

## THE ART OF LOVING SELF

By Kerri Ryan

There was a Vanessa Amorosi song last year on airplay which had the line "I spent years really hating me, longing to be friends" and thought I totally relate to that and know many other women who can also claim to have lived a life of, if not hatred, then lack of love for themselves and their bodies.

How does this happen to so many women? I've been aware of my self loathing for as long as I can remember. My overweight round body has been my excuse to not participate fully in life, to not realize my potential, to not enter into long term relationships, to have no abundance, to settle for less than what I deserved – after all, what man would choose someone fat to love, I certainly wouldn't. I have never been bigger than a size 14, but in my mind's eye, I was huge and unlovable. In my battle with weight that would never leave through dieting, I came to understand that it was because I didn't love myself that my body became a reflection of what I thought about me. I didn't love me, so I created a body that resembled 'unlove'.

My investigations into why I didn't love myself have taken me on a huge journey encompassing most of my life. Parental relationships loom large in the shaping of esteem in the life of a girl or any child for that matter. My mother carried incredible unworthiness and still does to this day, together with an obsession like attitude to every morsel that goes in her mouth. My post war patriarchal father believed in educating the boys but girls will just grow up to have babies and live in the suburbs – won't they? Growing up in Brisbane in the 60's and 70's I had no role model of feminine success to reflect on. Women hardly even held down jobs, let alone became successful in their own right.

I listened to a psychotherapist at a conference recently who explained that boys develop an innate sense of self esteem as part of their milestone achievements at around the age of 3. Girls don't develop in the same way. Many other factors must come into play for females to develop this same sense of self. This was a light bulb moment for me. Men generally, seem to possess an innate sense of entitlement and self worth that women will often struggle to achieve throughout their whole lives. I had never heard this before, but it explains so much about why women don't naturally develop healthy self worth and why mothers need to model this to their daughters and sons.

So working by the age of 15, I couldn't wait to embark on the rite of passage that sees so many young people head overseas and test their maturity outside the stifling familial ties that bind. I clearly didn't fit the mold in my own family and wanted desperately to escape. London and Europe and anywhere other than Brisbane were dreams come true for this naïve 20 year old and I reveled in the freedom those opportunities presented. I indulged in cigarettes, alcohol, sex and drugs, trying to fill the abyss of my neediness with copious sexual partners, looking for love but only getting laid. Smoking dope and having sex were wonderful ways to escape and I repeated this pattern for many years to come, not understanding that being out of my body in a drug induced high while having sex enabled me to avoid the loathing I felt for myself and my unacceptable overweight body.

Then I met a man and fell in love. And surprisingly to my mind, he fell in love with me. 26 years of age in London, smack, bang, hopelessly in love with this 6' 2" gorgeous man in a

double breasted suit. I fell and I fell hard. Within five weeks I was engaged. Within six months I was married. But holy mother, what had I married. I brought him back to my family in Australia - this violent, alcoholic, emotional cripple who my parents saw through in an instant. "Love is blind" was never truer for me. Then began this horror filled marriage of alcohol fuelled abuse that saw me lose myself as I spiraled into blackness, desperately in love, but unable to understand how someone who said they loved you could inflict so much pain.

The marriage lasted 20 months. I fortunately had never known violence against women and wasn't prepared to wear it. I walked away, heart broken, my belief in love and my innocence taken from me. In the healing that took place in the ensuing years I came to understand that I attracted to me exactly the mirror of how broken I was. It wasn't about him, it was about me and how I felt about myself. When you get that, when you realize you attract to you exactly the energy that you put out, then you have the power to change your life. Many women choose to not see this vibrational match to the men they attract into their lives and remain a victim, repeating the same scenario over and over again. The face may be different, but the pain is the same. The Universe in its infinite wisdom offers you as many opportunities as you need to wake up. If you are deeply asleep, consider this knowledge a "wake up call".

