

Sex with the Lama

is not always a good idea neither for Lama nor partner

Lama Tendar Olaf Hoeyer, August 2017.



The picture shows the Zen master *Bodhidharma* with his ear in the hands of a courtesan...
(from John Steven's book: *Lust for Enlightenment*)

Ethics is not always a simple matter, when eroticism is involved. Erotic frustration and naked desire may destroy an otherwise beneficial relationship between student and Dharma-teacher. Since erotic Tantra does exist (*karma mudra*) as a legitimate form of practise (*sadhana*), where the students traditionally engage in a special erotic union with the Lama – or with his wife – as initiation, Sanskrit: *abhisheka*. Later, the yogi will find suitable partners for his or hers *sadhana*. It is of course not for monks nor nuns. Never the less, some people think, that it is also OK for the ordained, because the Tantra vows surpass Vinaya rules for monks and nuns. This opinion is not held in the larger monasteries. The learned Pandits have never been able to agree about this.

It is a difficult path for anyone, to use the area of eroticism to also become the solution for all such problems of letting go of attachment and identification with sex in order to gain insight, liberation and enlightenment. If eroticism is obsessive to someone, *karma mudra* **may** be applied. Because both the problem and the solution manifest simultaneously in the same mind at the same place, there are also erotic Tantra as a method. It is there naturally so to speak. This erotic union has to happen in a state of *samadhi*, that is meditative absorption. This method is therefore almost impossible to execute correctly. In other words: you have to try many times, before you succeed.

Within Tantra there is a hierarchic difference between Lama and student. So the Lama may easily misuse the student, if the master does not really hold mastership, but is unskilfully a victim of delusion, Sanskrit: *ahamkara* and *moha*.

To the poor unenlightened village Lama, it may not appear clear, what is liberating *karma mudra*, and what is sexual exploitation and self satisfaction. To several known 'masters' it also appear difficult to distinguish. The most notorious is the *Nyingma* Lama *Sogyal*

Rinpoche, otherwise mostly reputed for his book 'The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying'. Sogyal Rinpoche has collected a series of accusations against him about sexual exploitation of several of his students. A 10 million \$ lawsuit from 1994 was closed with a settlement, so we do not know the juicy details nor the size of the compensation.

(Read about this via these links:

www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2011/jul/01/lama-sex-abuse-sogyal-rinpoche-buddhist &
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sogyal_Rinpoche.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sogyal_Rinpoche))

The criticism of Sogyal Rinpoche has in August 2017 lead to his resignation from the leadership of his organisation 'Rigpa'. Read about this development here:

1) Sogyal Rinpoche's resignation:

www.tilogaard.dk/english/Sogyal_Rinpoche_resignation_letter_1_sr_1_etter_august_2017_eng-1.pdf.

2) The leadership of Rigpa's reaction:

www.tilogaard.dk/english/Sogyal_Rinpoche_resignation_Rigpa_board_reaction_letter_2_rigpa_letter_aug_2017_eng-1.pdf.

3) Press release from Rigpa:

www.tilogaard.dk/english/Sogyal_Rinpoche_resignation_Rigpa-press-statement-final-2017_08_11.pdf.

4) Read here Sogyal Rinpoche's students open letter of complaining:

www.tilogaard.dk/english/Sogyal_Rinpoche_students_complain_Letter_to_Sogyal_Lakar_14_06_2017.pdf.

Now also the Kagyu *Lama Norlha* in the USA have been accused of sexual exploitation of his female students for decades. This inspired his organisation to arrange a conference about sex and correct relationship between Dharma-teachers and their students:

<http://kagyu.com/introduction/ethics-policy>

(– please not that this Dharma centre is part of the 'alternative' 17th Karmapa *Ogyen Dordje*'s network. Lama Norlha is not in any relationship with the 'classical' 17th Karmapa *Thrinle Taye Dordje*, Tilogaard's 'protector' nor with his network.)

