

THE DESTINY OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

An East –West Perspective

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Note: In this thesis the term *polarization* is used, in a positive sense, to mean connecting with the *complementary* side of human function. The principle of polarity is thematic, e.g. in Yin and Yang, male and female gender, and (physiology) in sympathetic and parasympathetic function of the autonomic nervous system. In Freud's advocacy of the nature of sexual function, the sex act—intercourse—is a polar balancing mechanism of the rest of the human psyche.

Introduction

In the summer of 1982 an International Health Seminar on the topic of Human Sexuality was held in Sri Lanka (Ceylon). The colloquium, hosted by the Department of Psychiatry at the Medical School of the University of Peradeniya, was attended by faculty and graduate students of New York University's Health Education Department and members of the Sex Education Information Council of the United States (SEICUS). This paper is an attempt to synthesize scientific and esoteric knowledge of human sexuality which was examined in this cultural exchange. It focuses on the relationship between sexuality and spirituality in the scheme of psychic development. The theory of psychosexual development presented is formulated on the basis of readings from religious texts and psychologic literature, sexological findings from clinical experience, and interviews with Buddhist monks, Sri Lankan educators and health professionals. It challenges both Eastern and Western religious systems that have perpetuated a fatalistic attitude about human sexuality, inextricably connecting sex to lust, craving, sorrow, and sin.

This paper proposes that religious scriptures do not support sexual repression in Buddhism and Christianity, or the concept of celibacy as a fundamental discipline for spiritual ascendency. It discusses ancient texts and modern sexological research which indicate that psychic integration and spiritual evolvment may be inhibited until sexual fulfillment is the mean of a normal life. And finally, it interprets Buddhist psychology and Freudian sexology as essential complementary steps in the evolvment of human consciousness.

Celibacy

Both Buddhism and Christianity have fostered the belief that celibacy is essential for spiritual attainment (See Fig. 1).

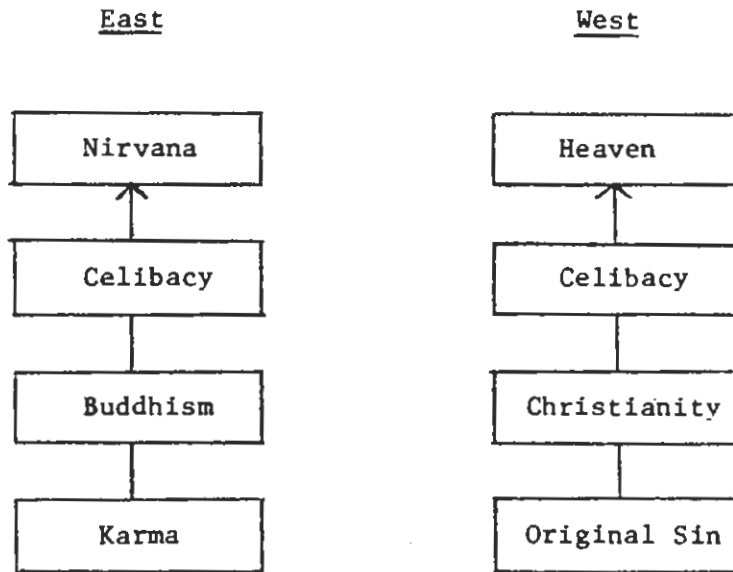


Fig. 1 Parallel Schemes of Clergical Route to Spirituality

In his paper "Buddhism and Sexuality" (1982) Dr. L.P.N. Perera elucidates the Buddhist viewpoint on sexuality: "Buddhism is concerned with mental culture which demands the total eradication of sexuality." and "Sex belongs to the lower life or that of non-celibacy." Dr. Perera summarizes that sexuality, "in whatever form it may manifest itself, is the greatest danger to the higher or religious life in Buddhism."

