

The Sexual Energy Elixir

By Caroline Robertson

For centuries Taoism and Tantra have taught that sexuality is a tool to transform the spirit. Now recent research suggests that satisfying sex also has the capacity to heal the body and mind.

Intimacy Immunisation

When some of my patients revealed that a good “roll in the hay” eased their symptoms I was intrigued. There was the 40yr old man crippled with arthritis who found masturbation more effective than medication. A woman who sidelined crampy periods with a dose of premenstrual sexual healing and the carpenter who recovered from chronic back pain and depression after trying Taoist love making techniques. Investigating the phenomenon further I discovered a plethora of reports and anecdotal evidence supporting sexual energy as a powerful panacea. One of the most startling scientific experiments found that hamsters copulating freely remained healthy even after being injected with cancer causing drugs while their celibate compatriots dwindled and died from the same toxic injections.

We know arousal creates feel good chemicals which is why sex sells but can it cure conditions? Measuring the effects of the “shagadelic state” on brains and bodies has led to revelations that it boosts the immune system, releases powerful painkillers, elevates the mood to orgasmic heights and imparts a youthful glow. In fact, before spending a fortune on wrinkle cream a Scottish study suggests you should consider investing in a bit of nookie. When the research panel guessed the ages of 3,500 people they estimated that those who had more sex looked 7-10 years younger than they actually were. No wonder China’s concubines considered canoodling the “best beauty aid.” High hormones may also be connected with greater longevity according to gerontologist Paul Niehans when after autopsying Thomas Parr who died at 152 discovered his huge testicles - a storehouse of abundant hormones. Another 10-year study found that men who had more orgasms had a 50 percent lower death rate than those less sexually active. Conversely, castrated eunuchs of Egypt’s royal harem were found to suffer more illness and age prematurely according to Russian physician Serge Voronoff. Sexual suppression may be linked to certain diseases with an estimated one third of catholic priests dying from prostate problems whereas men who have sex a several times a week were shown to suffer fewer prostate problems.

The biggest aphrodisiac, our brain, is on constant call to respond to our primal programme for species perpetuation. So what happens when, according to psychologists, every 3 seconds men think of sex and every 6 seconds women join in? Titillating thoughts trigger nerve signals to the brain, specifically tickling the hypothalamus, neocortex and midbrain. These then release neuropeptides and

hormones that can alleviate illness, health and prolong life. An MRI during orgasm shows a bridge fusing the logical left and intuitive right brain hemispheres, creating an integrating and ecstatic experience.

Another factor is that levels of the 'cuddle hormone' oxytocin during orgasm can surge up to five times higher which contracts the uterus, strengthens emotional bonding, regulates body temperature, blood pressure and pain relief. The immune boosting immunoglobulin A is also raised considerably according to a study by Carl Charnetski, PhD., co-author of "Feeling Good is Good for You" who found that subjects who had sex once or twice a week had 30% higher levels of the immune boosting antibody immunoglobulin A than the more cold-prone celibates. During arousal we can also tolerate up to 110% more pain due to the midbrain's release of potent painkilling endorphins and corticosteroids, which numb painful nerve endings, relax muscles and calm the mind. A study by Beverly Whipple, Ph.D., confirmed that during orgasm women could increase their pain tolerance by up to 75%, an analgesic effect that can last for six hours according to Drs Sadoughi and Brown. These painkilling properties have been applied successfully to arthritis, menstrual cramps and migraines where circulation away from the head to the genitals can give marked relief, making the "not tonight I've got a headache" excuse redundant. Shifting focus from pain to pleasure also acts to remind cells of their capacity for joy, overriding persistent pain pathways. In addition the effect of increased hormones, progesterone, FSH and LH in women can regulate periods and ease menopausal symptoms. Using it may also protect you from losing it, explains Irwin Goldstein, M. D., "If you're sexually active now, you're protecting your ability to stay that way later," by pulsing oxygen rich blood and lubricating juices to the pelvic area thereby strengthening the whole reproductive system. A bit of sexercise may be another weight loss option as it burns an estimated 200 calories, equal to 30 minutes vigorous running. Other studies link increased sexual activity with a lower risk of breast and prostate cancer. Another sexual revolution is that whereas previously sex was restricted for heart patients today the American Heart Association (AHA) actually endorses various techniques of sexual healing. A study in Wales supports the move after showing that men who had sex twice a week or more experienced half as many heart attacks after 10 years as men who 'got it on' less than once a month. Sexual dissatisfaction was also prevalent in a high percentage of patients prior to a heart attack according to research by Dr. Paul Pearsall, author of Sexual Healing.

