

What does it mean
to express our sexual
and sensual selves?
Author Jan Day
shares what it means
to embody tantra

TANTRIC ENERGIES

and Compassionate Authenticity

The essence of tantra is to include every aspect of life, weaving it together in our journey of growing into becoming more conscious and open to love. Tantra includes everything – the dark and the light, the body, feeling, heart and soul. It includes our inner world and our relationships, our communities and the world around us.

So, although tantra isn't only about sex, we certainly do include our body and our sexual nature when it comes to living tantrically. We often use sexuality as a medium in which to learn. That's because it is both one of the most powerful energies we can experience and because, historically, it has often been abused or misused. The result is that our relationship with our own sexual nature is rarely innocent, natural or easy and is often somewhat distorted or dysfunctional, leading us to use sex to get love, cover inner pain or feel powerful.

To come to a full sense of embodiment we need to have a good awareness of and connection with ourselves in all dimensions of our being: our body and sexual nature, our feelings and gut awareness, our thoughts, creativity and patterns of thinking and acting, our intuition and soul. As we develop that connection with ourselves we naturally build sensitivity, awareness, caring and empathy towards the people we are in relationships with and, ultimately, with all beings, our planet and even beyond. It's a rippling-out of awareness, connection, sensitivity and compassion which brings us into full connection both within and without.

EMBODYING TANTRA

So, how do we start to come alive to embody this tantric energy? We begin close to home, in our own body. We start by developing awareness of the sensations in our body, noticing what happens when we are touched physically, connected with our breath and open to our feelings. We begin to notice the more subtle energies that flow within us, which bring delight when we pay attention and notice them. We also want to open to let the stronger energies flow in us and move us, to be able to be with them without needing to do anything with them.

We are discovering and voicing a resounding 'yes' to our own experience and

opening the door to our aliveness. That can be blissful, but it can also be challenging and turbulent because we may have shut down those energies for valid reasons. We have so much life energy within us. We therefore go slowly and stop whenever we feel more than we can comfortably be with. A good way to process and build our capacity to feel and be with ourselves is to engage in a daily journaling practice. It's a time to listen deeply to whatever is going on in our inner world.

Once we have restored sensitivity to the flow of our life energy and built our capacity to hold ourselves in it, we can more easily regulate ourselves. We can then begin to extend our attention outwards to attune to the people we want to relate with. Just as we need to go slowly for ourselves, we also need to go gently and bring our heart energy and compassion to our interactions with others as we move into connection, touching each other both physically and emotionally. When we are fully with ourselves in this way, we have the possibility to attune to a partner and create a full-bodied energetic connection that feels both safe and calm and also alive and vital. It feels safe to connect with someone in this way if they are present to themselves, too. We are alive and touched by every gesture, sound, sight, touch. We are touched by life.

WORKING WITH THE INNER WORLD

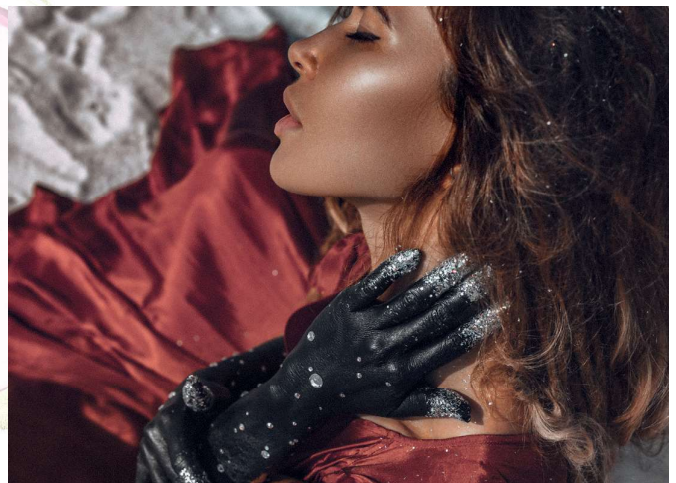
As well as tuning in to our body, sexuality, feelings and heart, we also include explorations of the different parts of our

inner world that drive our personality and being. This work, which I call 'Parts Work', enables us to explore – with care and compassion – a wide range of different parts of ourselves. We observe which parts we identify with most easily if we are challenged or triggered: those which we keep hidden in the shadows, which keep us in patterns, which are relics from the past and no longer serving us. We can also step into transcendental parts, such as the voice of Pure Love, or into archetypal parts that we want to develop, such as the Sensual Woman, Wise Adult or Protector. By giving ourselves permission to listen to each part and to identify with it without judgement, we can appreciate the value each part brings (or brought) and allow our different parts to integrate, balance and support each other.