But a historical perspective indicates that the discipline of celibacy advocated by the Buddha for his clergy was a pragmatic concern and not essentially a matter of spirituality. The

urbanization of society in the Buddha's time had created an atmosphere of heightened sensory stimulation, and consequently of heightened eroticism. It was from this environment that the Buddha had to draw a following. He was primarily concerned with establishing and expanding a monastic organization and required the undivided dedication of his disciples. That the advocacy of celibacy was based on pragmatic concerns is substantiated by the fact that homosexual acts were considered less of a sexual transgression of monastic discipline than heterosexual acts; this was because homosexuality did not engender the risk of pregnancy and familial responsibility which would distract the monk from full commitment to religious service (Perera, 1982).

The expediency of celibacy for a religious life was also articulated by St. Paul in relation to Christianity, "The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord; but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided" (1 Corinthians 7:32-38).

It is significant that Paul's religious fervor in relation to sex was based on his personal vision that the Day of Judgement was at hand. He qualified his advocacy of celibacy by stating, "On the question of celibacy I have no instruction from the Lord...."

The tenet that there is antipathy between sexuality and spirituality is challenged by an examination of the motivation of the celibate to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, or (in the context of Eastern religion) to attain the spiritual goal of Nirvana. The need for self-gratification can underly both the spiritual aspirant's desire for eternal bliss, and the laity's desire for sexual pleasure. This point is alluded to

in Buddhist and Freudian Psychology (P. De Silva, 1978):

Sensations of physical caresses, play and amusement with women, looking at and being enticed by feminine figures, being enticed by their voice, reminiscences and past associations with women, desire to see others enjoying the pleasures of sense - all these are considered as associations with sexual feelings. And lastly, even the living of a godly life in the hope of attaining a celestial abode. (p. 101, Italics mine)

The quality of good or evil is not uniquely characteristic to a celibate or sexually active life, but rather it is the emotions and mental attitudes underlying the actions of an individual that determine the spirituality or depravity of desire. This issue is clarified in terms of Buddhist philosophy which holds that "there are some desires that Buddha deliberately advocated; the desire for...the welfare of other beings" (Smith, 1958, p. 101). But Smith distinguishes the type of desire which is detrimental to the individual and society:

Tanha is a specific kind of desire, the desire to pull apart from the rest of life and seek fulfillment through those bottled-up segments of being we call our selves. Tanha is... the will to private fulfillment.... It consists of all 'those inclinations which tend to continue or increase separateness, the separate existence of the subject of desire; in fact, all forms of selfishness, the essence of which is the desire for self at the expense, if necessary, of all other forms of life. Life being one, all that tends to separate one aspect from another must cause suffering to the unit which

even unconsciously works against the Law. Man's duty to his brothers is to understand them as extensions, other aspects of himself, as being fellow facets of the same reality.'

(Humphreys, 1951, p.91, Italics mine)

The argument against a personal quest for spiritual salvation through detachment and disassociation from the human condition is elaborated by Evans-Wentz in Tibetan Yoga and Secret Doctrines (1981). He states that the "ethical incongruity of an eternal Heaven for the elect among human beings and an eternal Hell for the damned finds no place in the Doctrine of the Buddha. So long as there is one being, even the lowliest, immersed in suffering and sorrow, or in ignorance, there remains one note of disharmony which cannot but effect all beings, since all beings are One; and until all are liberated there cannot possibly be true bliss for any" (p. 11).

It is notable that when the Buddha attained Nirvana, he renounced his state of spiritual immunity from the tribulations of earthly life "to preach his wisdom for the welfare of mankind...there was probably a struggle between the joy and calm of attainment and the recognition of the needs of others..." (Parrinder, 1977, p. 10).