Having long recognised the elixir of sex, Traditional Chinese Medicine practitioners may prescribe a course of particular sexual postures to address a range of physical or psychological illnesses. Positions combined with focused awareness and breathing stimulates specific reproductive reflexology zones thereby sending energy to related organs. For example the woman on top position is suggested to relieve menstrual cramps. Tantra also details advanced pranayama, mudra and bandha practices for healing and spiritual advancement.

Though the evidence is mostly anecdotal, the psychological effect of healthy sex or suppression is obvious to most sex therapists as Dr Sandra Scantling voiced, "sexual closeness is the body's emotional fuel." In 1949 sexologist Dr Rudolf von Urban

explained in his book-“Sex, Perfection and Marital Happiness” that deeply relaxed lovers create a resonance effect called entrainment that brings about deep healing for both partners. Prescribing the ‘sexual bonding’ method to hundreds of patients which entails lying motionless together for 20-30 minutes he showed it improved the relationship, insomnia, high blood pressure, irritability, ulcers and other health problems. This was attributed to the merging of bioelectric energy streams unblocking negativity such as fear, anger and resentment, the same phenomenon viewed by Tantra as divine union dissolving the illusion of separateness. In their healing love workshops Dianne and Kerry Riley teach the “Daily Devotion” practice similar to sexual bonding where couples lie still with genitals, lips and limbs connected for at least five minutes morning and evening. Participant’s response was that it helped them to heal daily disharmony, diffuse potential discord, energise, relax and improved moods.

Some therapists have found that union with a loving partner or oneself in the right circumstances can heal frigidity, quell anxiety, release trauma from touch depravation or abuse and overcome feelings of negative self esteem, timidity and alienation. The emotional benefits of sexuality were evident in one study which found that men who masturbated regularly were less prone to bouts of depression.

So next time you’re feeling down try a sexperiment. Put on some sensual music, soak in a relaxing bath and stroke yourself while visualising the most appealing mate imaginable. Sense those happy hormones surging through your system? When the juices of healthy arousal flow through us we are tapping into an extraordinary energy that has the capacity to create new life. Letting this creative energy generate healing within and allowing it to overflow into everything we do we can transfer that passion, excitement, warmth and energy of sexuality to everything we encounter. As Rob, a 62 year old minister says- “People who are sexual are blessed, they can remake themselves. They are a creative repository for all that sexual energy and they can take it in many directions, to build a new house, to attract a new person, to take an intellectual journey.”

Seed Saving

Ancient Tantric and Taoist teachings have always acknowledged the transformative potential of sexual energy. According to Ayurveda and Tantra health, immunity and vitality come from abundant ojas or the transformed creative essence of semen and ovum. This life-generating cream contains the concentrated nectar from all the cells, the culmination of all vitalising biological processes. It is this refined elixir that, when utilised properly, forms Amrita- or the fountain of longevity. Traditional Chinese Medicine and Taoism also attribute life energy to Ching or channelled procreative powers. This precious energy is to be expertly cultivated, conserved and circulated. Rather than wasting it Taoists aim to refine it just as raw honey is purified from its raw waxy form to the sweetest nectar. In women it contains the zenith of Yin and in men the potency of Yang- both essential for health and balance. Women are considered more fortunate than men as they naturally tend to retain this vital fluid since their reproductive organs are internal and they have a yin receptive nature whereas men lose it easily. Taoists connect this difference to the fact that women live an average six years longer than men.

