

Human Sexuality

It is almost impossible to objectively discuss this subject without getting bugged down by issues surrounding gender identity, freedom of choice, right to self-expression and empowerment. In countries that are heavily influenced by the Abrahamic religions, it appears as if the fear, or fascination, with imageries of sexual relations (intercourse) are always lurking beneath the surface, in the minds of those engaged in the discussion. And these subliminal images produce an effect that colors people's position on the subject, even before the discussion has begun. Other religious cultures appear to be more accommodating or show indifference to personal choices in this matter. Therefore, any comprehensive discussion/examination of human sexuality should start with a thorough understanding of the society's mores and values regarding sexual relations and intercourse. Especially since it appears that the crown of most human endeavors is to attain some form of intimacy in relationship.

For most human beings, male or female, the ultimate purpose of life is to become engaged in an intimate relationship (i.e. marriage), which includes sexual intercourse, though usually couched in terms of procreation. Nevertheless, even pre-modern societies recognized that intimate relationship between a husband and wife was not always for the purpose of procreation. This drive is present in children's stories in which the prince and princess overcome adversity to "*live happily ever after*". Many successful leaders or figures, upon attaining the pinnacle of achievement, almost invariably chase after some form of intimacy. Though this may manifest in abhorrent sexual behavior, or profligacy. Historically, sexual intercourse has also played a role in some pagan fertility rituals, and in acts of military dominance.

Therefore, it is not surprising that embedded in the psyche of most people is an immediate assumption that sexual intercourse must inevitably occur in any close and intimate relationship. And this assumption involuntarily conjures images, in the mind's eye, whenever topics regarding sexuality or gender relationships arise.

In societies influenced by the Abrahamic religions, the attitudes and imagery are influenced by the passages from the Book of Leviticus, in the Bible, which explicitly *forbids a man from lying with another man "as with a woman"* (Leviticus 18:22). Leviticus 20:13 also classifies the act as *an abomination*. That is, something that causes extreme disgust, or loathing. An abomination also implies deviation from nature or something that is considered an ill omen that can incur the wrath of the deities. It is noteworthy that this stern biblical pronouncement does not explicitly mention same-sex relations among women. Although later Talmudic scholars discouraged woman-to-woman intercourse, they did so without the same biblical severity as when it involves the male acts. Another noteworthy paradox is that although the Talmud (the Jewish oral law) uphold the biblical or rabbinical restrictions against same sex intercourse, they do not condemn same-sex *desires* or orientations. They only prohibit the related acts. The Christian faith has, by and large, developed its attitude from the same, or similar passages of the Old and New Testaments of the bible.

While the Quran and Hadith condemn same-sex acts, historical Islamic societies often tolerated or embraced homoerotic poetry, literature, and practices. The *Hanafi* School, for example, goes further. They maintain that since male same-sex acts are not mentioned as punishable acts in the *Qur'ān*, they should be excluded from the *hadd* category of sexual offence¹. Therefore, they argue that sodomy should be

¹ This covers all unlawful or illicit sexual intercourse outside of a valid marriage, including adultery, fornication, and rape . Or the crime of falsely accusing a chaste person of illicit sexual intercourse (zina) without producing four

punished at the judge's discretion rather than by the fixed *hadd*. Furthermore, they argue that this should also apply in the administration of *Shari'a law*, which is based on the interpretation of the *Qur'an* and the *Hadith*. However, most contemporary Muslims follow the interpretation of the *Qur'an* by the larger Sunni and Shia sects, who believe that homosexuality is the most punishable sin, and deserves the death sentence as well as calamity from God.

The conflicting interpretations and exceptions seen in the Abrahamic religion's attitude on this matter raises a critical question. "*Why should an act that is driven by the same desires within a man or a woman, be judged differently?*" Creation's laws are neutral, and are triggered strictly by the purity, or lack of it, in the desire, motivation and thoughts leading to the actions, regardless of the gender of the perpetrator.

Perhaps we may detect a more logical consistency in the attitudes of other cultures on this matter. And from these we may arrive at a perspective that aligns more with creation's laws. So, let us now take a brief look at other tradition's attitudes on this subject.