In conclusion, the problem of tanha does not justify the suppression of sexuality and the advocacy of celibacy. The attitude of tanha - self-centeredness at the expense of others - is antithetic to both human love and spiritual love. It is an egoistic condition that reflects the lack of emotional evolvment in a human being, and is not a problem that is unique to the laity or clergy. Therefore, it cannot be assumed that because sexual desire can arouse feelings

of lust and craving--tanha, the problem reflects on the nature of human sexuality rather than on the personality of the individual. It is not logical to assume that a marital relationship is inferior to the celibate life because of the complexity of male-female relating. And, it is not logical to assume that a celibate life will allow an individual to transcend the need for emotional integration that is implicit in sexual relating. The challenge of a marital relationship must be examined as an advanced problem in the scheme of creation - a premise that is substantiated by references to the transcendence of duality in sex which are found in Eastern and Western holy scriptures.

Sex and Sin

At the seminar in Sri Lanka, the author presented a theory concerning the conflict between sexuality and spirituality in Buddhism and Christianity. The theory proposed that sexuality and spirituality far from being antithetical, are interdependent factors in the scheme of Creation. An analysis of passages from biblical and canonical texts herein substantiates this thesis, by demonstrating that ancient scriptures contradict the sexual repression promulgated by religious dogma.

In the proposed theory, the Western concept of God's Plan and the Eastern concept of the process of Consciousness¹ are viewed as two versions of the same fundamental scheme of Creation; the Kingdom of Heaven correlates to Nirvana, and Original Sin correlates to Karma. (See Fig. 2)

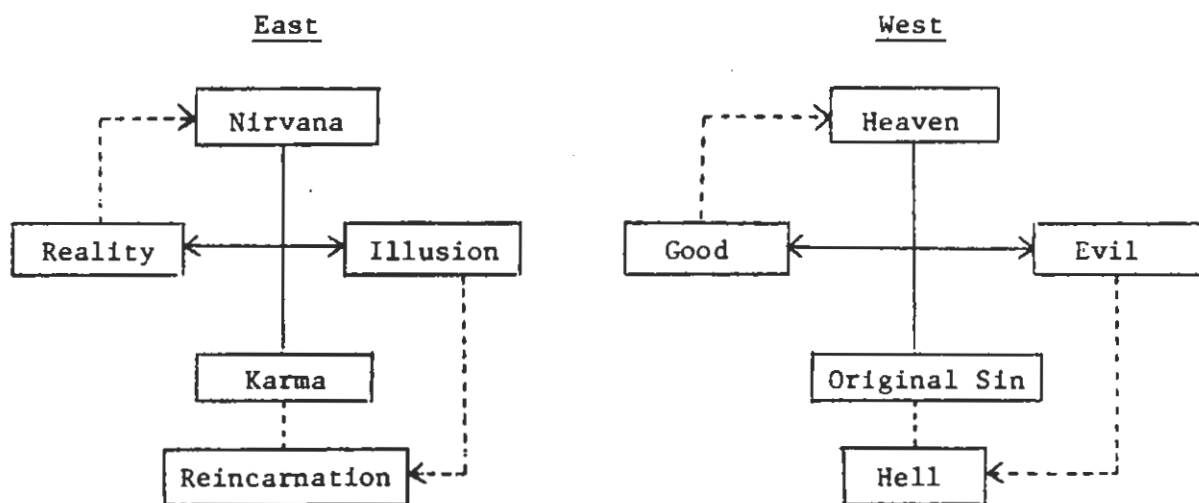


Fig. 2 East and West Parallel Schemes for Human Development

¹ In the Eastern schemes of Consciousness, Evolution is viewed as a process of psychic development which can be significantly effected by individual will. Stages of consciousness are defined, giving the scheme a meta-physical dimension.

The prevailing fatalistic attitude toward sex has its basis in religious scriptures and can be traced to its origins in Eastern and Western versions of the genesis of the human race.

