



Tantra Masters Charles Muir and Leah Alchin

INTERVIEW BY ROB SIDON

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One of the originators of the modern tantra movement, Charles Muir, who founded Source Tantra School nearly 35 years ago, is said to be the most prolific trainer in the field.

Prior to the tantric path, Charles, a native of the Bronx, taught hatha yoga in New York City in the 1960s through the mid-1970s under the auspices of television yogi Richard Hittleman and swamis Satchidananda, Madhvananda, and Vishnudevananda, among others. Penniless and celibate, he longed to move to California, but could not afford the trip. His prayers for a cash infusion were answered when an investment of pocket change yielded the New York State lottery's grand prize—and with it, his ticket west. Thereafter, he met his wife and business partner, Caroline. Although they divorced in 2002, she remains a close, loving friend and a senior teacher at the school.

Leah Alchin originally hails from Michigan and began studying tantra in 1997. Leah is an advanced educator and vice president of the school. Over 30 years his junior, she and Charles live together in Boulder Creek as beloved partners.

Common Ground: You're a lucky man, Charles, having won the lottery in many aspects of your life. I've never met anyone who won a state lottery.

Charles Muir: Three weeks before winning the grand prize, I was in Big Sur on my first trip to California. I had my first understanding of God as the Mother and cried in prayer to the beauty of nature, "Mother, bring me back here."

Women have been my primary teachers, and my path unfolded with the perfect woman to teach me and help me do my work. I'll never forget my first tantra woman coming to one of my hatha yoga seminars in Mexico and telling me she wanted to share her tantra with me. I gave my standard reply, which had always worked, "Thank you so much for your offer, but I don't sleep with my students." She replied, "I am not your student, I am your teacher. And this is not about sleeping, it's about awakening." I held out for six days but then the experience we had together changed my path; that was kind of a lottery too.

CG: In your early life, you were on a classic celibate yogic path. Who were your primary influences?

CM: From 1965 my yoga teachers all expounded celibacy as the only way to deal with our sexual energy. They all explained that sexual energy was the fuel for spiritual advancement and enlightenment. Conserve it, sublimate it, ignore it, transmute it, transform it. As a young man I had a hard time with this and felt that I was failing my gurus. But so many were later busted for having sexual relationships with their female clients. Almost all of the schools of yoga and Vedanta recommend Brahmacharya (celibacy), which seems to work in an ashram, cave, or forest away from women. Tantra was a path for living in the everyday world.

CG: Tantra is often misunderstood. What's your description?

CM: Most teachers use approximately the same translations of the two Sanskrit syllables that make up the word: *tan* means "expansive" and

tra means "weaving." It is their understanding that differs. You must also understand that there is tantra and there is tantra yoga, which is what I teach. I would define that as an expansive weaving of energy, love, and consciousness that yields yoga (union or oneness).

CG: What do you say to detractors who suggest that tantra is just a spiritual pretext for good old-fashioned lust?

CM: The people who take our course discover that our presentation of tantra yoga is equally about love and sex. Lust is an energy that takes. It is second chakra (reproductive/sexual) energy being directed by the third (power) chakra. Love is about giving, not taking. In tantra yoga, it becomes the highest expression of the fourth chakra (love) joined to the sixth (consciousness) and elegantly expressed through the second chakra. Our books, DVDs, and courses teach the art of conscious loving.

Lust is easy for most men to express, yet love is what both their spirits and their women really crave. Lust will make you do things that seem like a good idea at the time. Afterward, not so much. Lust can get one into trouble, so many people and religious institutions fear lust. They threaten us with damnation in an effort to limit our sexual experience. They rarely experience the sacrament of sexual love in the bedroom with their beloved. Yet it is God that created sex; we have screwed it up because of a lack of education about how to be a great lover. We are 21st-century lovers held back from sexual love by 19th-century values.

The other thing is that these days there are a lot of people teaching things under the umbrella of tantra who have little understanding of the yoga (union) part of tantra. They can lead one down the path of lust, an endless path of desire that brings you closer neither to your partner, nor your Self, nor your god or goddess. Know your teacher and their work before you study with them.

