority. This tells us that Lilith was a highly respected Goddess for a very long time.

Recently, there has been an emergence, a kind of reformation, if you will, of our perceptions about women's sexuality, starting with the notion that all women are capable of being orgasmic. From the onset of Masters and Johnson's research until now we have evolved to a more sophisticated knowledge of women's sexual responses. We now understand the complexity of the clitoral system and ascribe to the radical idea that women's sexuality needs to be understood from a completely different paradigm than the prevailing male-centered viewpoint. Witness the books such as The New View of Women's Sexual Problems, and the conferences and gatherings around this "new view" which has gained such support in our own profession.

I submit that it is no accident that the repair of Mary Magdalene's reputation and restoration of her importance to the church, even perhaps as partner to Jesus, is emerging at this same time. The whole movement towards recognizing the Divine Feminine represents the raising of our collective consciousness. And it is healing the rift between men and women that is long overdue. **The recognition of the sacred feminine goes hand in hand with freeing women's erotic expression.**

In order to take the emergent view of women's sexuality a step further we must we find ways of motivating women to reclaim what was lost and move away from the prevailing sense of brokenness into freeing women's untamed eroticism—which is a very

scary thought for many. We must also allow for an expanded view of feminine sexuality which enhances and even allows us to speak of spiritual ecstasy.

I believe that in order for women to fully reclaim their erotic potential, they must feel empowered. The archetype of Lilith calls to women deeply. She is someone many women can identify with instinctually. As Lilith implies, there's a bit of danger and certainly lack of external control when women claim their erotic natures. Yet women need not feel afraid of their own instinctual knowing and their wildness.

To accomplish this freeing up of erotic energy, my book, *Reclaiming Goddess Sexuality* has outlined a step by step process which allows women to find their own way. I have found that right brain techniques are effective in empowering and motivating women to free the expression of their eroticism. Techniques such as guided imagery, dream work, goddess archetypes, story telling, movement, and meditation speak to women's deeper instinctual knowing.

Keep in mind that reclaiming sexuality for all humans begins with understanding and accessing their sexual ENERGY. Sex does not equal intercourse and in fact is not an act one does with a partner, it is far more fundamental than any external event.

Many of you have had experiences with something you might have called sexual ecstasy or spiritual sex. The experiences are often described in language such as "feelings of oneness with the universe during orgasm," having "out of body travel while making love," "weeping with the joy of sexual bliss," being "enveloped with a loving light," and "touching souls with the partner." One of my own spiritual sex experiences was a most compelling direct encounter with universal healing energy, and there were moments of boundless, timeless existence in "light/energy." Clearly, many women and men are having such experiences and are becoming willing to talk about them. The descriptions of sexual ecstasy sound quite similar to near death experiences in some ways.

That spiritual ecstasy is part of eroticism is an ancient knowledge.

The cultures that honored the Divine Feminine as well as masculine held the view that sexuality was both a healing energy and a pathway to raising the consciousness. The ancients believed that ecstatic union with the Source of the Life Force was the ultimate expression of sexuality. It has been my passion to study any references to spiritual sexuality for over 30 years, Tantric, Kundalini Yoga, Taoist, Quodoushka and many more.

For example, according to Toltec Teachings, sexual energy is essential to healing and renewing our creativity. When female sexuality is dormant and the women are not orgasmic, Marilyn Tunneshende, in *Don Juan and the Art of Sexual Energy*, tells us that her teachers refer to this as a "broken vessel." The Nagual Shaman were adamant that most women in our culture have lost their access to unbound orgasmic energy.

Energy psychology recognizes meridians and energy centers as has Eastern forms of medicine for thousands of years. The follow table is a way I have found to make sense of the many ways sacred sexuality has been presented in the esoteric teachings. Where ever this is useful, take it to heart and let go of the rest.

Levels of Sexual Energy

- **Genital Pleasuring**

Mutual, consensual pleasure and relaxation, playful self-expression. Tension release through genital orgasm. (1st through 3rd chakras)

- **Conscious Loving**

Enhancement of partner commitment through conscious, loving communion. “Valley orgasm” of continuing waves of energy. (4th chakra through 6th)

- **Spiritual Union**

Sexual energy utilized to attain ecstatic, altered states of consciousness. Cosmic orgasm through multiple energy centers. (7th chakra and beyond)

Sexuality Through the Higher Chakras

HEART--4TH Chakra: Compassion/Divine Healing
Compassionate communion and healing with open loving

THROAT--5TH Chakra: Telling /Discerning Truth
Intimate communication and self-disclosure

3RD EYE--6th Chakra: Perception/Projection
Projecting visualizations and perceiving the partner as God/Goddess

CROWN--7thChakra: Inspiration/Illumination
Transcendence, union with Life Force.
Balancing the cosmic M/F polarities

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