Women's innate ability to have multiorgasms of increasing intensity also make them sexually superior according to Taoists. This is reflected in an ancient Greek myth where the sage Tiresias changes into a woman and in response to Jupiter's enquiry as to which gender has greater sexual pleasure he replied "women by at least ten times!" Maybe Freud's theory of penis envy needs to be updated to clitoris envy.

Whereas western research on sexual healing doesn't emphasise the importance of retaining and recirculating sexual fluids, the Eastern systems make the vital distinction. One drop of semen is equal to sixty drops of blood in the energy it bestows on the body according to Vedic science. In Taoism it is considered to be a superfood rich in easily absorbable nutrients and energy that can revitalise body and mind. Western science agrees as semen has proven to be a treasure house of vitamins, minerals, trace elements, hormones, proteins, irons, enzymes and other vital nutritional substances including calcium, albumin, lecithin, phosphorus and nucleoproteins. Interestingly these are similar constituents to brain and nerve tissue, areas which Plato, Pythagoras and eastern rishis believed were nourished by retained semen. They also held that a weak nervous system, depleted energy and brain function were connected with excessive seed loss.

However, after investing so much internal effort to produce this beneficial brew many blow it without considering the consequences. The immediate effect is obvious- like a burst balloon men's energy and mood become deflated. They may also disconnect from their partner as one man bravely admitted, "Once I ejaculate, the pillow looks better than my girlfriend." But the long term effects are the main concern, as a New York Times report reiterated "creating sperm is far more difficult than scientists imagined, demanding a diversion of resources that otherwise might go into assuring a male's longterm health." Its estimated that the average American man spills roughly 15 litres of his seed in a lifetime- a reservoir that if redirected would amount to a vast store of energy according to Taoists and Tantrics. All species tend to depletion after expelling reproductive fluids. Male silkworm moths emerge from their cocoon only to mate after which they die. And plants have greater longevity if they are kept from going to seed. This energy loss explains why many athletes including Mohammed Ali abstained from coitus before competing, so they'd have reserve strength to draw on. Then there are those who find a pre-performance release relieves tension and relaxes them for a better result.

However Taoists masters caution that if a man continues to squander his semen he can get very sick. All Taoist works claim excessive semen loss causes premature aging, damage to the nervous system, muscular weakness, poor digestion, loss of eyesight and energy. Peng-Tze, an advisor to the Yellow Emperor explained, "after ejaculation, a man is tired, his ears buzz, his eyes are heavy, and he longs for sleep. He is thirsty and his limbs feel weak and stiff. In ejaculating he enjoys a brief moment of sensation but then suffers long hours of exhaustion." The early Kinsey report found that 80% of men ejaculated within two minutes of penetration, not good news for women who take on average 20 minutes to reach orgasm. The inability to delay release may be connected with early subconscious conditioning to climax quickly because sexuality was concealed as a shameful secret.

Rather than advocating suppressive celibacy as the solution, Taoism and Tantric masters advise sexual expression with awareness and expertise. Using special techniques one can retrain the downward and outward explosive ejaculation to become an imploding inward and upward intrajaculation. Not easy to say or do! But as Healing Tao master Mantak Chia explains “Real sexual fulfilment lies not in feeling the life going out of you but in increasing the awareness of the vital current that flows through the loins.” This conserved force that would normally form new life is then channelled within to renew the whole body. Specific areas that benefit are said to be the nerves, endocrine glands, bone marrow, brain and immune system. Tantric scholar Sir John Woodruff in the “The Serpent Power” says “the force of the sexual centres if directed upwards, extraordinarily heightens all mental and physical functioning.”

