

Chapter 11: ECSTASY

Pleasure. Say it.

Pleasure.

It sounds naughty, decadent, and absolutely delicious.

You have a right to feel pleasure. You have the right to feel marvellous in your skin and to enjoy the bounty of sensations that are available to you through your senses in every moment. You have the right to experience your body as the gift of your aliveness. It's your door prize for admission onto the planet.

So many of us deprive ourselves of the sensory feast that is right at our fingertips. More than ever, today's world encourages us to live in our heads rather than our bodies. We connect virtually to our friends, jobs, and the world. Our lives are mediated through the Internet, our computers, and our various I-devices. We sit at desks, drive in cars, and export our consciousness to the Cloud. Everyday interactions are digital rather than organic.

Sensual experience is a powerful opportunity to get out of the virtual world and come back home to your body and yourself.

You can enjoy the richness of your body's capacity to feel through your skin, your muscles, and your bones. Pleasure immerses you immediately in the present moment and awakens you to the very core of your aliveness.

However, while pleasure is an intrinsic part of being human, yoga and sex haven't always been friends.

Let's look at why.

A Brief History of Sex and Yoga

When yoga began more than three thousand years ago, it was not the physical practice that we know and love today. Practicing yoga meant meditating; yogis believed that enlightenment was found by looking inwards. The external, physical world – full of sensual distractions such as food, drink, and sex – was an impediment to this spiritual journey.

When we desire something, we usually can't help thinking about it, which makes it's hard for our minds to settle down.

For example, in the morning, I am a barely human creature consumed by a desire for Starbucks coffee so fervent that I can think of little else until I get it.

To avoid these distractions, ye olden yogis chose to be ascetics who avoided worldly pleasures. They would fast and practice celibacy. Many of us have experienced the waning of desire that renunciation can bring. For example, when we go on a dietary cleanse, we are often giving up something we enjoy. After a period of adaptation, we usually start to accept that we can't eat the pound cake in the fridge, and we don't think about it as much anymore. But once a forbidden item is back on the menu, our minds start murmuring their cravings again.

Sex is the Mack daddy of sensual delights.

Think about it: when you are attracted to someone, how distracted does your mind get?

When I am attracted to someone, the object of my affection starts to take up pretty much all of my conscious real estate. It's as if the hamsters in my brain have decided to watch a movie marathon of every romantic comedy ever produced. With good reason, yogis considered this distraction an obstacle to meditation. And to avoid this trouble, they practiced celibacy (*brahmacharya*) and took sex entirely off the menu.

Don't panic.

I promise you that you don't have to take a vow of celibacy to be a good yogi. Lucky for us, in the Middle Ages, a yoga philosophy called Tantra offered a new point of view that revolutionized the way that we could relate to the sensual delights of the world.

When you hear the word "Tantra," you may have a hazy image of Sting, sex, and the Kama Sutra, so let's look a little deeper.

While there are many branches of Tantra, we're going to talk about a branch of tantra that subscribes to *non-dualism*. Non-dualism proposes that the material world (*prakriti*, the realm of your Little Self) and the spiritual world (*purusha*, the realm of your Big Self) aren't really separate. In fact, the divine is embodied through the physical manifestation of the world. Another way of saying this is that God (however you might define God) isn't separate from us. The world is God incarnate.

So rather than avoiding the material world because it is a distraction on the road to enlightenment, the world around us can be experienced as the unfolding expression of divinity itself.

Whoa. Let's take that again. Slowly.

The world is the unfolding expression of divinity itself.

In other words, we don't have to *avoid* the world in order to become enlightened. Everything in the whole universe – including us! – is sacred. From this point of view, nothing in the material world is inherently bad.

According to tantric philosophy, we - through our bodies (and feelings, thoughts and relationships) - are participating in the continually unfolding expression of the Universe.

With this transformation of thought, the entire landscape of human physical experience – including our sexuality – becomes an opportunity for spiritual connection. Rather than being an impediment to our spiritual evolution, our senses can be our tools for self-realization.

Pretty awesome.

Tantra

Tantra is a branch of philosophy that upholds a non-dual view of the Universe. “Non-dual” means that there is no true separation between the divine and material. The world is an unfolding expression of Universal Consciousness in a multiplicity of forms. Therefore, rather than transcending the world, we can experience rapture *through* the world. Yay!