I spent many years trying to understand why I was so broken, why I hated myself, why I attracted men who were losers. An examination of my upbringing didn't include any sexual or physical abuse. Sure my parents were playing out victim and oppressor roles in middle class suburbia, but there was no alcoholism or violence and I was well cared for and loved and about as normal as every other kid.

At about age 30, divorced and disillusioned, a light went on and my spiritual search commenced. It was 1991, I had moved to Melbourne and I was living the new age man! Crystal shops, incense, tarot cards, reiki, dream catchers – I took to it like topping to ice cream. In hindsight I had began my search for answers, answers to all those big questions, but at the time, I was just trying to heal this deep gaping wound wrought from a failed marriage and a belief that all men were bastards. At this stage I didn't even understand the depth of disconnection and lack of love I had for my own self. I see now that that is pretty normal. In fact, most people will never examine their wounds, for to do so means you dig into the depths of your own soul in order to find out who you are. That is a journey the majority will never make – it's much too painful. Much easier to live life on the surface, never bring out the steam cleaner to dislodge the crud at the base of the fibres. Better to just lift the edge of the carpet and quickly shove the detritus underneath and pray to god no-one sees through your damaged facade. No-one usually does because they are too busy peeking through the cracks of their own broken lives.

I never knew when I decided to go there. Perhaps it was a soul decision made long before I took physical form, and somehow I think it was, but life just seems to conspire a set of circumstances that are catalysts for growth and my failed marriage certainly was that. I sometimes lament the fact that I never married early in life and had a couple of kids and partnered with a good man and lived a somewhat 'normal' existence, but that wasn't the path my soul had chosen this lifetime. No, it chose to walk the 'road less travelled' and it has been lonely and childless on the one hand but rich and full and free to experience what many women and men miss out on, their lives an endless cycle of work and caring for others.

It's quite strange when you embark on a quest to find something, without knowing what it is you are looking for. The noble Knight Percival's quest for the grail is the allegory that many

use when they are seeking to explain the search for knowledge, wisdom, god, spirit or just plain self. It is intangible, indescribable but becomes an awakening of the heart. I remember speaking to one of my spiritual teachers when I was training to become a Reiki channel, and I said for the first time I was truly beginning to grasp the meaning of unconditional love, that somewhere when you drop the ego, love encompasses all. It was a concept for which I had only a theoretical understanding, but somewhere deep in my soul I had begun to heal. And like the tightly closed rose bud that begins to unfurl, I see those nascent beginnings of heart opening are like the unleashing of an energy, the light of which is a salve for the soul. And like those knights who ecstatically witnessed the grail's appearance in the court of King Arthur, who are so touched by the elixir of love that they will quest until their death, so too I made my pledge.

If there is a reason why one embarks upon a spiritual journey, then it must be the aphrodisiacal desire to immerse oneself in the experience of love. There is nothing greater to aspire to in all of existence. Once having tasted its magnificence, then you are a slave to its ever greater unfolding. The yogis, sadhus and mystics of every religion speak about this transcendental experience of nirvana, of melding with higher consciousness of leaving behind the physical to enter into the realms of bliss. I tell you I have tasted its sweetness and am committed to searching for another hit, just as intently as any heroin addict.

What inspires and divines my soul now is the power of the liminal high achieved through the joining of two partners in the act of sacred sex. While most people will only ever experience the pedestrian variety of physical sex, they will still remember when their hearts were first open to that special one in their lives, when it was all still new and they couldn't wait to lose themselves in their partner's eyes, their mouth and the touch of naked skin. In that physical joining when two hearts are open and seeing only the most beautiful in each other, an incredible high ensues, promising to last forever and cementing a bond that joins people in what used to be a lifetime commitment. Sadly the flush fades and the rose that is the open heart, slowly closes in the reality of everyday life, losing the beauty first found when love was new.