Lama Norlha was born in Kham (Eastern part of the ethnic Tibet) in 1935. 8 years of age, he entered a monastery. He escaped from Tibet in 1961. Lama Norlha was then 7 years in Kalu Rinpoche's monastery in Sonada in India. In 1976 he went to the USA and became the leader of the Dharma centre Kagyu Thubten Choling. He also visited Denmark. Allegedly, Lama Norlha has had many sexual relationships, since he arrived in the USA. Now, he is officially deposed and retired. It is a bit strange to hear about, but not so surprising for people, who know Tibetan culture.

These stories about sexually potent Tibetan Lamas with great erotic appetite, that appear to lack ability to let go of attachment and identification with passionate feelings (*kleshas*), pop up all the time. So,

this looks like a typical problem, that occur periodically. There is good reason to consider this problem and to take care. It is not always all right.

The problem in this kind of cases is of course, that we as bystanders cannot look through whether the case is sexual abuse or correct erotic Tantra.

It is always the students that complain and feel abused. Some times such students experience regret long time after the whole thing took place. We might presume, that they did not learn anything and they were unable to conduct Tantra correctly. Possibly, the Lama have tried to show them a special way to emancipation and enlightenment in a professional manner. We do not know. On the other hand, the Lama might misuse the hierarchical power situation to relate erotically to the student with an intent of personal gratification and orgasm, disregarding the students situation and keeping Bodhicitta out of it. In that case, there is **no** *samaya* or Tantra vow. We do not know, but the complaining students suffer much evil, because they have been caught up in a game, that they could not evaluate nor avoid, when it all happened. Later it appear to them, that they could have backed out. All in all, they are left with a feeling of shame. So even if the Lama did try to teach the students karma mudra, then apparently there was no success, and the students cannot help it, but experience abuse and regard the Lama as a sophisticated violator. The Dharma community, that they are part of, then also suffers and people leave.

It is not obvious, what is real or true. Such cases are difficult to unravel. It is typical though, that the abused students feel outrage, and that the Lama does not say much if anything at all, maybe because of *samaya* – or because it is simply all too stupid.

This is the reason, that erotic Tantra is rare indeed and difficult to accomplish. Also, it is not the ‘highest’ path. That of course is *Mahamudra*, where you will not engage with an erotic partner – where there is no erotic Tantra.

The wise Lama and Dharma-teacher will abstain from erotic relations with the students. As a principal rule it is unprofessional and may only be applied in very special cases, for instance if the Lama is married with the karma mudra, whereby the hierarchy to some extend is equalised.

In ancient India erotic Tantra was a tradition between the homeless wandering *sadhus* or ‘holy men’ and yogis. In their native environment the tradition worked well, because there was not much of private property, private life, family honour nor lasting relationships for such yogis. On the other hand, karma mudra have never worked well within organised religion in general nor in the monasteries in particular. The first Karmapa *Dysum Khyenpa* was in this way expelled from his Lama *Gampopa*’s monastery, because he conducted erotic Tantra within the monastery walls 900 years ago. It was not the first time nor the last that such expulsions happened.

What is ethically correct in connection with Tantra, may be utterly incorrect in a civil *samsara* connection. When someone cultivate eroticism, almost automatically also the strong passion of envy is invited and not only desire. Right in the heels of both follow naturally pride and anger. Also confusion will arise. But just as easily great sensitivity and openness may appear, so *Bodhicitta* is definitely a possibility, if you really go for it. Even erotic Tantra is designed to handle and overcome the invitation of eroticism to attachment and identification, then this art will just as easily lead to more of the same kind. Eroticism is seduction, so erotic Tantra may become completely seductive and be misused.



The picture shows Lama Norlha, that many Americans now hold in contempt. Lama Norlha though, is not necessarily a pig. He may have had a perception, that he was aiding his erotic partners to accomplish Bodhicitta. But we do not know. Just like the case with Lama Yeshe from *Kundreul Ling (Le Bost)* in France several years ago, this looks like a simple and extensive practise between a higher ranking person, that misuse a lower ranking person sexually. In the Tibet of Old, people would not have protested against such treatment, because you never know – maybe the Lama is a Buddha. Lama Norlha may have presumed, that the Americans think likewise.