We welcome each and every part of ourselves with compassion, curiosity and understanding. By befriending our inner world, we become more authentic. We know ourselves more clearly and we can resonate and relate with others from a place of compassionate authenticity. Our self-serving parts won't sneak out and take over, but instead be integrated so that they bring their unique gifts to the table.

When we are in connection with ourselves and fully embodied – with our own heart and feelings and the different parts of ourselves – we don't need rules. We resonate with others, and ultimately with our world and with life itself. Then, we become love. It's not simply 'nice' – it's juicy, raw and alive. This is the journey of living tantra. »

We are discovering and voicing a resounding 'yes' to our own experience



THREE PRACTICAL EXERCISES

OPENING TO THE FLOW OF OUR BODIES

Sit comfortably somewhere quiet where you won't be disturbed, and bring your attention to your breath. Staying connected to your breath, begin to let your focus move throughout your body as if your breath was guiding you. Send your attention down into your feet as if you were inside them, then very slowly allow your focus to move up through your legs, gradually taking in your whole body. As you do this, imagine that you could actually breathe into and inspire each part of your body.

Notice with great curiosity the tiniest sensations and energy flows. Expand your breath and focus to take in your whole body, as if you could look down from the top of your head to take in all parts and feel their wholeness. Finally, expand your awareness outwards – beyond the boundary of your skin – to encompass the area around you and expand outwards. Notice how you feel as you do this, and realise you can do this practice anywhere, even if for just a few minutes.

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USING MOVEMENT TO STIMULATE THE BODY

Ideally, you'll have some music for the next practice. Something like 'Shamanic Dream' by Anugama works well. While standing, close your eyes and begin by shaking, keeping your feet firmly on the ground and allowing a gentle bouncing which starts from your knees and ripples up through your body so that your whole body shakes gently.

As much as you can, let everything be soft and relaxed. Let your body move easily while paying attention to what happens within it. You may notice tension or other sensations. Stay as relaxed in your body as you can. After about five minutes, let go of the shaking movement and begin to let a wave-like movement flow through your body, starting from your pelvis. Start the movement by moving your pelvis forwards and making big circling movements that ripple up through your body. Move in a way that feels pleasurable and notice your inner experience for about five more minutes.

Then, lie down on a rug, yoga mat or bed. Allowing your body to move, keep your attention within your body so that you notice the sensations, energies and feelings moving in you. Keep moving in a way that feels pleasurable for about ten minutes before softening and slowing your movements, putting your arms around yourself or stroking your body and holding yourself with love. Imagine saying a deep inner 'yes', radiating out from your heart to all that moves within you.

FEEL INTO YOUR SENSUALITY

To extend your attention to all that sparks your aliveness, practise noticing what happens if you bring your focus to your pelvis, skin and lips. Sense your sexuality, pulsating and alive within you. Enjoy the sensations and energies. Next time you are out in nature or even in the supermarket, take in the sensual quality of nature, whether it is in the leaves, the clouds or the vegetables piled up in the supermarket.

How do you feel about your sexuality when you notice it in everyday life without needing to do anything with it? Does it feel okay to feel the sexual pleasure pulsing within you? Does it stir other thoughts and feelings? Keep a journal as you continue this practice in everyday life, going as slowly as you need to so that you don't get overwhelmed. Note down any thoughts, ideas or judgements you have about feeling sexual pleasure within your own body. Notice if bringing attention to your body changes the quality, quantity or intensity of what you feel. ●



✦ Jan Day trained for 15 years with Art of Being founder Alan Lowen in Europe and Hawaii, as well as being a CTA certified coach. Jan encourages men and women to learn to trust their own unique journeys, to embrace and move beyond the limitations of their own wounds and to move towards their potential. Her latest book, *Living Tantra: A Journey into Sex, Spirit and Relationship* (£12.99, Watkins Publishing) is out now.

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