

Review of Sex Education and the Spirit

by Lisa Romero; Steiner Books, 2017; 140 pages

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by Daniel Mackenzie

Sex Education and the Spirit, Lisa Romero's latest contribution to her series of profoundly inspired books on spiritual development, growth and health, delivers far more than its title might suggest. The author is acutely aware that contemporary society has programmed us— even those who are eager to learn about a given topic—to seek quick facts, “life hacks,” and simple secrets of success. We gravitate towards clever bullet lists, opinion blogs, and colorful how-to videos, leaving those daunting books we know we *should* be reading to gather dust on the night stand. Rather than cater to that current cultural impulse, Romero gives us what we *need*, not just what we want. The central premise of her book is that we must attend to our own spiritual transformation if we wish to attain the deeper understanding required to address sex education in a way that meets the demands of our time. Such transformation, whether we like it or not, requires dedicated, persistent work.

Though clear, straightforward and deliberately structured, the author's writing is stripped of anything that might compromise either the content or the reader's requisite effort to absorb it. Though her books are deceptively short, Romero's chapters are long and demand more focus and attention than most works in both the education and self-development genres call for. This is not to say that her tone is dry or overly earnest. On the contrary, she manages to infuse even her more esoteric passages with down-to-earth examples drawn from daily life, as she covers vast terrain ranging from the lofty realms of spirit to the earthier subjects of masturbation and pornography. A reader more familiar with her understated brand of humor may even find cause for an occasional chuckle.

Even so, this is not the kind of book you can pick up late at night, read a few paragraphs from and then fall asleep; the reader is advised to allot a comfortable amount of fully alert waking time so as to absorb as much of each unfolding chapter as possible in one sitting. For those who give this book the time and attention it gently requests, the payoff is immeasurable.

Over the past two decades Romero has emerged as a premiere teacher of anthroposophical meditation and self-development, even while her work as a master homeopath, health practitioner, personal consultant, and educator of professional teachers and healers is ongoing. Her first two books, *Inner Work Path* and *Developing The Self*, distill much of the content she works with in

her meditation retreats and three-day courses. Although the setting and form of those interactive and introspective workshops give rise to present-moment opportunities and inspirations that no book could capture, these two first volumes are rewarding handbooks for purposeful inner work. In *Sex Education and the Spirit*, the author's experience as an educator of parents and teachers smoothly dovetails with her expert guidance in spiritual development. Though this book is highly recommended for teachers and parents, it is not exclusively geared towards them. It is compelling reading for anyone interested in self-development, inner work, and the matters of sex and gender in contemporary society.

Although *Sex Education and the Spirit* is indeed rich with insights about children's delicate relationship to the experience of gender and sexuality through progressive stages of development, it delves deeply and at length into the inner growth processes of adults as well. Romero's rigorous explorations of various aspects of spiritual self-development may initially strike her newer readers as tangential or off topic, yet these are not random digressions, nor gratuitous insertions. Each exercise presented speaks to a particular capacity that is essential to cultivation of a healthy, holistic understanding of sex-related issues.

The thrust of her teaching is that our own inner development is actually prerequisite to an understanding of any aspect of human life, including how healthy education about sex and gender must progress. Instead of merely alerting us to this truth, Romero provides us with the means—mostly by way of exercises and meditative verses from Rudolf Steiner—to do the relevant work. One crucial insight that arises from such work is that the human spirit itself is genderless and connected to a higher world that exists in eternity, beyond the ephemeral, material domain we spend most of our waking consciousness in. The author emphasizes the particular importance of this understanding now, at a time during which the prevalence of materialistic worldviews and values holds such sway over our cultural norms and habits. The outer world is constantly bombarding us with body-identification, sex-baiting, and gender stereotyping. The world of higher consciousness, however, wants us to understand the body as a mere vehicle for the human spirit, and to recognize the individual within each of us, whose essence is beyond sex, gender, and other generalized physical associations.