The physical yoga practice that you know and love has emerged from Tantra's generous bosom. Through your yoga practice, you are using your body as a vehicle for self-transformation. So, whether you knew it or not before this moment, you, my friend, are doing a tantrik practice every time you unroll your yoga mat.

Now, a note about Hitler and other bad people.

When I wrote, “from this point of view, nothing within the material world is inherently bad,” some of you may rightfully have perked up as you considered some of the crappy things that happen in the world. You may have thought, “Hey, those things are bad! Not everything that happens in the world is good!”

Yes, here is the conundrum of non-dual philosophy: if everything in the world is part of the divine, then why does bad stuff happen? Isn't god all good?

Some philosophies create the “devil” or “evil” to explain away the stuff in the world that we don't like. However, Tantra takes a slightly different approach. While Tantra would say that “everything is God” from the very *highest* perspective, not everything will seem okay (or is okay) from our human perspective.

Let's return for a moment to our virtual reality metaphor. If life is truly the ultimate virtual reality game, then nothing that happens in the game is really that terrible – when seen and understood from the perspective of the Big Self. However, for the Little Self,

who is immersed in the virtual reality, the bad shit can definitely feel well, like bad shit. Because it is.

Understanding the larger perspective doesn't mean that we become apathetic about the fate of the world. The world is a reflection of the divine and - as we explored in chapter four - we are the architects of creation.

But here's the riddle: in the tantrik worldview, no one is holding a gun to our heads and threatening us with punishment or damnation if we are bad. Instead, we make choices that align with our values because we *can*, and because we want to, as an expression of our own creative power. We are responsible. We are being good people because we want to uphold our own values – not because anyone is “making us.” We make our virtual reality what it is.

Life is a game. And we can choose to play it well.

Now let's talk about sex.

Honour your feelings

I was a late bloomer. Nerdy, flat-chested, and sporting a mouth full of braces, I was far more comfortable fantasizing about the men from my sister's romance novels than dealing with the goofy teenage boys skulking around my high school.

Keenly aware that I was lagging behind my gal pals in real-world experience, I believed that I could learn everything I needed to know about “making out” if I did enough academic research. I grilled my girlfriends relentlessly for data:

- “When he kisses you, how do you turn your head?”
- “How does your tongue move, is it like sweeping, or is more of an in-and-out thing?”
- “Where do you put your hands? Shoulders, back? Do you move them?”

As you can surmise, my first kiss was a disaster of intellectualism. In my perfectionist quest to “do it right,” I did not feel a thing.

I'd finally cornered my teenage crush (Geoff, yes, Geoff! The love child of C. Thomas Howell and Robert Sean Leonard! The boy of my dreams!) in my bedroom. On my rainbow coloured waterbed, to be exact. He was no longer dating Laura the sporty senior and was free to smooch other ladies.

“If I could have anyone be my first kiss, I'd want it to be you,” I say breathlessly.

“Well,” he clears his throat. “You’d have to take your glasses off.”

Oh my god, is this really happening? I whip my glasses off (which, uh, duh, you actually don’t need to do) and toss them aside. Then I face off like a kissing gladiator.

He leans in. His lips touch mine. They’re soft. And then oh my god, he licks my lips and sticks his tongue into my mouth. Now, I’ve been prepped for this manoeuvre, so I think that I should turn my head. But dammit, his tongue is moving around now, and now that I’m here, I have no idea what to do with it. It feels big and wet. Do I suck on it? Duel with it?

I have no idea how long this lasts, but I have a vague sense that what is happening is not sexy *at all*.

When he pulls back, I feel like an octopus has just landed on my face. “Um. Huh. I think I’m a sloppy kisser,” I say. I wonder where my glasses are.

“I think you’re perfect,” he says stoutly, surreptitiously wiping away some of my drool. He really is a sweetheart.

My confusion with sensuality did not get better over time.

Sex – when it finally happened - was almost shockingly disappointing. For me, it was indeed an “act” rather than an “experience.” I couldn’t reconcile the “heaving, throbbing” rapture that I had read about in my novels with the pushy, inept, alienating experience that I was having with my boyfriend.