Leah Alchin: Because so many people exploit tantra (all you have to do is Google the word and see sex ads), many people question the



Leah Alchin and Charles Muir

type of person who would be attracted to it. Their fear is walking into a room filled with sloppy, naked people wanting to have sex with multiple partners. They assume it must attract people with sex addiction issues.

What do I say to those with such fears or judgments? First, there's no nudity in our classes—you take what you learn and practice it in the privacy of your own home. We provide a safe environment, showing you the edge, not pushing you over it. Second, tantra isn't a religious dogma. It fits with any spiritual belief system you practice. Third, we attract healthy, mainstream people looking for that "something more to sex" that meets them on a deeper level. Tantra transforms lust into sexual love—a very important distinction.

CG to Charles: You're the granddaddy of the tantra movement in the West and originator of Sacred Spot Massage.

CM: I started teaching tantra yoga to my hatha yoga students in 1980 as part of my school's curriculum. It quickly became my primary yoga practice. When I started studying hatha yoga in NYC in 1965, there was no "Yoga" in the phone book. The closest listing in the Yellow Pages was "Dannon Yogurt." When I made the transition to teaching only tantra, there was no other teacher in the U.S. doing it.

I am the originator of Sacred Spot Massage. It is not an ancient practice from India, but rather is derived from my study and use of a tantric practice called *Nyasa* (ritual charging and awakening of the chakras), energy, mudra, massage, and psychology. Thirty years later, it is a worldwide movement with over a million Google hits, and it is part of most tantra teachers' courses. There are many who teach a watered-down version of the practice—people who have learned it second-hand. I have trained and certified about 120 teachers

worldwide known as “Certified Tantra Educators,” a trademarked term.

CG to Leah: What attracted you at such a young age to this vocation?

LA: As I was coming of age, sex scared me. I was afraid of my own sexual energy, fearful that it was too big, that I would lose control, perhaps get pregnant, or be used instead of loved by men. My experiences shaped this fear until I fell in love for the first time. I had a deep intuition that there *must* be something more to sex. With a partner that adored me and loved the parts of my body that I loathed, I found an expression of the Divine that touched my core while being sexual. Sadly, that relationship ended—life was taking him places where he needed to go alone. I was devastated until I realized that his role in my life was to set the stage for my path and purpose: teaching tantra. It was through him that I read my first book on tantra and realized that all of these magical things I was experiencing with him were techniques he had read in *Tantra: The Art of Conscious Loving*. My life changed, and I knew I could never settle for ordinary sex again. I wanted that sexual, spiritual, and love connection to permeate my whole life. I wanted to teach others how it could be done.

CG: I imagine people roll their eyes when they learn that your partner is 30 years older than you.

LA: Yes, it tends to be a button pusher for people. Love doesn't carry an age; you are attracted to people who match your vitality. What's difficult is that many couples have been wounded by a spouse cheating with a much younger person (or they know someone who has). This creates a misperception that I'm a home-wrecker and Charles is shallow. Nothing could be further from the truth. My experience is that it takes less than 24 hours for a student who is struggling with our age difference to see that I can be taken seriously and am more than eye candy.

CG to Leah: How were you attracted to Charles?

LA: First, the man is outrageously funny! He knows who he is and makes no apologies. I admire him; I love what he does in the world and the miracles he inspires in the love lives of thousands! I find him to be beautiful and powerful. And he loves me, very deeply. I'm so blessed.

CG to Charles: As mentioned, you won the lottery in many ways. As a 63-year-old is there anything intimidating about



Charles Muir's Source School of Tantra.

having a 32-year-old goddess as your partner?

CM: Sometimes I consider that she may not be able to keep up with me when I am 90 and she is 60, but she seems to be able to keep up with me now, so I don't worry about it.

CG: What is the effect of age on a man's ability to maintain an erection?

CM: I hear this from many of my male students. It's funny that before there was a cure for the situation now named erectile dysfunction, few men in my classes even mentioned having a problem. Nowadays, they freely talk about it in our men's classes. There are so many reasons for this problem, and only a few of them are medically caused. Body tension, emotional issues in any area of life, and a depleted sexual system caused by excessive ejaculation are the most frequent causes. I take a natural formula called “Wow for Men—A Tantric Aphrodisiac” twice a week, and along with the tantric energy recirculation techniques, it has pretty much eliminated the problem. Leah sometimes has a difficult time keeping up with me. We started selling it on the Internet, and it has become our biggest seller. Men order it over and over, because at less than \$1.50 it works better than most pharmaceutical products and is also good for your overall health. It is a sexual tonic that revitalizes what tantra calls a tired chakra.