The methods for doing this involve practices such as contracting the pubo-coccygeal muscle, pressing on the perineum, pulling down the testis, pinching the frenulum and most importantly using breathing and visualisation practices to circulate the accumulated energy around the body's central energy channel. Known as Sushumna in Tantra and the microcosmic orbit in Taoism this circles from the sacrum up the spine, over the head and pools energy in the navel (nabhi or dantien.) Its vibrating energy has the power to create ecstatic whole body multiorgasms, without ejaculation, releasing healing ripples to all cells. This is different from the old practice of coitus reservatus where one makes love without an orgasm, as this didn't explain how to channel the contained energy it can lead to severe prostate pressure, pain and heat congestion. If done correctly however it is not dangerous to withhold semen. In the early stages a retrograde ejaculation occurs which passes into the bladder and is expelled with urine and with mastery the thick fluid is transmuted into a fine nectar that travels to nourish all tissues like a rejuvenating shower.

Most men find it hard to conceive of orgasms without ejaculation though this is a natural prepubescent occurrence and according to Mantak Chia and Douglas Abrams Arava in “The Multi Orgasmic Man,” after persevering with the practices “Most men begin to experience multiple orgasms within a week or two and master it within three to six months”. In their study of multiorgasmic men Dunn and Trost found it was much easier for men to become multiorgasmic later in life and with an intimate, loving partner. Writer William Burroughs noted the different types of orgasms “There is the pleasurable orgasm, like a rising sales graph, and there is the unpleasurable orgasm, slumping ominously like the Dow Jones in 1929.” Taoist and Tantric practices create the regenerative valley orgasm, continuous ecstatic waves rolling throughout the body that get stronger and leave one energised as opposed to the degenerative peak orgasm where one rises to the wave's peak to come crashing down. As one Tantric scholar noted the “Goal is not to climb one peak together, but an entire series of mountains, each higher and with a more spectacular view than the previous peak.” Couples dedicated to a deeper sexual experience have the choice to prolong pleasure so the climax builds to greater heights together. This mutually erotic healing journey creates stronger bonds of intimacy involving coming together rather than just coming.

The Sexual-Spiritual Schism

Having considered the physical and psychological benefits of sexuality let's venture into the minefield of sex and spirituality. For some it takes a mental leap to accept that sexuality and spirituality can be integrated. Our view of sexuality is filtered through the projector of past conditioning from cultural, religious and familial influences. Sex is such a deep-seated subconscious drive that, depending on our approach, it has the power to recreate or destroy us.

According to our outlook we can see it as divine or depraved, a source of damnation or salvation, a process for procreation or pleasure. Whether we think it will degrade us to devil status or elevate us to angelic heights will decide whether it harms or helps us. Adopting the middle path between hedonism and asceticism, craving and aversion liberates us from restricting concepts, opening us to utilise sexuality for the highest good according to time, place and circumstance.

Though sex is easily accessible today many find it shallow and dissatisfying. Some are sexually wounded after degrading, disappointing, humiliating, exploitative, shameful or simply unstimulating experiences. This discomfort may manifest in subtle or obvious ways such as fear of nudity, public displays of affection or erotic art, frigidity, impotence, sexual perversions or most commonly an inability to release inhibitions in order to fully enjoy sex.

Society does little to enhance our sexual wisdom, encouraging it while at the same time condemning and sensationalising the natural act that created us. As far back as the 1940's psychologist Wilhelm Reich was persecuted for extolling the orgasmic release as one of the most physically and emotionally healing experiences and as recently as 1994 US surgeons general Dr Joycelyn Elders was forced to resign for stating publicly that masturbation was a normal part of human sexuality.

Religion often contributes to our aversion to sex, shrouding it in the same shame that prompted Eve and Adam to forage for fig leaves. Many religious traditions reinforced a negative concept of sexuality where celibacy was for strong saints and sex for weak sinners. In an attempt to redeem themselves some would suppress their baser sexual nature to cultivate superior spiritual sensitivities. Extreme cults such as the Skoptsi Russian sect would go so far as to castrate themselves, women cut off their breasts and Angela de Fulgino burnt her own genitals with hot coals in order to destroy desire. Preachers in patriarchal religions began blaming women for their sexual frustration, polarising them as either the demonised whore who traps them into lust or the sacred asexual virgin-mother. And you only have to see how harmless Peter Finch was branded a sexual predator in *The Nun's Story* and *Black Narcissus* to understand how female celibate orders bore the same prejudice against men.