In his paper, "The Buddhist Doctrinal Point of View on Human Sexuality" (1982), Dr. P.D. Premasiri relates a legend from the Buddhist cannon, which describes the transformation of the human race from an early non-physical state to a mature physicality. The legend parallels the evolvement process of Adam and Eve in the biblical Genesis, and indicates the occult (concealed) origin of the association between sex and sin:

In the female appeared the distinctive features of the female, in the male those of the male. Then truly did woman contemplate man too closely, and man woman....passion arose and burning entered their body. And beings seeing them so doing threw, some, sand, some, ashes, some, cowdung, crying: Perish foul one! How can a being treat a being so? (Dialogues of the Buddha, Sacred Books of the Buddhists, Part III, Vol. 4, pg.85)

In the above canonical passage the male and female are depicted attaining a stage in the human evolutionary process, in which their physical bodies have materialized to a level of function involving the awakening of the sex instinct. This new phase of human development is a threatening spectacle to other beings. The transformation is an initiation -- a dramatic step forward for the entire race, a fearful step involving a new complexity of the human psyche that will require the struggle of millenia for integration. It involves fear of the unknown, and fear of a specifically problematic phase

of existence. The reaction of "beings" to the initiation of sexuality can be perceived as an inevitable response to a change in the pattern of human development that breaks the existing thresholds of human experience.

The cosmic plan of human evolution consists of a series of initiations. In Eastern thought, initiations are critical points in the scheme of Consciousness. The theme of reincarnation, karma, and initiations is also indicated in biblical passages. From this standpoint, it is apparent that all beings including spiritual Masters such as the Buddha and Jesus have had to undertake Karmic liabilities in a succession of earthly lives in order to fulfill their roles in the plan of Creation. Therefore the scheme of Karma (akin to the liability of Original Sin) is an inevitability, as articulated in Buddhism: Beliefs and Practices in Sri Lanka by Lyn De Silva (1980): "The Law of Karma may be described as the Law of Cause and Effect." De Silva emphasizes that "no God can interfere with this law. It is a law that holds good in every department of the universe. No one can therefore escape or disregard this law..." (p.56).

It is important to note that the Law of Karma poses a formidable challenge for the evolvment of every human being, but it does not carry the onus of sin and eternal damnation that pervades Western religion. Evans-Wentz (1981) explains that "the belief that one part of the whole can enjoy happiness for eternity while another part eternally suffers misery of the most terrible character conceivable, is quite unthinkable to a Buddhist; for him no states of sangsaric (repetitive cycles) existence, in heavens, hells, or worlds, are

other than karmic and, therefore, of but limited duration" (p. 11).

The confusion that sex is intrinsically sinful has no basis in biblical scripture. Sex did not cause karma. But rather, the initiation of sexuality and earthly karma (symbolically termed original sin) occurred simultaneously, and have consequently been interpreted as a direct cause and effect relationship. A literal interpretation of the Bible reveals that the sin, or the initiation, was the attainment of knowledge by Adam and Eve, knowledge which resulted in sexual awareness and earthly karma. It is not logical that knowledge would be a sinful human faculty. This substantiates the premise that the "sin" is symbolic, signifying initiation, which although problematic is basically a positive innovation in human development.

Adam and Eve, having disobeyed the Lord and eaten from the tree of knowledge, open their eyes and become aware of good and evil. They are embarrassed by their nudity and cover themselves. Here a correlation is designated between knowledge (mental development), sexuality (indicated by self-consciousness about their genitalia), and spiritual values (a sense of good and evil). These three components of psychic development appear significant in that incipient phase of evolution. It is the hypothesis of this discussion that these psychical components, the mental, the spiritual, and the sexual, are interlinked and interdependent.

This premise is supported by the book of Genesis, where the course of human evolution was revealed to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Lord gave them a warning in an attempt to hold off a quantum transformation in Consciousness - the beginning of a Karmic struggle

for the spiritual perfection of the human race: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for on the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The serpent in the Garden then proclaimed, "Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." And the Lord acknowledged, "Behold, the man is become as one of us...."

Here it is evident that the Lord has accepted that man is as a god, possessing knowledge, sexuality, and a sense of good and evil, indicating that these might be faculties which are an integral part of the phase of existence that man has entered.