CG to Leah: It sounds like Charles has it going on.

LA: Indeed. This is a man who has dedicated himself to the healing of the collective feminine

through consciousness and *pleasure*. Charles uses the love that comes from his hands, his eyes, his words, his wand, and his whole being to thoroughly worship me.

CG to Charles: What do you make of the whole Viagra trend?

CM: I tried each of these products, and they gave me headaches and an upset stomach, and made it difficult to orgasm multiple times. My female students often complain that their husbands have their “wood” back but still don't know how to use it.

A woman needs more than an erection to be sexually satisfied. She craves emotional and energetic connection with her man. We teach men how to masterfully use their wand whether it is hard or soft. It becomes a massage tool to awaken the woman's sleeping, limitless pleasure potential. It's easy for most men to embrace the 1,001 modalities of movement that give both partners ecstatic pleasure and connection. For most men, the sexiest part is when his woman is feeling orgasmic pleasure. For most women it's the connection and the feeling that the man is giving love to her, rather than taking her for his pleasure.

CG to Leah: How would you describe the difference between men and women, particularly when it comes to their respective arousal curves?

LA: Men tend to be more verbal, outward, and visual when it comes to sexual energy. Women tend to need more of an emotional connection with a partner in order to fully express the heights of our sexual energy. You have to touch our H (heart) spot before touching our G spot.

CG: My sense is that women have the innate capacity to carry a deeper charge, so to speak. Do you sometimes prefer being with women?

LA: I believe both men and women carry a deep charge—it's not gender specific. A man needs to know his heart is safe in order to fully open to a woman. A woman needs to know her body will be protected and cared for in order to fully open. We have keys for each other's locks and the locks of each other's keys, as Charles often puts it. My experience is there are gifts only women can give you and gifts only men can give you. I practice my sexual healing with both. I consider myself heterosexual.

CG to Charles: As guys we're so conditioned both physically and culturally to ejaculate as an objective. But then—pop!—the party's over.

CM: Orgasm and ejaculation are different things that in non-tantric sex happen within a second of each other. But one can easily learn to orgasm without losing one's energy by ejaculating. This quickly leads to multiple orgasms, which every man is delighted to discover.

CG: Sounds like the Holy Grail of tantric rewards, but like many of our male readers, I am saying to myself, "Not in this lifetime." Honestly, is the ability to learn how to have orgasm without ejaculating at our disposal?

CM: The Holy Grail is feeling deeply, emotionally loved to your core while pleasurable energy streams through you like electricity. You connect to yourself, your partner, and your God on ever-deepening levels. You are free, renewed, uplifted, and satisfied like few can imagine. It is your birthright as God created you. We forget that God created sex and it is time for us all to know what the poets spend lifetimes trying to describe. Sexual loving is a subject that we can all get good at, and we must do so for ourselves, our partners, and the world. Of course you can learn this, and tantra is one of the most important things you will learn in your life.

CG: You are known for having originated the sacred spot massage ritual. How would you describe this for a woman?

CM: It is a meditation on your sexual chakra where you are a receiver, being given to for at an hour or two, deeply breathing while you are internally massaged on an area called *yoni nadi* (sacred space meridian), which is the gateway to the sexual psyche along with vast energy and pleasure. Your partner has learned nine massage strokes for this area that move blocked energy, tension, and emotions. They have learned energetic techniques called mudras, which integrate the released energy and align the lower chakras with the upper. Your partner has been trained to be there for you in whatever comes up, be it shadow or bliss. The tears are sweet and so too is the unbelievable pleasure. The release is deep, as is the connection with your partner. Awakening is sweet, and so too is freedom. The two become partners in sacred awakening, and it is fun and intimate.

CG to Leah: And for a man?