Celibacy can be a healthy aid to enlightenment if the creative energy is rechannelled correctly. But suppressed sexual energy wages an inner war which eventually surfaces in destructive ways such as through aggression, depression, neurosis and psychosis. Philosopher Omraam Michael Aivanhov agrees, "Only idiotic puritans fight against this energy, and they are always hurled to the ground and crushed by it, because they are fighting against a divine principle."

Then there is the opposite paradigm where unrestricted indulgence is advocated. Practiced along proper guidelines, with pure intentions this can also be a path to enlightenment. In Tantra it is known as Bhukti when you don't deny pleasure but deepen it until you transcend it. But there are inherent dangers on this route such as sex addiction where one gets stuck in sensual pleasures rather than seeing them as rungs in the ladder to liberation. Excessive sex can devitalise partners and devalue its special quality as author Ayn Rand felt "I consider promiscuity immoral. Not because sex is evil, but because sex is too good and too important." There are not only physical dangers but also the negative energetic effect of absorbing malevolent vibrations if the experience is bereft of benevolent love.

However, it's not a question of quantity but rather quality that will nurture sexual satisfaction. People are largely dissatisfied with their sex lives today because they lack a spiritual concept of sexuality that would greatly enrich the experience. As poet May Sarton pointed out "Sex itself must always come to us as a sacrament and be so used or it is meaningless. The flesh is suffused by the spirit, and it is forgetting this in the act of love-making that creates cynicism and despair."

By introducing a sacred dimension to making love we take advantage of its transformative quality. As Georg Feurstein noted "The great ideal of a body-positive spirituality is to transmute the sexual energy, without squashing it and oneself, and to use it in order to intensify one's consciousness and one's erotic capacity."

Primordial Sex

Many ancient cultures saw spirituality as sacramental. Sacred sexual symbolism permeates every civilisation right back to the oldest cave drawing showing a woman on top at Mesopotamia's 3,200 year old Ur excavations. Phallic effigies include the Roman's Mutunus, Japan's iron phalli of Kanamara-sama and Sarutahiko, the wooden priapus of Trani, Italy called Il Santo Membro, American Indian's totems, India's millions of Shiva lingams and shaligram shilas including the thousand lingams at Tanjore temple hall, Kashmir's natural stalagmite lingam in Amaranth cave and England's well endowed giant of Cerne Abbas. These are often invested with the power to bless infertile couples with progeny or to increase spiritual strength. Real genitals were also worshipped as BZ Goldberg reported in 1931 that the priests of Kanara walked nude through the streets, ringing bells while women ran out to kiss their member. Naked women were also worshipped as shaktis during tantric rituals such as Yoni Puja. Deities of the female form include the u-shaped yoni of India, the conch shell, a natural moist rock cleft at Kamarupa, Assam said to be Sati's genitals and the clamshell parade at Inuyama, Japan where girls throw rice cakes from the centre of the opening and closing clam. Icons of divine intercourse abound with the Ankh symbol, the yoni lingams of Asia including the 64 at Nepal's Pushpatinath Temple, a sacred stone in the Ark of the Covenant chest which represents coitus and at Japan's Chiba festival where a giant wooden phallus is inserted into a straw vulva splattering the audience with milky sake.

These ceremonies are a celebration of the universal act of creation. The male organ symbolises the proactive, impregnating energy of purusha, yang or the deity related to

this such as Shiva or Krishna. The female organ signifies the balancing receptive, impregnated energy of prakriti, yin and goddesses such as Shakti and Radha. Their union is the synthesis of divine dualities, opposites merging in ecstatic creation. Erotic artistic traditions flourished in many ancient cultures including India where the 85 Tantric temples of Khajuraho embellished with sensual statues still stand as testimony to its liberal past. Rather than seeing sex as polluting it was considered a purifying rite to visit a temple prostitute in ancient India, Sumer, Egypt, Rome and Greece where women were worshipped as the doorway to the divine. "The original whore was a priestess, the conduit to the divine, the one through whose body one entered the sacred arena and was restored," says researcher Deena Metzger. In India there is even a temple hymn saying "To have intercourse with a prostitute is a virtue that takes away sin." However we must consider that these priestesses had presumably raised their consciousness to a level beyond personal attachment and selfish desire.

