

Sexy and spiritual

Expand all of your horizons through Tantra. By Rose Rouse

Thanks to the internet, Tantra is becoming better understood and more commonly practised in the UK. Whereas 10 years ago, it was a titillating titbit from Sting (he was actually joking with Bob Geldof in an interview), now people are able to research what it means and realise it's not only a sacred sexual practice but an expansive approach to living. Tantra actually means 'to weave, to expand and to spread' so this makes sense.

"We find that people of all different ages come," says Hanna Katz-Jelfs who has been running Transcendence Tantra (tantra.uk.com) with her husband Martin, for over 20 years, "It depends what stage in their development they are. It could be they are in their 20s and curious already, or it might be they suddenly have some time to focus on their relationship as their children grow up. But people tend to be more aware of what tantra is these days because they can read about it on the internet."

So why do individuals decide to do a Tantra workshop? "Often it's because they want more out of life," says Jan Day, intimacy coach and founder of Living Tantra (janday.com). "They might be materially successful but they realise they're not connecting to a deeper part of themselves and others. Tantra helps you feel accepted at a deeper level of who you really are. You get an opportunity to explore yourself emotionally, spiritually, physically and sexually. In accepting yourself more profoundly, you accept others at that level and also open to God, in whatever form that takes for you."

Because there are so many distorted behaviours around sexuality (shame, addiction to porn, for instance), there is still a big need for Tantric re-education in this area. In many UK classes, teachers are gently guiding participants to move their sexual energy up through their hearts in order to meet others in a heart-centred way. There are also healing aspects to these workshops. "So often conditioning teaches us to split our hearts and our sexuality," says Elena Angel who runs Dragon Tantra (dragontantra.com) with her partner, Mike Lousada. "By using our sexual energy in a different way, we can really evolve in our ways of meeting each other, especially our partners."



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Both couples and singles can get a lot out of Tantra sessions. As a single, you can check out whether the exercises are done in twos or in groups of three or four which dissipates that one-on-one focus which can be off-putting. “Tantra can provide a healing experience for single people who haven’t been in a relationship for a while,” says Angel, who also offers bespoke Tantra and Tao healing as Dakini Shyama (dakinishyama.com). “Mike and I are also setting up some new tantra-inspired weekend workshops for total newcomers who might be put off by the more outlandish-seeming parts of Tantra like the mantras or nudity. Our Sex and Self workshops are aimed to give sexual confidence to a more mainstream audience.”

Tantra workshops differ according to their teachers so it’s worth spending time finding out exactly what you’re getting into to make sure you get what you want. A lot of courses are technique-based as opposed to emotion-issue led. These tend to spend more time on the celebratory, pleasure-orientated aspects and not so much on psychotherapeutic, sexual healing.

Hanna Katz-Jelfs, and her husband Martin, run Tantra workshops that are more spiritually-orientated. “Tantra for us is a practical way to a spiritual path and contemplating spirit, heart and sexuality,” she says. “Our introductory levels focus on stages from energy and intimacy to cobra breath to living in bliss. Much of what we teach connects to daily practices like meditation and yoga which help bypass the ego and connect to oneness. We’ve just brought out a DVD on Tantric Healing Massage which we hope will cause a cultural change in intimacy and the potential around it.”

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Elena Angel and her partner Mike Lousada are both sexual healers, so they bring the energy of a very intense, committed tantric love partnership to their sessions and their work is very much about relationship dynamics and modelling the ‘mature’ masculine and feminine. “Sometimes I am seeing couples who need private sessions,” says Angel. “They might want to develop their relationships with an expanded sexual and spiritual vocabulary. They might want to deepen their orgasmic pleasure.”

But do they have any examples of the benefits? “I’ve seen so many people become so much more open to accepting themselves, seeing their partner and simply being able to love as well as being able to really live in a passionate way,” says Day. “I worked with a woman recently who had pretty much given up on herself as a sexual being who could be in a relationship. The workshops and coaching gave her back a sparkle, regenerated her sex life and opened her up to a new passion for life.”

Katz-Jelfs adds: “We just had a private session with a couple from Brighton who have two children and were on the brink of divorce. We held them and supported them in such a way that in the end their differences dropped away. It wasn’t easy, but it happened. The woman said afterwards her children are now encouraging them to go to Tantra workshops because they know it’s what kept their parents together.”

There are plenty of other examples too. “I saw a couple privately who were in a good relationship,” says Angel, “and the woman wanted to recapture some of the youthful excitement that comes with exploring new things. She’s interested in both sex and spirituality and wants to explore now that she’s more mature and has a stronger sense of self and her own power. Whereas the man felt satisfied as an achiever in his material existence and is now wondering about the intangibles and how to explore those.” The number one benefit in all cases is a richer, more expanded way of living.