The Buddha and Freud

There is a logical connection between Siddhartha Gotama, the Buddha and Sigmund Freud in relation to their profound influence upon the Consciousness of the human race: (See Fig. 3)

1. The Buddha converted religion into psychology
2. Freud added to psychology, a sexological foundation

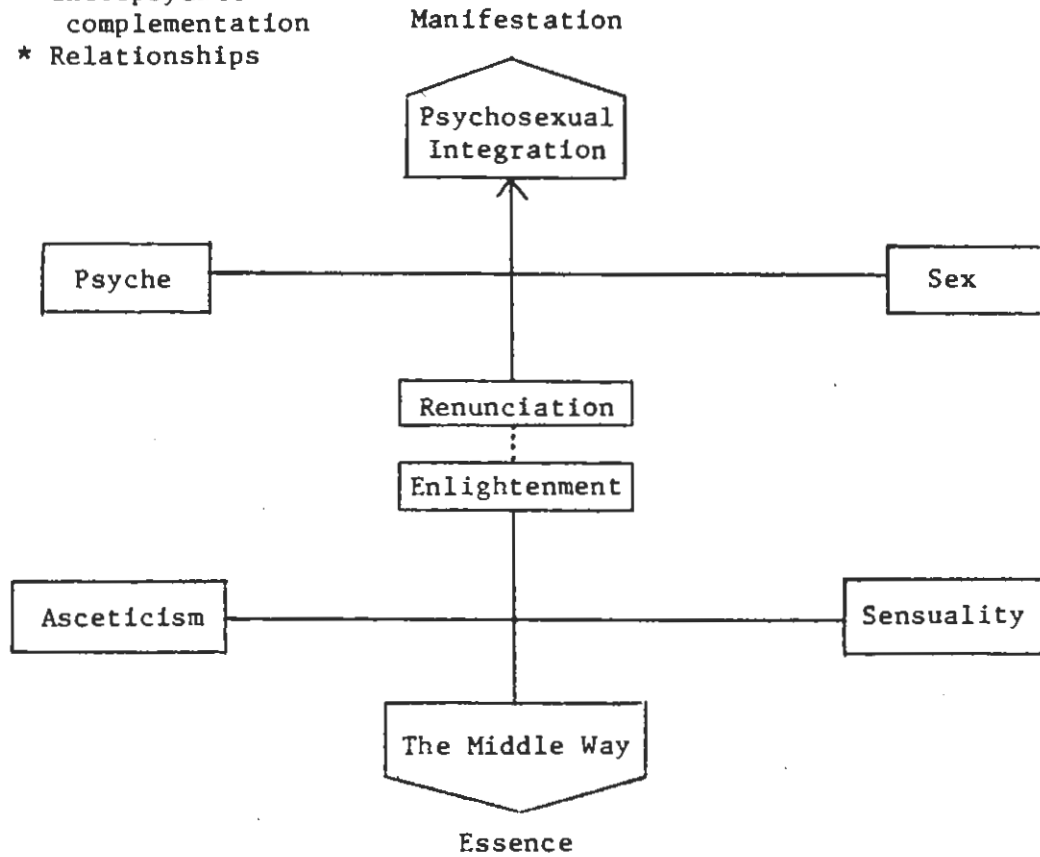
The Buddha, well trained in the Hindu tradition, revolted against the Hindu priests of the Brahman caste because they had created an elitist religious order which did not serve the people. He perceived the necessity to end the people's dependency upon God and gods, upon an eternal Soul, and upon the Brahman priests. The mysteries of spirituality "had degenerated into mystification with magic and divination" widely practiced. "Religion had become a technique for cajoling or coercing..." (Smith, 1958, p. 93).

The Buddha's approach to religion was "psychological...in contrast to metaphysical. Instead of beginning with the universe and closing in on man's place in it, Buddha invariably began with man, his problems, his nature, and the dynamics of his development" (Smith, 1958, p. 97). The Buddha converted religion into psychology --a therapy of Consciousness, that might help people to live experientially - by their wits - in order to develop their mental capacities and be able to sense a godly essence within, rather than adulating external forces.