Eastern belief systems and the practices of Tantra and sacred sexuality are currently flooding a western audience with the promise of recapturing the ecstatic high of love between two people. By using that most powerful of energies – sexual energy - as a pathway to an elevated experience of the divine, the spiritual and physical join in a sacred outpouring that not only reconnects and heals the couple involved, but offers a taste of ecstasy. While the west is just starting to understand and experience the practices of Tantra, the Hindu, Buddhist and Taoist teachings have for millennia understood the harnessing of sexual energy as a means of seeking enlightenment. But please understand that what western Tantra teachers are offering has nothing to do with the traditional religious practices of Tantra.

Traditional Tantra refers to a specific set of beliefs and practices such as meditation and breathing exercises intended to develop enlightened spiritual qualities and to awaken pathways to the divine by arousing and harnessing energy within the body. Tantra honours sexual energy and the sacred union of male and female as a pathway to the divine, but its focus has nothing to do with intercourse. Modern western Tantra takes aspects of these ancient teachings and uses them to aid couples or singles to enhance their sexuality and lovemaking skills, and to heal relationship issues.

In Tantra, the aim of many of these practices is to enhance and manipulate the life force known as prana, chi or ki. All refer to the same vital energy that enters the body through the

breath and circulates as an electrical energy or current with the aim of achieving an enlightened sexual experience, which Chia and Chia describe as:

*"...having an inward orgasm where the orgasm actually travels through all the organs, glands and nervous system, thrilling and revitalizing them with the life-force of sexual, creative and regenerative energy."*

I am fortunate to have experienced this blissful joining with one partner, and it is indeed a spiritual act equally as much as a sexual one. You are reminded that outside of any religious beliefs or practice of doctrine, there is simply divinity, able to be accessed by anyone using the life force granted to us all with a partner or without. In its most simple context what I experienced was divine love, not from a partner, but from a spiritual joining of two energies.

LOVE: such a small four lettered word that carries infinite potential for self realisation and growth. Why then have I spent a lifetime judging and hating myself and shutting the door to those who would seek to love me?

I do believe that we are all an act of love brought forth from the loins of the creator who or whatever that may be for you. And as I seek on a daily basis to observe love in action, be it in the gurgle of a happy baby or the magnificence of a sunset, I learn to become more gentle with myself. I learn that the ego keeps me in judgment of my imperfections, crazily believing that I must be perfect to be worthy of love. As my harshest critic I begin to see a softening and a wisdom entering into the inner conversation that has kept me separate from the thing that I desire the most. The truth is that you can't attract love into your life unless you love yourself warts and all, or in my case, large behind. I grow tired of the war I wage within and now only want peace and love and to quest to discover even greater exalted experiences of divinity. Now I know that this is my purpose, the same as it is for everyone. No matter where you are on your journey to love, the focus always remains with the self. Cut yourself some slack, give yourself a break, forgive everything you are not proud of and just, in this moment, feel the love that is always and ever available to you. Then go out and share your loving self with the rest of the world and shine. Namaste.



So many loving responses from people out there in FB world. How amazing that this medium has come into play in the 21st century where we can connect the web of love and hold hands all across the planet, in synchronicity and open hearts, right in the privacy of our own homes. It brings tears to my eyes to know that the energy and vibration of this love which for me comes in the form of the goddess is shared by so many others. This is far from mainstream friends, what I get up to and the beliefs I have as priestess, have seen me persecuted and brutally killed in other lifetimes for daring to speak that which wasn't the party line. As I'm sure it has for many of you. Strange, when it was only ever a message of love and healing. So thank you for your well wishes at a time when I personally, and the planet itself is going through such monumental changes at such a rapid fire pace. I hold onto the fact that this tidal wave surge of love will find root in the hearts of many many people and that instead of living in hiding, we can live in the light. That which needs to die and fall away is happening and it is painful, but it is so necessary and it allows for incredible new growth. Thank you everyone as we all hold hands together. Much love - Kerri, Priestess of Goddess