Many question our whether we are monogamous by nature, a concept rejected by most cultures. Muslims are known for practicing polygamy but there are also many cultures allowing woman more than one husband known as polyandry. A study by Jane Barr found that out of 853 human societies worldwide 84% practiced polygamy. These ancient traditions teach us that beliefs about sexuality very greatly according to time and culture. Holding negative concepts of sexuality holds us back from taking full advantage of its healing capacity. We restrict ourselves from the sacred possibilities of sexuality if we cling to past conditioning and limiting man-made conventions. When we open our perception to the spiritual side of sexuality it will start to manifest more spiritual energy. Many people already experience greater ecstatic transcendence in their bedroom than in their church or temple. As actor Omar Sharif confided- "Making love? It's a communion with a woman. The bed is the holy table. There I find passion- and purification."

Divine Union

Spiritual transformation through sexual experience begins with accepting the body as a temple of divine energy. Accessing this energy within ourself and others reveals the mystery of universal energies. Both Tantra and Taoism advocate methods to use sexuality as a springboard to more subtle realms as it is such a powerful and persistent force. Initially this requires willingness to experiment with techniques then ultimately an ability to totally surrender and forget all methodology. The Taoists call this effortlessness Wu Wei, understanding that the harder we strain to attain something the more it slips from our grasp. This is relevant to many of the 40% of women who struggle to achieve orgasm as stress blocks them from feeling pleasure in the present. Interestingly electroencephalogram readings have shown that women's brainwaves during orgasm are predominantly in alpha- the meditative relaxed state. We all long for a loving connection at the deepest level. We can meet this love with a partner whilst also acknowledging that the same love we seek is within. Spiritual sex is best practiced with yourself or an unconditionally loving and willing partner. To be able to trust and surrender to your partner or yourself is essential as the aim is to soften separation boundaries and emotional armour with selfless and sharing intentions. The potential for blissful ego-transcending ecstasy rather than selfish ego-fulfilment is much

greater when there is patience, communication and consideration between partners. This requires making love through the heart, not just the genitals. We can absorb the opposite energy of our partner or we can harmonise our own internal yin/yang or ida/pingala polar opposites. Jung called these the anima and animus- the male aspect in women and the female aspect in men. Worshipping the divine in our partners and ourselves allows us to really soul mate.

During high sex the co-mingling force of physical, emotional and spiritual love is so supercharged with electromagnetic energy that it can lead to spontaneous awakening and healing. Connecting the male and female parts is likened to turning on an electrical socket. This is often felt as a frisson or shudder of electricity shooting up the body or as streaming sensations rippling and pulsing in waves as it dissolves blockages. As one woman recounts "It felt like my pelvis literally became a funnel of energy, widening and receiving this incredible force of energy." It is essential to learn how to contain and channel this intense charge otherwise it can cause symptoms such as headaches and fatigue. These energies have enormous capabilities that we must respect as Benjamin Walker, author of 'Sex and the Supernatural' states "Sex is not just a buzz in the genitals, or a form of biophysical electricity streaming through the flesh, but an occult power, attuned by invisible strings to the resounding harmonies of the cosmos."

Erotic experiments

Freud once said that sexuality contained a "divine spark," in order to fan that into a flame here are some tips.