For example,

Hinduism, Daoism and Native American / Indigenous Traditions. Sexuality is widely viewed as legitimate goals of human life. They acknowledge diverse sexualities and gender fluidity. Ancient texts like the *Kamasutra* treat sexual intercourse as a refined art and a science. While the harmonization of Yin (feminine) and Yang (masculine) energies is viewed as the fundamental driver of life. Daoist practices often incorporate sexual energy (*Jing*) for physical vitality and spiritual longevity. Thus, sexual intercourse is associated with a potent spiritual force that when properly released can lead to upbuilding. By the same token, it can lead to disastrous consequences when misused, abused or handled carelessly.

Hinduism and Native Americans also feature the concept of a "third gender", in which individuals are categorized, either by themselves or by society, as neither a man nor a woman. Thus, acknowledging non-binary identities as roles that exist outside the traditional male/female binary. *Although these cultures are accepting of gender fluidity, they do not have a single unified stance on homosexuality. So, even here, views range from acceptance in specific roles and rituals, while maintaining cultural conservatism as the norm.*

Confucianism and African Traditions.: Sexuality is more heavily focused in these cultures on social harmony, filial piety, and familial lines. Here, sexuality is heavily channeled into marriage and procreation to ensure the continuity of the family and the community. Therefore, *it is understandable if in these cultures, homosexuality would be deemed an anathema, because it goes against procreation, and threatens continuity of the family.*

Buddhism. Buddhism generally approaches sexuality not as a moral failing but as an attachment that ties individuals to the cycle of rebirth. Therefore, the emphasis for practitioners is to avoid "sexual misconduct" that can bind one to a cycle of rebirth. Where one's sexual desires can lead to such binding, they are encouraged to learn to practice celibacy. But this should be a voluntary choice, because enforced celibacy may place a cap on the outer manifestation, but not control the inner urges that have an equally devastating effect on the person's emotional and psychic state, as well as their ethereal environment.

credible witnesses. They are considered severe offenses that carry a fixed corporal punishment that under Sharia can range from flogging to stoning, depending on whether the offender is married or unmarried

Looked at from a Spiritual perspective, one can safely say that, of all the traditions reviewed above, only Buddhism suggests a clear path for arriving at a spiritually objective conclusion on this subject. While all others place a focus on the outer manifestation, and the human responses to the act, Buddhism places focus on the inner motivation for the act, and the associated spiritual consequences, good or bad. This is the key determinant in triggering the laws of creation. It also offers a spiritual perspective that applies equally to male-to-male, female-to-female, or male-to-female sexual relations (intercourse).

Conclusions

From this background, let us now try to identify the spiritual transgression(s), if any, that may be associated with homosexuality. For this, perhaps the words **unnatural** and **abuse/misuse** may serve as logical starting points. We should also review these words strictly from an objective perspective, devoid of biases or preconceived ideas.

Unnatural in its objective meaning implies going against the dictates of nature. So, the question is, how does homosexuality violate the dictates of nature? Especially since there is ample evidence of the natural existence of a "third gender" among human beings, though rare.

This is where we need to distinguish between the concept of gender and sexual intercourse. Gender is a concept or spiritual state that exists beyond the confines of the material world. Whereas sexual intercourse is confined to the material body and to the material world.

The sexual drive, as already mentioned, has a specific role that it plays in the promotion of human life on earth. And if that drive is diverted to acts that are inimical with its specified purpose, one can logically and fairly describe such acts as unnatural.

From what we have reviewed thus far, we have seen that the sexual drive has been recognized for millennia, as nature's design for the propagation of the species. It also harbors potential for the release of powerful spiritual energy for upbuilding. But if we are honest with ourselves, we have to admit that very few appreciate or even understand how to achieve the release of the pure spiritual force that is associated with the highly refined art or science of sexual intercourse. Therefore, it is fair to conclude that, when not serving the natural purpose of procreation, most sexual acts today are not in synch with nature's design.

From this perspective, one can conclude objectively that, if most human sexual relations fail to pass one or the other of the test for natural sexual activity; homosexuality definitely fails to pass both tests.