Progression of Consciousness

Phase 2: Freudian

- * Interpsychic complementation
- * Relationships



Phase 1: Buddhism

- * Intrapsychic individualization
- * Introspection

Fig. 3 Sequential Steps in the Transformation of Human Consciousness

Apparently he sensed that the power of the sex instinct was overwhelming in relation to the mental faculties developed at that point in the evolution of human consciousness. For this reason he may have had to suppress sexuality in his time, although this contradicts his advocacy of The Middle Way which includes sensuality (See Fig. 4). Basically, this approach to life required moderation --a balance "between the extremes of asceticism and sensuality" (Parrinder, 1977, p. 9). This model for Consciousness fosters development of the discriminatory powers of the individual-- the will.

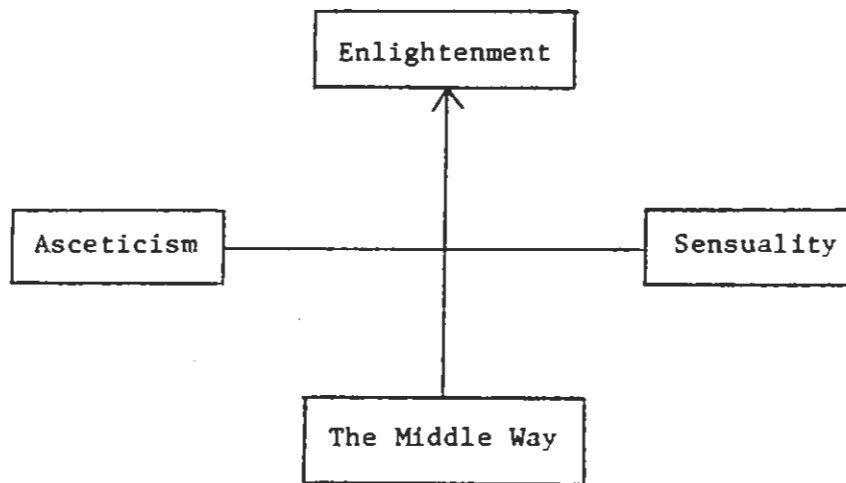


Fig. 4 Principle of Buddhism

The principle of psychic balance is fundamental to the concept of The Middle Way, therefore it is unlikely that the Buddha believed that sexuality had to be eradicated, and that celibacy was essential for spirituality. If the eradication of sexuality was accomplished, the emphasis of the psyche would shift from a balance between asceticism and sensuality to the extreme of asceticism, destroying the principle and dynamicism of The Middle Way.

The Buddha was also undoubtedly aware of the fact that the eradication of sexuality would have been inconsistent with the destined role of human sexual function for the polarization of psychic and cosmic energies as defined in the Hindu-Yogic tradition. For example, the complete scheme of sexual function is symbolically depicted in Hindu art by gods coupling with the goddess Shakti. She represents the female principle of Cosmic energy, and "the erotic dieties symbolize the transcendence of apparant dualities.... The commingling of the individual with the highest spirit, or universal soul...an inexhaustible storehouse of energy...thereby renewing oneself and experiencing indescribable joy" (Burrows, 1972, p.35-36, Italics mine). Here the male and female are interdependent for the complete chemistry of sexual response; they transcend duality --separateness--and are one.

Considering that the Buddha may have adjusted his concepts to the specific problems of his time, it is notable that he allowed for the possibility of contradiction:

Believe nothing because a so-called wiseman said it.

Believe nothing because a belief is generally held.

Believe nothing because it is written in ancient books.

Believe nothing because it is said to be of divine origin.

Believe nothing because someone else believes.

Believe only what you yourself judge to be true.