Romero guides the reader through an exploration of how not only the physical body, but also the other human sheaths (the life body, the astral body, and the "I am") can generate varying forms of attraction. She explains the value of removing both shame and sentimentality from dialogues about puberty and sexual awakening, and why it is important that discussions about sex be gender-neutral and inclusive. The author admonishes us, however, that it is never enough to merely parrot the teachings and insights provided by spiritual research. A teacher or parent who is merely relaying data and facts—even those derived from someone else's deep inner work—will be unable to guide, act, and interact with true understanding. We must not simply echo what she calls the "chatter" of contemporary teachings. Rather, we are called upon to hold and entertain deep questions about why things are as they are in the world today. Why are an increasing number

of individuals expressing gender identifications and sexual preferences outside traditional norms? What effects does the ubiquity and unprecedented accessibility of pornography have on both children and adults? How should the way we talk to children about sex evolve as they pass through various stages of development? This profoundly engaged holding of questions is one of the essentially anthroposophical aspects of Romero's work.

Were anthroposophy merely some kind of belief system based solely on the static record of Rudolf Steiner's life work, it might actually be what it is often misidentified as by uninformed detractors—a religion, or a personality cult. What qualifies anthroposophy as a vital movement, however, is that its founder shared not only the abundant fruits of his own spiritual research, but also a wealth of practical instruction in the field of spiritual self-development. Though Steiner's legacy of esoteric insights, social initiatives, and artistic innovation is of a staggering scope and volume, he was less concerned with his own personal achievements and more interested in passing the torch of spiritual research to anyone with a sincere interest in continuing the work.

What Steiner shared came not from his personality, but from the vast domain of spirit, and he sought to teach us how to transcend the limitations of our own mundane identities and to access that realm ourselves. Steiner's work tethers us to the foundation of what he called spiritual science, while exhorting us to tend to its evolution in response to present-day impulses and expand its reach into yet unexplored regions. Guided by Steiner's specific indications, certain distinguished anthroposophists have thus endeavored to cultivate their own inner capacities, so that they might in turn contribute usefully to the ever-growing body of anthroposophical literature, course work, and world-transforming initiatives. Lisa Romero is among these torchbearers who propel the movement forward, working to meet the demands of our time with healthy forms.

It is powerfully evident in her writing that Lisa Romero's deep engagement in her own inner development is faithfully and firmly rooted in Steiner's teachings. She quotes him frequently, and in passages that convey his prescribed exercises and verses, her language does not stray far from his original texts. It is nevertheless equally obvious that the author is not merely repackaging the work of her teacher. The bulk of her offering—that which speaks directly to the challenges of our time—is clearly produced through her own spiritual efforts and her considerable experience in the professional world. In this sense, Romero is both a strict Steiner loyalist and a generously productive spiritual researcher in her own right. She successfully balances the twofold task of sharing the fruits of her own labor, while teaching us how to grow our own trees. The author also shows veneration for other spiritual teachers from outside anthroposophy, freely sharing poignant bits of poetry and prose from the likes of Rumi, Hafiz, Rilke, and theosophist Mabel Collins.

Even for those who do not choose to actively pursue their own spiritual development, *Sex Education and the Spirit* provides a rich array of insights into the eponymous topic. Romero exposes commonplace errors in sex education, many of which are traceable to the root problem of

identifying children with their gender-specific bodies and traditional social roles instead of treating and approaching them as spiritual, individual beings. Many of us carry unconscious gender biases, and tailor our speech differently to boys and girls; this only reinforces over-identification with the body and outmoded gender roles.

She explains how a deeper understanding of the human being and the distinct stages of child and young adult development can foster wiser methods of educational guidance. Primarily, therefore, the book is an inspiring exhortation to perform the inner work required to develop our capacities, open our thinking and feeling life to the vast wisdom of the spirit realm, and harness our will to enact what we have thus received in *creative giving* to the world. More specifically, if we wish to cultivate the healthiest possible approach to sex education, we must develop our own spiritual understanding of both children's needs and the tasks of our time.

Those of us who feel drawn to the path of anthroposophy and called to take up the work of spiritual self-development and creative giving may dive headlong into the vast trove of Steiner's collected lectures and books on the subject. This is the endeavor of a lifetime, and may be so challenging and intimidating as to be discouraging for all but the hardest spiritual seekers. It is a great blessing to have a guide like Lisa Romero, an initiate who works out of genuinely anthroposophical impulses that she has arduously transformed into her own, helping us learn where to place our focus and how to apply our efforts in alignment with the higher impulses of our day and age.

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