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How can you achieve a full-body orgasm that lasts for hours? Practice, practice, practice BY **JULIA NORWICH**

I have recently found myself poised to start over sexually, a sort of midlife faux virgin. This time, I wonder, how will I approach sex? I am acquainted with first, second, and third bases; one-night stands; married sex; high-test performance (orgasm required); and abstinence—each a manifestation of an evanescent civilization built atop the ruins of the one that came before.

Lately, I've heard about the unearthing of another sexual culture: the five-thousand-year-old practice of Tantric Sex. Woody Harrelson and Sting are (separately) Tantric practitioners, I've heard—which means *something*. I asked a friend of Harrelson's to find out if he would talk to me about Tantra, off the record.

The answer came back: "Sure, but why off the record?" Unfortunately Harrelson's shooting schedule was such that we were never able to hook up. Sometimes imagination is better than reality, anyway.

But we turned to other authorities.

In *The Art of Sexual Ecstasy* (Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam), which has sold over 150,000 copies since it was first published in 1989, author and teacher Margo Anand describes Tantra as "High Sex." Charles and Caroline Muir, authors of *Tantra, The Art of Conscious Loving* (Mercury House), write, "Ancient Tantra is a spiritual system in which sexual love is a sacrament." The goal: Through sex, you and your partner will become one with each other and with the universe. The publisher of *Tantra: The Magazine*

(Box 10268, Albuquerque, NM 87184), Alan Verdegraal, who produces a twelve-part monthly mail-order course with editor Susana Andrews, told me, "In Tantric Sex, spiritual evolution is more important than procreation." Anand points out that you may make love 3,000 times in your life and only create one child. "So what are you going to do with the other 2,999 times?" You're going to learn to have Higher Sex.

That's the philosophy; the physical technique is this: Largely through breathing techniques, Tantrikas—as practitioners are called—reroute and expand orgasmic energy from the tiny place in which it is usually concentrated, and pulse it through the body. The result, a "full-body orgasm," which Anand describes thus: "Instead>

of a localized genital release, you experience a prolonged series of subtle, continuous, wavelike pulsations that spread through the body, resulting in the impression that you are melting into your partner." The way you get there is to stop stimulation as you are about to peak, breathe the sexual energy up through the chakras (seven "energy centers" in your body—read about it), rest and feel the energy, and start stimulation again. (Then you repeat the entire exercise.)

Anand claims that channeling energy from the genitals into the head "stimulates the brain cells and creates a bridge between the right and left hemispheres, fusing the intellect of the left hemisphere with the intuitive faculties of the right. It is this fusion that creates the experience of ecstasy, in which body,

Tantra requires that you be fully present—that you engage body and soul—and you probably don't want to do that with just anyone who happens to turn you on.

Yet, reading the Muirs' book, I found this: "Too often couples engage in 'all or nothing' sex." I've noticed that, myself. Who says kissing has to lead to intercourse? Instead, one might try "The Nurturing Meditation," in which partners nestle like spoons and, "With their chakras aligned front to back, the two bodies tune one another," through harmonized and "reciprocal" breathing. After ten minutes, you may move on to making love, or you may not. Either way, you complete your close encounter with this last step: "Look at one another. Look *into* one another." Sex without

counterclockwise three times, "dispelling negative forces." Nor do I want to have sex with a man who squirts the air above my head with scented water from a plant sprayer and, while the mist drifts down on my hair, chants, "I dedicate this space to love." (I didn't make this up; these are examples from Anand's book.) There's more: I do not believe that sexually explicit videos, like *Sluts and Goddesses* ("How to be a sex goddess in 101 easy steps," including a five-minute orgasm "where Annie is stimulated by two women") or *Fire on the Mountain: An Intimate Guide to Male Genital Massage*, are manifestations of "sacred sexuality." (Each video is \$40 from the *Tantra Bazaar* catalog, an offshoot of the magazine.) And I do not plan to go to a Tantra weekend workshop (clothing optional) where I could try Tantric Sex with strangers—a spiritual excuse for an orgy.

I am not the only prude who's interested in Tantric Sex, and Verdegraal was able to suggest techniques for those unwilling to commit themselves to a full Tantric experience. "Imagine that you have a nose on your chest, where your heart is. Slowly inhale right into that point and exhale through it. This will bring energy directly into your heart center. If you and your partner lie heart-to-heart, you can breathe this way, in and out of each other's hearts." In his correspondence course, Verdegraal also describes the full-body hug: Embrace—not so tightly as to block the energy flow—and "with soft, subtle movements begin a conversation with your partner . . . let the movement originate in the breath. Inhale rhythmically, slowly and deeply, matching your breathing to your partner's breathing." Slow dancing, swaying to the music. . . .

I like this "Tantric courtship"—it's romantic, the way '50s sex often was, but the frenzy and guilt are replaced by a sense that time is on your side. (It was then; it isn't now. Another of life's ironies.) A little Tantra, it seems to me, could go a long way toward creating a gentle approach to sex for a neoneophyte, born-again virgin. □

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mind, heart, and spirit all participate." Meltdown.

"The average lovemaking session is ten minutes and a man's orgasm usually lasts ten seconds," Verdegraal says, but Tantric sessions tend to last one to four hours and even men considerably older than Woody Harrelson may stay erect the whole time and have a half-hour orgasm. Sounds exhausting, but Amy Hubert, a *Tantra* magazine staffer, says not: "You draw the sexual energy up into different organs and sex becomes revitalizing."

Achieving High Sex, you will not be surprised to hear, involves mastering certain techniques—Anand's book calls for seventy-five hours of exercises, which seems to rule out any partner with whom you are not already intimate. (A husband would be handy here.) And even the simplest exercises are more emotionally demanding than full-bore sex on, say, the third date, when you're still holding a lot back.

intercourse. Surely, this does not require advanced intimacy; necking comes to mind.

Another exercise a friend who dabbled in Tantra described to me is the mysteriously sexy practice of tracing another person's aura with your hands, skimming the air just above his or her skin. I tell an old beau, now a friend, about this. Does it sound great? "Oh, yes," he says. If he weren't calling me from California, he might come over so we could touch each other's auras. Why not? We could do this and stay friends.

I could not, however, do some of the other things recommended for Tantric bliss with my old beau or anyone else—I couldn't even do them alone without feeling goofy. Here's where Tantra begins to lose me. I do not wish to create a Sacred Space filled with "flowers, candles, bells, incense . . . suggestive sculpture . . . a magician's wand, a quartz crystal," and walk around it