His name was Mikey, by the way. Geoff and I had reverted to being “just friends” after our kissing adventure. Mikey was a smart kid who wore an earring (scandalous!), worked as a DJ, and looked like Waldo from *Where’s Waldo*.

Mike was my first real boyfriend. And while he was a nice enough guy, it turns out that I had a real problem communicating my feelings and boundaries to him. And unfortunately, my challenge in communicating extended to my ability to talk about having – or not having – sex. I did not know how to say, “No, this doesn’t feel right.” When difficult feelings surfaced (“difficult” being any feelings that might be at odds with what Mike wanted at the time), I felt as if there were a giant hand around my throat. I simply couldn’t speak.

I wound up performing my way through sex. I acted in a way that I thought looked good. Despite the distinct lack of “pulsating waves of pleasure,” I kept having sex with Mikey and in the hopes that my experience would change. And I thought (again with the thinking, thinking, thinking!) that I had an obligation to meet his expectations. God forbid he was disappointed.

With Mikey, I had sex because I thought I *should*, not because I wanted to. I started to hate sex. Part of me started to hate Mikey, too. And I hid all of these confusing feelings beneath a happy face. Poor Mikey had no idea of the icy rage that was coiled in the figure beneath him.

“Should” is sex’s death knell.

Many of us have had sex when it didn’t feel right. Comedian Amy Schumer darkly jests, “Haven’t we all been just a little bit raped?” Rape is not funny; her joke speaks to the terrible prevalence of non-consensual sex. Some of us have had undesired sex forced upon us. Others (like me) have forced *ourselves* into it somehow. Exploring rape is far beyond the scope of my expertise; I acknowledge it here because the sad fact is that many of us have had negative sexual experiences. Listening to our bodies and honouring what we truly want is essential for nourishing and reclaiming a whole sense of self.

Even those of us who have been blessed with a happy sexual history have probably had sex when something didn’t feel right or was “off.” To fully enjoy the richness of sex, we must stop our fragmentation bring the heart, head, and body together in our decision and experience.

By upholding our right to make an integrated choice, we leave no part of ourselves on the sidelines.

“The Rules”

Have you heard of the “Third Date Rule?”

Someone, somewhere decided that you shouldn’t have sex until the third date. Apparently, three is the magic number. If you wait til the third date, then you’re not too easy, but you’re also not a hold out. Hundreds of books have been written about the “code” of sexual conduct and dating (do this, but don’t do that!). It’s like a terrible continuation of my relentless note taking as a teenager when I was trying to figure out how to kiss a guy. We look for the “the answer” that will help us determine the “right” way to act.

Bullshit.

Here’s the thing: there are no rules to dictate when or when not to kiss, have sex, or let someone touch your bare belly. Your choice is your choice. And the right person will be cool with *whatever* you decide. Some people don’t want to have sex until they’re married; others are comfortable with sex from first sight. There is no right or wrong here, and there is no magic formula to follow. You are not a slut; you are not frigid. If

any of these kinds of judgments are getting thrown around, then they are coming from someone who lacks the empathy to understand you and be your person.

Acting with integrity means that our mind, body, and emotions are united in moving forward with what we are doing.

Any external rules that we try to follow will actually take us further from our own insight and wisdom.

The only rule you need to follow? Trust yourself. This means that if sex doesn't feel right, you get to say no.

Saying No

The voice of "no" can be quiet and is frequently drowned out by a cacophony of chatter from the mind. How many of us have eaten when we are not hungry, had sex when we weren't interested, or pushed through our physical limits when we were sick and should have been in bed? The body's wisdom can easily be trampled by the ego's agenda.

To become integrated, we must pause and listen to what our body is saying. *Practice the pause.* By taking a moment to breathe, feel, and move into the space beyond our thoughts, we can practice honouring what our body really wants. When we can hear what we need, then we can make a more informed choice that upholds our whole experience.

Ojas

Ojas is our primal sense of vigor and fundamental energy reserve. Ojas is fed through our senses, experience, and the food that nourishes our bodies. When we have sex, ojas is said to be depleted. Conserving our own vital energy gives us permission to choose what kinds of experience enliven and feed us, and which experiences are unsatisfying or detracting. We are given full permission to protect our sensual and sexual experience: are we being nourished or depleted?