(L. De Silva, 1980, p. 54)

It is evident that the Buddha's radical revolt against existing concepts was not a negation of life or spiritual truths, but rather an attempt to pivot the Consciousness of people away from all beliefs and practices that inhibited development of the mind and will. The Buddha believed that the awakened mind would find its way back to essential earthly and spiritual themes in the due course of time: "Be ye lamps unto yourselves....Work out your own salvation with diligence" (Burtt, 1955, p. 49-50).

Freud

Two thousand years after the Buddha began converting religion into an internalized psychology, Sigmund Freud added a sexological base to human science. Freud was concerned that there were many people who had "passed through the process of human cultural development" but for whom "sexuality remained a weak spot" (1905-1975, p. 15).

An echo of the ageless struggle between sexuality and spirituality is found in the conflict between Freud and C. J. Jung. Jung's interest in metaphysics put him in opposition to Freud's emphasis on sexuality in psychoanalytic theory. Freud was unwavering in his conviction that sexual function was the polarizing force of the entire psyche. He wrote, "It would...be sacrificing all that we have gained...from psychoanalytic observation if we were to...water down the meaning of the concept of libido...equating it with psychical instinctual forces in general. The distinguishing of sexual instinctual impulses from the rest receives strong support from the assumption...that there is a special chemistry of sexual function" (1905-1975, p. 84, Italics mine).

From his clinical experience Freud surmised that libidinous energy could stabilize the entire psyche if properly discharged in sexual activity; but if improperly discharged, libidinous energy could have a toxic effect on the human system. Freud therefore concluded that no neurosis is possible in the presence of a normal sex life. He stated that the "specific or adequate activity" which "will...abolish the whole of somatic excitation present...must

absolutely be carried into operation" (1896-1950, pp.97-98).

Here Freud views the sex act as an essential rejuvenatory function. He identifies a libidinous form of energy which can potentially stabilize the psyche, a concept which strikes close to the earliest scriptural commentaries on sexual function. The Hindu concept of polarization and renewal is notably similar in theme. From this standpoint the esoteric symbolism of the goddess Shiva as the female force of cosmic energy which merges with human energy, can be associated with Freud's concept of vaginal orgasm. Vaginal orgasm in this context would refer to a more complete degree of orgasmic function. Here the gap between science and metaphysics begins to close.

The theme of polarization of the psyche which was vital to Freud's sexological theory (and to the Reichian school of Psychology) has been a central theme in Tantric rites. Polarized sexual function enabled "each participant to recognize and take possession of the complementary sexual components within him or herself which normal social roles obliterate" (Rawson, 1981, p. 72).

The scheme of psychic polarization through sexual harmony is also indicated in the Holy Bible:

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:24-25, Italics mine).

This brings the historical period from Buddha to Sigmund Freud full cycle. The Buddha looked away from the heavens and instigated a level of self awareness that would enable people to manifest their earthly destiny. Freud provided a focus upon psychosexual integration and arrived at a point where he realized that science had to consider the metaphysical implications of human development. (See Fig. 5)

Freud became interested in the phenomenon of telepathy because of its implications for human relating. He believed that "telepathy itself predisposed a special sensitiveness, based on a close emotional bond, between two people of such a nature that if anything untoward (...not fortunate) happened to one of them the news of it would immediately be perceived by the other" (Jones, 1957, p. 381).

The evidence of higher sensory capacities led Freud to conclude that science must be ready to consider the unknown dimensions of human experience. Freud was "far from being inclined to dismiss" metaphysical levels of experience. He felt that "they called for thorough investigation. And even if still more extraordinary 'spiritualistic' phenomena could be demonstrated we should be prepared to accept them and to make any modifications of existing natural laws 'without deviating from our faith in the universal connection of the world' " (Jones, 1957, p. 398).