The second word, **misuse/abuse**, in this context, is closely associated with the word unnatural. An abuse or misuse occurs when someone uses something in a way that it was not designed for. Such misuse generally results in causing harm to the abuser and others affected by the abuse.

In the context of this article, we are best served if we can identify the harm caused a person, or others, by a sexual act. This should help us determine, in the most objective way, whether such act is an abuse or misuse of nature's design.

Again, there is ample evidence, from history up to modern times, of specific illnesses that are exclusively associated with excessive or unconventional engagements in the sexual acts. Although some may reject this correlation, is it illogical to see these illnesses as nature's way of trying to bring to our notice and consciousness, the harm caused to our person by such acts? In the absence of any logical rebuttal of this

idea, shouldn't prudence suggest heeding these telling signs of nature. This perhaps demonstrates the spiritual wisdom and objective practical path that Buddhism's perspective on homosexuality offers those who are trapped in this emotional challenge.

To repeat, without being judgmental, Buddhism acknowledges the dangers that such life style poses to binding one to the cycle of rebirth. But it also recognizes that people are born with inclinations that may not be healthy. And for such situations, it encourages a voluntary practice of celibacy. However, it must be quickly stressed that the advice to practice celibacy is for this specific circumstance. It is **not** to be interpreted that celibacy is the ideal path to spiritual growth for everyone. Such interpretation would go against nature's law of propagation of the species, and a gross misunderstanding and misapplication of the advice. In effect, celibacy should be a voluntary choice, when someone recognizes that it is perhaps the best way for bringing sexual urges, with which they are struggling, under control. Because otherwise they might run the danger of incurring more karma, by giving free reign to the urge. Also, such practice of celibacy does not necessarily result in the total extinguishing of the natural sexual drive in the person. It only helps to develop the inner will of the individual against succumbing to urges to their detriment. Also, although this is not mentioned in our summary of Buddhism's attitude to homosexuality, it is a well-established tenet of Buddhism that practically all reincarnations of human beings on earth are a bid to redeem mistakes from past misdeeds (i.e. karma), or to learn some new upbuilding lessons for our spiritual growth. And the only path to a successful incarnation on earth is for us to keep to the paths designed by nature, even if this means denying ourselves of our strong unnatural inner urges. Because, the probability is quite high that these are the karmic urges which we have reincarnated to try to overcome.

Closing Remarks.

A relationship between consenting adults, by definition, falls into the social category of "*victimless crime*". Therefore, the transgression should rest with the individuals' conscience, or acceptance of a violation of the spiritual principles governing this act. And, in accordance with their right to exercise free will, it is strictly left to them to choose to see, or not. However, the exercise of the gift of free-will does not override the Spiritual law of cause and effect. Free-will only applies to the freedom to choose to comply or not. This is unlike the case with animals and other creatures that are not endowed with free-will, and must comply with nature's dictates. For man, choosing not to comply with nature is what manifest as *the binding to the cycle of rebirth*. However, if one uses their influence, position, authority or enticement to encourage others to cultivate and indulge in the same passion, they thereby create victims, who through this influence may become trapped in the binding cycle of rebirth. For this, they will incur additional karma.

The fervor that this subject provokes, especially in those who are genuinely concerned about the debasement of noble sentiments in man, is understandable. Because they see this as resisting the slippery slope towards the gross immorality of a Sodom and Gomorrah on Earth. For such people, perhaps, we should all be reminded of Jesus' words in John 8.7, .."*Let He that is without sin among you, first cast a stone at her*" ... These words of Jesus did not condone the wrong done by the woman. Rather he drew attention to the hypocrisy of the crowd that wanted to stone the woman, for a guilt that they too harbored within, and perhaps practiced in secret. The same assessment would be quite applicable today regarding sexuality in modern times. Because, as it were, the majority of mankind is struggling inwardly and outwardly with the overactive and distorted sphinx of sexuality, regardless of whether we are in a conventional relationship or not.

Therefore, while one may be justifiably concerned about the moral state of the world, better success could perhaps be achieved through objective spiritual education, than through condemnation.