Remember Ethan from Tinder?

After we moved past the initial confusion over mixed signals and paying for checks, we started dating. An engineer and a sailor, he took me on summer evening cruises where we grilled salmon, watched the sunset, and drank cold white wine. He was well informed, adventurous, and enough of a geek to be totally sexy. He was patient, laid back and we took things slow.

After a couple of months, I felt that it might be time to sleep over Ethan's apartment. I arrived on our date with toothbrush and birth control in tow. However, despite the

preparation, there was something that didn't feel quite right in our chemistry. My mind was full of exasperated chatter: "Don't be a tease," "Why not just do it?" "Don't disappoint him," "You've come this far!"

I have an old, dogged habit of being afraid of disappointing men. From my very first sexual experience, I've made their expectations more important than my experience. And here I was, nearly forty, with those same voices chattering in my ear.

But I didn't want to listen to them anymore.

I pause. I try to get quiet, ignore my crazy mind chatter, and really listen to my body.

I'm not feeling it.

"I'm sorry," I say finally, "I'm not there yet."

He props himself up and looks at me, "This doesn't just...drive you crazy?"

It seems impolite to say, "Uh, no, which is why I'd rather just go to sleep."

"I know, I wish I were," I'm sincere in this wish. I'd rather be caught up in an unfettered, animal display of passion than have this particular conversation. "But I'm just not there yet."

"Seriously?" He sounds surprised.

"Um, yeah, seriously."

He lays back in silence.

The silence grows.

I start to get that tight feeling in my chest. It's the feeling that says, "I'm bad, I've done something wrong." It's the feeling that I'll do just about anything to avoid.

I frown up at the ceiling. Fuck that feeling.

"I'm leaving," I suddenly say. My body says "no," and I am going. For the first time in my life, I am going to leave someone's bed. Even though it seems rude.

"I'm sorry, this just doesn't feel good. I'm going home." I pack up my things – toothbrush, birth control, and all - and I go.

Soon thereafter, Ethan told to me that he had been having feelings for another woman.

Perhaps a deep inner sixth sense had steered me to wait on intimacy, or perhaps I was simply lucky with my timing. Either way, I was happy that I had listened to my intuition.

The right person wants the relationship to work both ways. The right person will never mind waiting until the time is right for you.

Navigating the waters of sex and dating gives us the opportunity to reclaim the wildish intelligence of our bodies and emotions. We give this intelligence space to be held, nourished, and heard. The body does not speak the same language as the mind: its logic and timing are different. When we reclaim and validate our body's wordless and inchoate intuition, we affirm our wholeness and our trustworthiness. We can say, "I don't know why, but this doesn't feel right." We can trust our own truth.

That evening with Ethan, I listened to my feelings rather than following the rules. Rather than doing what I thought I *should*, I listened to my instincts. My whole body. My full self. And because I did, I took care of myself.

Saying Yes

When we trust ourselves to say no, we can also trust ourselves to say yes.

At first, Alex and I had decided that we should be friends rather than pursue a relationship. I was too afraid of his history with alcoholism to commit to something more. But we loved hanging out with each other. As we earned each other's trust, the sexual tension between us started ramping up.

My mind pulled back. "It's not appropriate," it said primly to my restless and burning body. "You are friends now, you are not dating. You can't go down that road. It's not right. It's not safe." So I kept my hands to myself. Or at least, I tried.

One cold fall day, Alex and I went to a lecture at a local college. Partway through the talk, Alex rested his hand on my back. I started burning up. The speaker probably gave us the answer to the human condition. I have no idea. I missed every word.

With Alex, I was still fighting my body's intuition, but this time my instincts were saying "yes" rather than "no." My mind was trying to keep me safe by following the "rules," but the problem was that I was ignoring what I really wanted.

I wanted him.

I drop him off at his place after the lecture.
"I didn't hear any of that lecture," I blurt out.

“You didn’t.”

“No. I didn’t hear a word.”

“Me neither,” he grins wolfishly, and leans in to kiss me.

“No, no, wait!” I scramble, “No, we agreed that this is not a good idea.”

“We said? No, *you* said. I’m all for it.”

“We decided to be friends,” I say stoutly. “Friends. Friends do not have sexual relations.”

“Why not?”