- Be aware of blocks to sexual satisfaction by asking yourself-what stops me from fully enjoying my sexuality? What steps can I take to enjoy a healthy, healing sex life? Consider your self-esteem and attitude to pleasure. If you have a partner, include a list of sexual likes, dislikes and requests to share with them. Write a list of negative beliefs and experiences regarding sex then jot down alternative empowering beliefs and desires. It's amazing what surfaces when we take time to examine our deeper sexual psyche. One client with neck pain said she'd abstained for over a year, as it was too uncomfortable. After trying some alternative positions she was delighted to find it actually afforded relief and her husband was only too happy to help out.
- Become your own lover to learn what turns you on. Spend time alone getting comfortable with your body, experimenting and sensing your response. Making love with ourselves can be just as satisfying as with a partner, generating a positive self-image whilst regenerating new life within. Many women have trouble orgasming or even enjoying sex. The best way to overcome this is to explore self-service. Sexual energy can be more intense for a woman when she is alone as they can focus on their own pleasure, at their own pace. The arousal pathways can then be switched on more easily when with a partner. Self-massage to arousing music is one way to try this. Since vibrators dull sensitivity to subtle sensations they are not recommended for long-term use. Men practicing withholding ejaculation for an inner multiorgasmic experience are advised to master this alone first, free from the stimulating temptation of a lover.
- An emotional connection is the strongest aphrodisiac for a healing and transformative sex life. Intimacy is fostered by mutual commitment to communication, relaxed bonding time, consideration and by honouring each other's needs. People look to the athletic

postures of the Kama Sutra or libido boosting formulas to improve their sex life whereas all it takes to be a phenomenal lover is a giving heart. No matter how technically good a lover is, unless the heart is in it, the sex will soon feel empty. The measure of a successful sexual experience is not by the number of orgasms achieved but by the degree to which the heart and consciousness expands to love more. Learning to love and accept ourselves is the first step to this. Meeting one's needs for relaxation, stimulation and nurturing are reaffirming acts of self-loving.

Loving intimacy is especially vital for women as author John Gray explains, "Sex opens a man's heart, whereas a woman's heart needs to be opened and then she can enjoy sex."

- Bored or unfulfilled with your sex life? A US study filmed couples making love then twenty years later taped them again to find they made love in exactly the same way. To keep love alive in a long-term relationship one step is to deautomate your sex life. Use your imagination, try variety, be spontaneous and open to the unpredictable. Consider different locations to jump-start the passion such as in water, a luxurious hotel or a secluded forest. Ecstatic experiences happen when we shed our inhibitions and lose ourselves in the moment.

- Condition your mind/ body instrument so when its time to play it creates an ecstatic symphony.

Sex is usually the last thing we can be bothered with when we're sick or tired, though it may be the medicine we need. Optimising health and energy through good nutrition, adequate sleep and exercise will build reserve energy for healing sex. Exercise not only increases self esteem but a study of 78 sedentary men at California University found that after a nine month exercise regime it increased libido, frequency of sex by 30% and orgasm by 36%, however excessive exercise decreased testosterone and libido. Pelvic floor exercises as taught in pilates will also heighten enjoyment and increase stamina for both partners. As author Sheila Kitzinger says "If your pelvic floor muscles are slack and you do not know how to use them, you are missing out on one whole aspect of sexual experience." A simple way to condition these muscles is to stop and start the flow of urine for as long as possible.

- Getting in the mood takes elaborate conditions for some whereas 'just turning up' is enough for others. In *The Elusive Orgasm* by Dr Vivienne Cass one woman despairs- "I just finish unwinding from work and the kids and he's ready to climax!" The joke that a husband vacuuming is foreplay for a wife has an element of truth to it. Since our erotic circuits are charged by emotion, the key to arousing yourself or your partner is to create a loving connection. Rather than thinking of sex as a stop/ start event it is an ongoing process of loving interaction with oneself and others.

You can make love the whole day by being considerate, appreciative and supportive to yourself and your partner and by seeing the inherent beauty in all things. To fill the environment with positive energy before lovemaking create a sensual ambience with seductive music, scents, edibles, mirrors, colours, gentle lighting and soft textures.

