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A meeting of the sexes

By John Darling

Tidings Correspondent

"Ye shall become as gods," said Genesis. Well, as long as you make that "gods and goddesses," Loraia Ward believes it - and that's her intent in the workshop "Dancing the Goddess and God."

The two-day event, Feb. 14 and 15, endeavors to revive ancient sacred dance, ritual, breathing and meditation with the aim of rejoining the masculine and feminine, who became estranged in the story of Adam and Eve, Shiva and Shakti, Isis and Osiris and many other world mythologies.

"Dancing the god and goddess takes us beyond the ego and its daily stresses, so we begin to see each other as completely divine," said Ward, 33.

Ward's work in this and other seminars, such as "Women's Sexuality; Aphrodite's Journey," "Breath of Union" (a couple's workshop) and her thrice weekly "Tantric Dance of the Sacred Feminine" all employ the principles of tantra, a Sanskrit word meaning the integration of the body, senses and sexuality into the experience of the sacred.

"The deep connection to the feminine energy is very opening and has allowed me to show more vulnerability," said Kemo Holgen, after taking the workshop. "I overcame a lot of the apprehension and awkwardness I've had all my life."

"The tantric dance has put me back in touch with my feminine sensuality," said Glenda Feinsmith of Ashland. "It opened my ability to feel very comfortable within my own body and skin."

Ward is a gyanist, a word literally meaning female-male and pointing to a new global culture in which both genders work, live and love as equals within a divine pantheon likewise inhabited by equal female and male deities, she said.

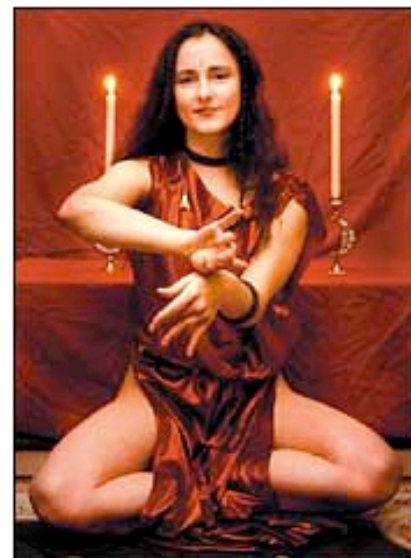
"Separating the sexes and putting one over the other has not worked very well," Ward said. "As they end their separation, and it's not going to happen completely in my lifetime, we're coming to see a deep sense of honoring, love, efficiency and positive nurturance - and the recognition and acceptance of the feminine in the male and vice versa. It's like the unfolding of the wings of a butterfly."

Underlying these changes is a re-emergence of The Goddess or Great Mother who, before the coming of the patriarchal religions, was known as "the giver of life, the vehicle of infinite possibility and the vessel of divine love - in other words, she is all creation," she said.

In this spiritual context, Ward added, her workshop offers a "breakthrough in intimacy and a bodily experience of opening the heart as you integrate sexuality with spirituality, move beyond the duality (of sex and spirit) in a tantric playground."

Howard Morningstar of Ashland said the experience helped him "overcome powerful fears and liberate the divine masculine energy."

Ward, who has a bachelor's degree in theater, has studied tantra since 1991 and sacred rituals since 1996. She is certified as a Hellerworker and Reflexologist. Her workshop in Ashland is \$195. She can be reached at 779-3137.



Loraia ward teaches workshops and seminars in the tantric arts, which aim to bring the sexes closer together and foster understanding in a setting of sensuality. Satsuki Doi | Ashland Daily Tidings