



Sex and the Spirit!

By SPRIHA SRIVASTAVA

Sex is good for the soul! This affirmation came my way on the cover of a well known wellness magazine. And the mark of exclamation seemed to insist that a large section of the world was perhaps oblivious to what the rest might find to be an obvious truth... that sex indeed is good for the soul. Here in India, in the land of the Kamasutra, this three letter word is a bit of a hot cake. We grab the idea, then awkwardly juggle it till it cools down before we go into a corner, and hopefully when no one's looking, bite into it.

But fret not, and fear not thy desires, for they will take you closer to God, or at least your inner godliness. I'm not the one saying this either. I'm merely quoting the masters of an ancient Indian tradition called Tantra. Before you raise that eyebrow, you should know that Tantra goes far beyond the black arts that most Indians identify it with and nor is it limited to the sexual gymnastics that many Westerners understand it to be. Having said that, Tantra does offer a unique path to sexual liberation and rumour has it, helps one bond with one's partner with a glue that binds beyond mere lust or everyday love. It is a bond of the spirit forged on the anvil of passion, in the furnace of an exchange of sexual energies.

Having heard all this and more, I took my hammer of hopeful skepticism to this party and, I wouldn't lie, hoped to come back an evolved convert.

Unfortunately, most Indian Tantrics, go about like Clark Kent. You wouldn't recognize them till the shirt comes off. So I had to look elsewhere and found a 'devoted married couple', Mark A. Michaels and Patricia Johnson, award winning authors and celebrated Tantra masters in their own right. And then I reached out to Diane Riley, a Tantra teacher based in Australia.

So here it is, the truth about Tantra, why it is good for you and some easy tips to introduce Tantric sexuality into your lives for a more fulfilling experience and to understand how passion and pleasure can indeed lead to spiritual fulfillment.

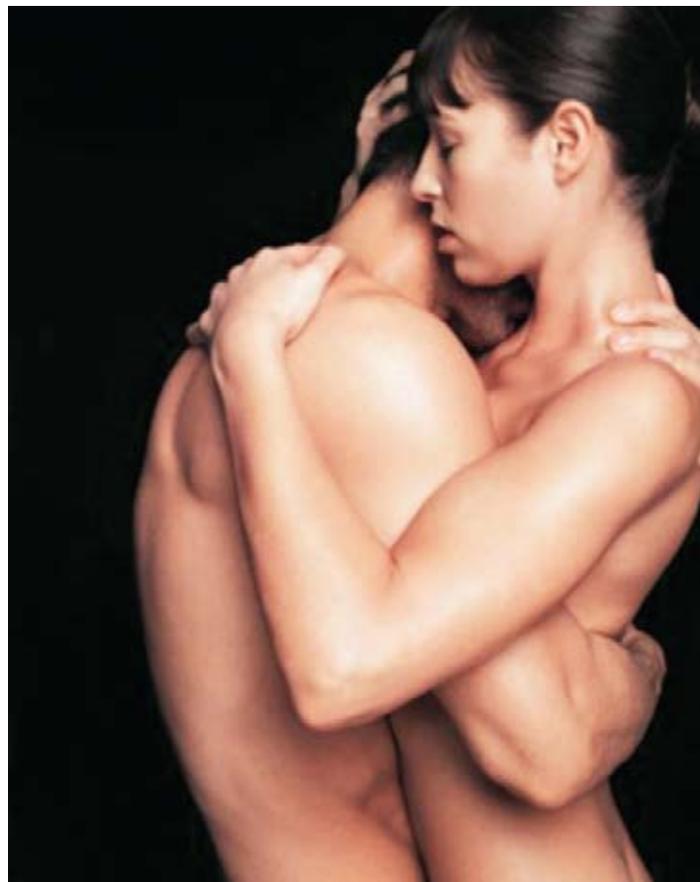
Good sex means good health because...

Patricia & Mark: Good sex is important for good health in a variety of ways. In emotional terms, it is nature's anti-depressant and stress reliever; why, it can even relieve pain. It also strengthens the immune system, burns calories, and recent research shows that frequent ejaculation is also associated with a reduced risk of prostate cancer in men.

Diane Riley: Good sex helps to release the 'good' endorphines, in our brains, helping us deal with stress much better in our lives. And fulfilling sex is an excellent 'tonic' and boosts the immune system'



Mark A. Michaels and Patricia Johnson.