Soaking in a soothing bath then "slipping into something more comfortable" can also set your mood. While a man's strongest sexual stimulus is visual, for females it is more setting. To minimise disturbances take the phone off the hook and choose a time when people aren't around. Take a moment to calm and centre yourself before coming together. New research by Dr Saral Tulsi clinical psychology professor suggests that

creative visualisation is a powerful approach to improving your sex life. "Think about the most pleasurable sexual experience in your life," Tulsi says. "You will get to a point where you are free from the negative images and can concentrate on creating or re-creating the positive images." If you take a while to get hot compared to your lover you may like to start some self-loving before uniting. Set aside enough time so there is no pressure or urgency as the Discourse on the Highest Tao Under Heaven explains, "The essence of foreplay is slowness, if one precedes slowly and patiently the woman will be exceedingly joyful.

- Sublime sex is a kind of mystical event that often happens in unexpected ways. As writer Simone De Beauvoir noted "Sex pleasure in woman is a kind of magic spell; it demands complete abandon; if words or movements oppose the magic of caresses, the spell is broken."

To practice sacred sex one must first acknowledge the divinity in oneself and one's partner. Next you can pray for positive energy to flow through you and meditate on giving and receiving healing energy with your partner. Create a calm, centred connection by gazing into each other's eyes whilst touching. Then to stoke passions fire take 10 slow deep breaths in synch. Alternatively with mouths together, exhale while the other inhales the air and vice versa. Breathe in each other's essence with the inhalation and on the exhalation release the energy throughout your entire body. Sex fails to satisfy us on a deeper level when we are penetrated physically but not energetically, resulting in a depleting and empty experience. Let barriers dissolve to envelope your partner as you both merge with universal orgasmic energy. An erotic massage helps this process by releasing mental problems and preoccupations whilst stimulating erogenous zones.

Enjoy the flow of subtle sensations rather than driving towards orgasm. Savour the taste, smell, touch of yourself and your partner. Problems preventing mutual enjoyment may include premature ejaculation in men and women failing to achieve orgasm. Micheal Winn Senior Healing Tao instructor suggests a way to postpone ejaculation - "The more a woman can touch and stroke a man's whole body and help him to be less penis oriented, the easier it will be for him to move the energy out of his penis to other parts of his body."

When trying to arouse a woman remember that the tongue is mightier than the sword. Only one third of women experience orgasm through penetration alone so it is important to explore other techniques. Remember that the most sensitive area in a woman is all within 1 inch of her love cave, dispelling the myth that deeper penetration is better. Women who are self-conscious or critical of their bodies tend to be more sexually inhibited. Interestingly a US poll asking men what they found sexy had very little to do with appearance rather 'what they want to do to me and what they want done to them' was the ultimate male turn on. Confidence was seen as another appealing trait. Liberating sex helps one to shed self-limiting beliefs by appreciating the pleasure you can give and receive irrespective of physical appearance. Still words whispered in a lover's ear can set the soul ablaze, especially if offering encouragement and appreciation.

A simple way to absorb your partner's energy is with muscle contraction, breath and visualisation. With tongues and genitals connected, on inhalation contract your pubococcygeal muscle and visualise energy flowing up your genitals, spine, head, tongue and finally to the belly. Then breathing out through the mouth feel the energy spread through your entire being. Remain relaxed and hold the energy within, resisting the urge to orgasm until the charge has accumulated to an overflowing level. Finally when you can contain it no longer, allow the dam to burst, creating an ecstatic surge like Victoria Falls.

Afterplay

Basking in the afterglow of love can be the sweetest experience of all. Relax in each other's energy and absorb the delight while lying together in still silence. It can take up to fifteen minutes for a woman's genitals to return to normal so she can continue to feel little tremors for a long time. Store the peak sensations in your memory cells so you can access them whenever you need a shot of sexual healing.

A rejuvenating drink to help a man replenish lost fluids is warm milk or with a pinch of saffron, a tsp of honey and a few dates and almonds blended together. To add more creative courses to your love feast refer to "101 Nights of Tantric Sex," by Cassandra Lorus.

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