It is also possible, that Lama Norlha was sexually frustrated, because he was a badly motivated monk – anyway his conduct was bad no matter what he thought. I presume though, that he did nothing criminally. The case is about lack of morality and bad ethics. The case is also a warning to everybody, that it is not only the Lama who carry a responsibility in relation to the students – the students also carry responsibility. They should not allow manipulation and seduction in the name of a religion. The students must secure that their integrity is respected. They also must secure that the Lama is qualified. Who else should do that? It is in itself an art to verify the reputation and qualifications of the Lama. The World is full of unenlightened people, and the Lamas are not always Buddhas.

The good news are, that the misuse was discovered, the Lama dismissed and everybody hopefully got wiser...

The bad news are, that we do not know whether Lama Norlha is innocent – or at least erring in his perception of the Americans. Maybe he was just too optimistic about the students engagement and ability. Maybe people of the West are too prudish. Maybe no one got any wiser...

On Tilogaard you cannot learn erotic Tantra. Actually, it is quite difficult to find a Dharma-teacher on this subject, if you are interested. The Magazine *Tricycle* has written about Lama Norlha:

<https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/kagyutubtencholingmonastery-working-sex-impropriety/>.

Read also: <https://tricycle.org/magazine/sex-sangha-again/>.

Read further: www.lionsroar.com/kagyutubtencholing-addresses-sangha-about-lama-norhla-rinpoches-sexual-misconduct-with-students/

Read also: www.lionsroar.com/confronting-abuse-power/.

This last link express a useful approach to this kind of problems. The typical ‘sexual predator’ – who is beyond dialogue – is also discussed.

Also Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche has commented on the issue of Sogyal Rinpoche by writing a rather lengthy paper: www.tilogaard.dk/english/Dzongsar_Khyentse_on_sex_with_the_Lama_August_2017.pdf. This paper is very important for any student of Buddhadharma.

Some people never learn

On the various website of the organisations directly connected to Lama Norlha and Sogyal Rinpoche there is no mention of sex scandals, even these two Lamas have made their formal exit from these organisations explicit and made excuses for their behaviour. It may seem that they did not leave at all. Quite strange – as if they are also in denial...

The same strange kind of attitude is also seen with the ‘alternative’ Jamgon Kongtrul *Lhabrang*. When you visit their websites, it is as if the Tulku has not left them, though he indeed did so more than a year ago in April 2016, stating that he did not feel like an incarnation of the previous Jamgon Kongtrul, and he would rather live his life without this organisation. Read about that here:

www.tilogaard.dk/english/Two_Jamgon_Kongtruls.pdf.

(Please notice, that the ‘classical’ incarnated Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, the son of Beru Khyentse Rinpoche both feels like his previous incarnation, behaves as such and has no problem of being that incarnation. I call his incarnation ‘classical’ because he was appointed by the ‘classical’ Karmapa Thrinley Taye Dorje. The 17th Karmapa Thrinley Taye Dorje was called ‘classical’ by Shamar Rinpoche.)

Postscript:

Lama Norlha died the 19th of February 2018, 79 years old.

Read also Alex Berzin’s essay on misuse by religious teachers:

<https://studybuddhism.com/en/tibetan-buddhism/about-buddhism/misconceptions-about-buddhism/dealing-with-abusive-behavior-by-spiritual-teachers>

Books:

‘Tibetan Arts of Love’ of Gendün Chöpel, translated and commented by professor Jeffrey Hopkins; Snow Lion Publications, 1992. ISBN: 0-937938-97-1.

‘Lust for Enlightenment - Buddhism and Sex’ of John Stevens; Shambhala Publications, 1990. ISBN: 0-87773-416-X.