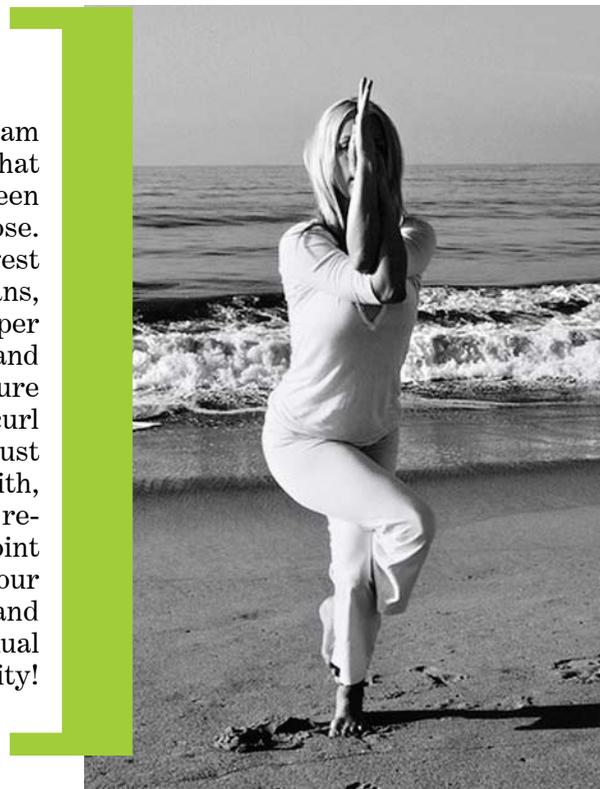


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So..er... how do we get started?
P&M: Begin with practicing the aswini mudra/PC Muscle contractions. In the US, these are called Kegel exercises, which are primarily taught to women after childbirth. Except for those who practice yoga, men are generally unfamiliar with the practice. Basically, it involves squeezing and releasing the pubococcygeal (stick with PC, it easier on the tongue and the ear) muscles (the ones you use to stop and start the flow of urine) and then bearing down slightly to ensure the full range of motion. This brings awareness to our sex organs, improves sexual function and response, regardless of gender, and generally keeps the entire uro-genital system toned and healthy.
 And practice eye-gazing. This is a modern adaptation of trataka, a traditional hatha yoga practice in which the yogi gazes fixedly on a yantra. For this variant, you stand face to face with your partner, feet shoulder-width apart, arms by your sides and palms facing each other. Focus your attention on your right eye and gaze into your partner's left, allowing

your left (receptive) eye to relax. Do this for two to three minutes daily. It is a very powerful way to connect and create harmony.
DR: To begin with, exercise and take time to listen to your heart. You could begin with playing some beautiful music. Then sit quietly and put your hands over your heart, paying attention to any physical sensation you may feel - tightness, heaviness, lightness, whatever. Now, pay attention to any feelings that may arise such as joy, laughter, sadness. Give yourself a few minutes to experience whatever it is you can feel. If you are doing this with a partner, then perhaps hold each other in a warm embrace. Don't talk; rather concentrate on your feelings of love. If you are doing this exercise alone, then just put your hands on your heart chakra, in the centre of your chest - right hand over left
 Diane also urges her clients to practice a ritual she calls 'daily devotion,' where partners take five minutes out together in a sexual way without any movement, expectations or orgasm.
 'You hold each other in sexual embrace with no movement- heart to heart, just holding each other, with synchronized breathing. Then you will feel very close to your partner- women feel emotionally nurtured, men feel sexually nurtured. Do this for five days in a

Yoga Guru and creator of Hot Yoga Bikram Choudhary says that if there was one asana that you should do to really spruce up your act between the sheets, it is the Garudasana or the Eagle Pose. It's the only pose in Yoga that opens up 14 largest joints and supplies fresh blood to the sex organs, besides making the hips, knees and ankles super flexible and relieving tension in the shoulders and neck. It's tough to attain perfection of this posture in the beginning, so for instance, if you can't curl your foot behind the other calf, it's alright! Just bend the knee of that leg slightly, to begin with, and then practice to get the pose right. But remember to straighten your back, focus on a point straight ahead and not strain the muscles of your face. Regular practice of Garudasana is, ladies and gentlemen, your pathway to enhancing sexual vigour and vitality!



row and it'll help your libidos become balanced.'
 Tantric love emphasises daily connections, simple tantric harmonising processes for rebalancing libido and amplifying passion, at whatever age. Throw out the performance enhancing drugs and try acquiring some Tantric skills instead!
 Diane's husband and fellow Tantra master Kerry Riley encourages men of all ages 18 - 80 to exercise their PC muscles as the fundamental technique for life long sexual health. 'Whether a man wants to learn ejaculation control or to strengthen his virility the PC muscle is important. Learn (how to work) this muscle and you will be able to make love for as long as you choose.
P&M: And does Tantra really help one connect better, sexually, emotionally and spiritually with one's partner?
 Practicing as a couple is likely to build or strengthen the physical, emotional, and spiritual connection between partners. It has certainly worked that way for us. Our only caveat is that if you are experiencing marital problems, trying to practice Tantra together can bring them to the fore. It's really best to start when things are already good, and you would like to make them even better.
 What about those rumours about tantric practices involving multiple partners? Does monogamy fit in

with Tantra? What about sexual jealousy?
 There is no dogma about this, at least as we've been taught. Tantra evolved at a time when monogamy was by no means universal, and in some of the ancient rituals the partner could be someone other than a spouse (in many ways it's easier to worship a stranger than it is to worship someone you know so well). Some modern practitioners advocate monogamy and others oppose it. We believe that for modern couples (monogamous or not), the most effective way to evoke the spirit of the ancient rituals is to try to bring the attitude of worship into all of your interactions (both sexual and non-sexual.)
 On the other hand, monogamy in its modern American form (at least) often entails denying even the existence of desire for anyone other than one's partner. As we see it, this kind of suppression and denial of desire is antithetical to the Tantric approach, which involves recognizing and working with desire, and then choosing whether or not to act.
 On a more personal note, in our experience, practicing together creates such a strong connection that jealousy is not likely to be an issue. ■

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