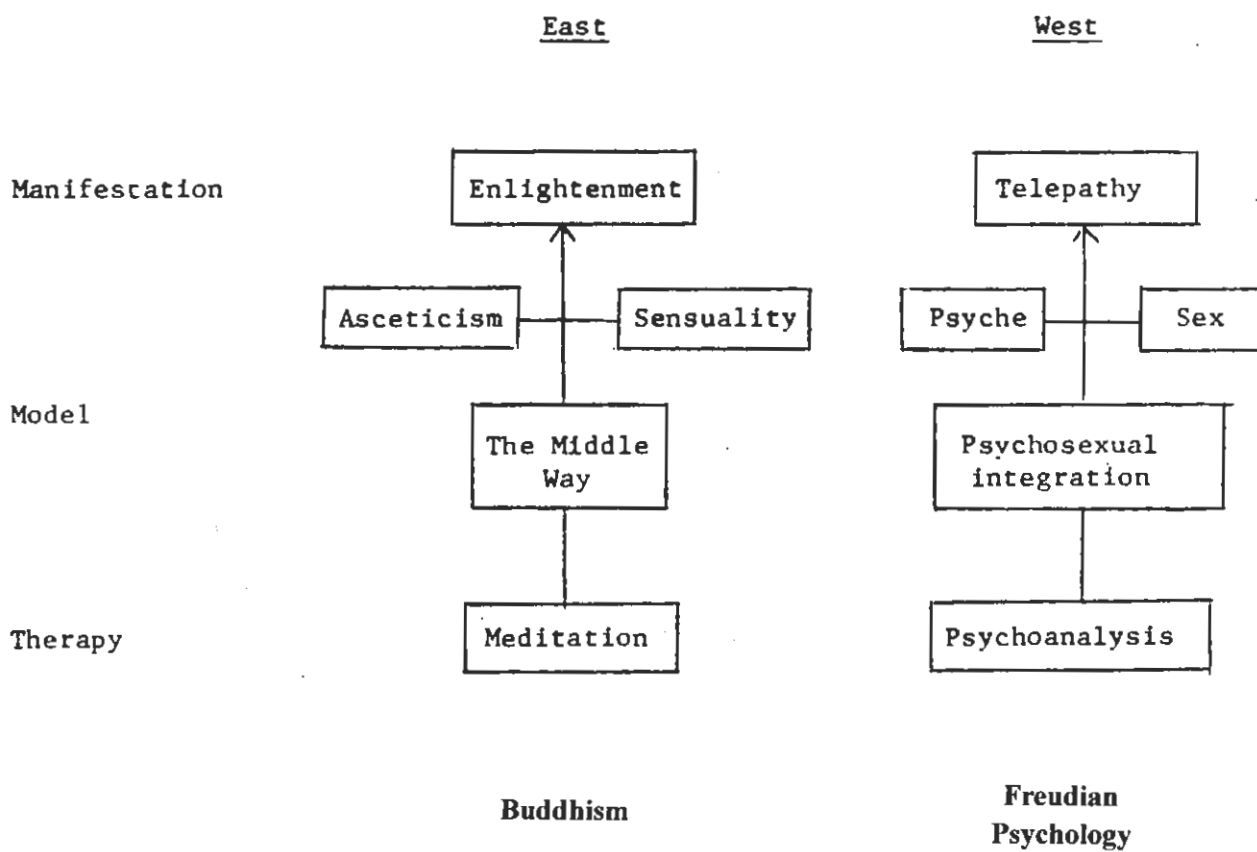


Fig. 5 Buddhist and Freudian Therapeutic Models

Conclusion

A reexamination is necessary of religious dogma which has dictated that sexuality is a lowly function involving the baser human instincts, and that the discipline of celibacy is essential for spiritual evolvment. Religious scriptures and sexological research indicate that sexual function is crucial for a polarization process that stabilizes and rejuvenates the entire psyche. From this standpoint it is evident that the sublimation of sexuality, which may have facilitated mental development in an earlier phase of human evolution, is an impediment to complete psychic development. In summation, the complexities of male-female relating which were considered a distraction from spiritual goals in early Buddhism and Christianity, may be the challenge of Consciousness in this age.

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