LA: For a man, his sacred spot ritual is an invitation to the ultimate beauty of his vulnerability. Men discover that pleasure has no limits. Stress for a man often gets pushed down energetically in order to survive the daily pres-

ures of life. Sacred spot is a way to discharge this vitality-robbing energy in a safe and loving container. It increases his ability to delay and control his ejaculation while reeducating his body to be multi-orgasmic. It is a life-renewing practice that will have him enjoying sex well into his old age.

CG: Briefly, what benefit might one expect from attending a beginner's tantric workshop?

LA: Nineteen or more transformational tantric practices, which include breathing, meditation, asanas, kissing and touch, lovemaking positions, and how to sexually heal yourself and others, including internal muscle exercises to quadruple the length of your orgasm (alone, worth the price of admission). Couples will renew the passion, intimacy, and love in their relationship. Singles will have their faith renewed in the opposite sex. Everyone gets a fresh new outlook on sexual love, one that our parents never had. For many, it's miracle. For most, it's sexual wholeness for the first time.



Top: Charles and former wife Caroline Muir, in the '90s. They divorced in 2002, but remain very close friends and business partners.

Bottom: Teaching yoga postures as a celibate on the East Coast in the '70s.

CG: Some couples take drugs into the bedroom to enhance their experience, notably cannabis; what's your view?

LA: Aphrodisiacs and other mind-altering "sacraments" were used in ancient tantric rituals. Your intention is what is key. Yes, I believe there is a place for some mind-altering substances, but I never recommend that for a beginner or someone who is exploring tantra for sexual healing purposes. You never want to use a substance to escape reality. I warn the students before Saturday night "home play" not to drink more than one glass of wine.

CG: Is polyamory a trademark of the tantric path?

LA: That's a good question. Many serious tantricas live an expanded lifestyle that includes loving more than one person sexually. However, 90 percent of our students are monogamous people looking to "pair bond" with one person. Jealousy is a big monster; it takes an incredible commitment to heal. For most, that's a ton of work that can be prevented by staying committed to one relationship. We don't preach or suggest polyamory to our students. We are happy to lend support to those on the polyamory path seeking guidance and understanding.

CG to Charles: I imagine learning tantra might be daunting, as so much is potentially unlocked, both physically and psychologically.

CM: About one in four hit emotional, physical, energetic, or psychological blocks. We train and prepare everyone. Our success with over 25,000 students speaks for itself.

CG: Have you been in out-of-control situations with imbalanced attendees?

CM: I have encountered the shadow side in numerous personal partners in the 32 years I've been doing this. Experience is how you learn and what allows you to teach others. Would you rather have a doctor right out of medical school deliver your firstborn or one who has delivered many, many of them?

CG to Leah: Are women more apt to embrace this kind of work?

LA: No, not necessarily. Many men bring their wives because they want a healthier and sexier love life. Many women bring their husbands because they want a deeper connection, yet feel something powerful is missing. Singles are looking for like-minded people that treat sex as sacred, not as something casual.

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PHOTO: ©MARY FRANKLIN

Willie Nelson at the Fillmore

Music's Most Unlikely
Sex Symbol

BY STEVE HEILIG
PHOTO BY MARY FRANKLIN

Halfway into his nonstop, two-hour-plus set at San Francisco's fabled Fillmore, Willie Nelson eased into one of his more romantic hits, "You Were Always on my Mind." Begging for another chance with an unknown woman, he promised, "I'll keep you satisfied," and a surprising thing happened—women all around me raised a lusty whoop, and some shouted, "Oh yeah-h-h, Willie!" It occurred to me that this 77-year-old, gray-braided, grizzled music legend might be the world's least-likely sex symbol.

Of course, he's much more than that—in the pantheon of American music legends, he is to country music what Bob Dylan, Bob Marley, and Miles Davis have been to theirs—young rebels who came to epitomize the best in their fields. Born in Texas in 1933, Willie got his start as a songwriter in notoriously tradition-bound Nashville, penning some of the most-sung tunes in country music, like "Night Life" and "Crazy," but could not get accepted as a singer and moved back to Texas, where he went his own way and led the "outlaw" country scene in the 1970s. The legendarily cranky Miles Davis even called Nelson his favorite singer and said he tried to do with his trumpet what Willie did with his voice. High praise indeed. Willie has released scores of albums, covering many genres with varying success, and every few years produces some sort of masterpiece amid the multiple Grammy awards.

