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CLARION REVIEW ★★★☆☆ RELIGION

A Grape Off the Vine: Our Lecherous Legacy

Ken Cohen
New Age World Publishing (Nov 1, 2011)
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Filled with too much libidinous lust? Try a little alliterative rap for relief.

This book's message—that lust is the original sin leading to all subsequent human failings and that yoga can help overcome it—will engage some readers, while its hammering, alliterative style may repel others.

In *A Grape Off the Vine*, dermatologist and author Ken Cohen recounts the religious changes in his life, beginning as a practicing Jew, an erstwhile follower of Indian guru Satya Sai Baba, and now a Catholic and practitioner of kriya yoga. By his own admission, he was a sex addict, and he undertook six years of psychotherapy as well as various spiritual routes to heal. Over time he devised a method for retraining his mind to higher realities, a method that he demonstrates throughout the text, as in this passage from the introduction: "The *Almighty* put words in *alphabetical* order to help us follow this *tragical trail* back to the time we were *gullible* enough to swallow this *gunk*, so let's *diagnose* our *dicey* behaviors, use our *dictionaries* to *dig* up a little *dignity*, *reminisce* with our *remorse*, and put an end to our *resentments.*" (Italics are the author's.)

Cohen's central theme is that Adam and Eve's sexual relations set a template of sinfulness, since lying and concealment, and, in the next generation, even murder would follow their fall. In conveying his beliefs, mainly based on his own life experiences, the author urges readers to heal themselves through yoga and his self-devised alliterative "rap" therapy: "We just need to use word *sequences* to get in touch with our *serenity*."

The themes expressed in *A Grape Off the Vine* are rather ingenious, and they could add something new to the traditional lexicon of religious study. The book suggests a thought-provoking link between lust as the basic building block of wrongdoing from the Western, Judeo-Christian heritage and an Eastern system of yoga using chakras (spinal energy) to facilitate the redirection of sexual passion. Cohen's personal journey through diverse religious paths has informed him well. His book sustains interest with pleasant illustrations, rather wacky cartoon charts and diagrams, moments of humor ("one way I *followed* my ego's *folly* was to *foment* my *fondness* for *fondling* women"), and some frankly pornographic passages—probably inevitable when the subject is lust.

However, at more than four hundred pages, this book is far too long; after a few pages it begins to seem repetitious, largely because of the presence of so many italicized words. What at first seems whimsical soon feels distracting and eventually becomes annoying. Though some may find this writing technique hypnotic and possibly, as Cohen asserts, therapeutic, it will likely strike most as too exhausting to plow through. It would have been far preferable had the author shared personal history and spiritual theory in straightforward, non-italicized prose, interspersing short "rap" interludes throughout the text.

Though sincerely conceived by an intelligent author, this book is unlikely to have a successful trajectory. Reconstructed with rational formatting, it could attract a following among those pursuing a multi-religious path.
BARBARA BAMBERGER SCOTT (August 1, 2013)

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