It seems most everyone loves Willie. Outside the Fillmore, young autograph hounds waited, posters and LPs in hand, in a cloud of cannabis smoke one might expect outside an old Grateful Dead show. The resemblance did not stop there—inside, tie-dyed hippies of all ages air-guitared and space-danced among the cowboys, bikers, African American families, elderly folks wielding canes, and just about every other kind of person you might imagine boogieing, two-stepping, and yes, smooching away. With his two drummers, vast catalog of songs seemingly at his fingertips, and versatility—the concert included not just country but blues, gospel, rock, jazz, and more—the old slogan "There's nothing like a Grateful Dead concert" came to mind. It was all expertly rendered by his veteran band, which includes his sister Bobbie on piano and son Lucas on guitar. Plus, Willie's superb playing, picked out on his old acoustic guitar, "Trigger," a hole worn through the front from decades of use, conjured none other than Jerry Garcia, ranging from pure twang to psychedelic and back in a single song.

Reverence, fun, and love was in the air, along with the greenish smoke. It's all centered on an old guy who regularly gets busted for pot, is a poet, an author, an actor who plays himself and others loosely based on him (including an iconic Historian Smoker in the pothead classic *Half Baked*), a tax scoundrel once accused of owing \$32 million to the IRS, and a father of seven kids from four wives. But he's also a veteran and wide-ranging activist, not only with his famous Farm Aid festival that helps nonindustrialized farmers, but also as an early adopter of biodiesel for his vehicles, an animal welfare advocate, and a gay rights advocate with his 2006 song "Cowboys Are Frequently, Secretly Fond of Each Other." Of that one he said, "The song's been in the closet for 20 years. I'm just opening the door." Ever current, just last fall, after his most recent pot bust, Nelson formed the TeaPot Party.

Of course, at bottom it's all about the music, and as Willie and the band ran enthusiastically through his version of the Great American Songbook—"Mama Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to be Cowboys," "On the Road Again," "Georgia," "Blood Mary Morning," "Hey Good Lookin'," "City of New Orleans," and more—his slightly ragged voice, even more-ragged skin, and anything else about him that might be worse for wear didn't matter. For whatever else it is, a Willie Nelson show is a major all-American love-in. 🐾

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CG to Charles: What do you say about our puritanical heritage that tells us sex is sin?

CM: Most Americans are 21st-century lovers still conditioned and held back by 18th-century values. Surely, the God of Love would have you know a better way to love. Remember that tantra initially seems to be about sex, but it is really about love!

CG: Fortunately, there are some progressive media figures such as Sting and his partner Trudie Styler who talk about their tantric partnership. Is tantra trendy in Hollywood?

CM: I started teaching tantra to Hollywood personalities in 1989 and have taught quite a few. Almost all of them are quite private about it in their lives. Some have been upfront about it because it helped them so much: Woody Harrelson, Barbra Streisand, and the former stars of *L.A. Law*, Michael Tucker and Jill Eikenberry, are a few who have benefited from my instruction. Sting did a couple *Oprah* shows about tantra.

CG: Is your approach also equally accessible to homosexuals and transgendered people?

CM: Tantra is not about gender. It is about love.

CG to Leah: It's great that you're doing this work, as it seems many of the well-known tantra teachers are quite a bit older now. Do you have anything particular to say to our younger readers?

LA: Throughout your life, leave your lovers better than you found them. Embrace your body and be curious about being a masterful lover. Seek love in unexpected places and don't be afraid to bring God into the bedroom. Don't settle for mediocre lovemaking.

CG to Charles: You've come a quite a distance from the celibate path. Any looking back?

CM: Thank Goddess.

CG: Thanks to both of you. Charles, any particular message to *Common Ground* readers?

CM: Tantra is a practice and so is love. It's worth learning what your parents didn't know to teach you. Practice love whether you feel like it or not, for it will quickly change how you feel. 🐾

Find out more about Charles' and Leah's seminars and home study course at SourceTantra.com.