I ignore him. “And it won’t work because... Well, there are so many reasons...”

Even while I’m talking about pulling away, I start to feel my body lean into his. I pull back and press myself into my car door determinedly.

He rolls his eyes at me and sighs, “You know, all this time that you’ve been talking, we could have been making out already.”

“Out of the car. I’m going home.”

I drive home, alone, stewing. In my own juices, so to speak.

In my apartment, I pace around restlessly. Getting involved with Alex sexually was such a bad idea. Wasn’t it? His history with alcoholism, my history with alcoholics. Bad, bad idea. No relationship there. Bad road to travel. Sure, my body felt like it was on fire, but sex would just make things complicated.

I pull up short in sudden realization.

Things were already complicated between us. Not having sex wasn’t changing any of that. It was obvious that I was conflicted and sending out mixed signals.

“Complicated” wasn’t why I was hesitating.

I was scared because I didn’t think I could trust myself.

I had a history of being afraid of disappointing others. Wary of anger and conflict, I silenced myself to keep the peace. While this habit wasn’t that problematic when it meant avoiding a verbal fight, it became insidious when I was afraid of disappointing sexual partners.

My mind was trying to protect me from getting myself into a situation that would spiral into obligation and self-betrayal. I was afraid that – if I followed through on my sexual desire for Alex – I would trap myself in a situation where I felt obligated, silenced, and ultimately disempowered.

But I *had* earned my own trust. I was no longer the girl who wouldn’t leave a bad situation. After all, hadn’t I proven that during my experience with Ethan? I had become someone who would listen to my own body, honour my feelings, break the rules, and leave – if I had to – in the middle of the night.

I didn't need to live according to my fears. I was already safe. I had trusted myself to say no. And now I could trust myself to say yes.

With this new realization, I was willing to change my mind. I got back into my car and drove to Alex's apartment.

Let's just say that he was happy to see me.

Responsibility

Wanting sex is normal.

The Chariot Story

Once upon a time, there was a chariot being pulled by five horses named Smell, Sight, Hearing, Taste, and Touch. These are the senses. Excited by everything around them, those horses ran willy nilly after whatever new and delicious experience came across their path. Carrots! Rabbits! Hay! Their tendency to race around didn't make them bad horses; it was simply their nature to chase after yummy things. At the reins was a charioteer (the mind). When the charioteer wasn't paying attention, the horses would run everywhere. But when the charioteer was present and awake, the horses could be steered.

However, the chariot only really got where it was supposed to go when the charioteer listened to the Passenger sitting in the chariot. When the mind listened to the passenger (the Big Self) then the chariot found its way to its destination.

-Classical Hindu story, adapted from the Katha Upanishad

In this story, the horses are our senses, the charioteer is our mind, and the Passenger is our Soul. Simply put, humans are designed to run after yummy treats.

Raga

"Attraction." Raga is a natural attachment to pursuing objects that bring us pleasure. When we become overly attached to the objects of our senses (whether it's food, drink, sex, drugs) or try to use them to solve our problems, pleasure has become dysfunctional craving.

Despite some indoctrination to the contrary, we (humans) actually like pleasure.¹ When we accept the nature of our senses, we don't have the unrealistic expectation that they

¹ For more on the neurology of attraction/ aversion, check out Rick Hanson's lovely book, "Buddha's Brain: the practical neuroscience of happiness, love &

aren't going to crave stuff. Accepting our nature allows us to get out of the blame cycle ("Why do I want this?" "I can't control myself!") and allows us to do the real work of taking responsibility for guiding our horses with more mastery.

As yogis, we have a responsibility to respect the power of pleasure and use it wisely. When we experience craving, loneliness, anger, or sadness, our first temptation is often to use something pleasurable – like sex - to cover these feelings up. We drink the wine and text the guy – not because we really want to do those things – because we're trying to make the *bad feelings* go away. And it works – temporarily.

We use pleasure as a Band-Aid for the Missing Piece, rather than allowing ourselves to experience our real feelings.

When Alex and I broke up, I spent many evenings alone in my small apartment, desperate to use alcohol and food to distract myself from the pain of our separation. An epic battle occurred every night over the wine bottle. I knew it would be better to meditate, read, or practice yoga, but I wanted nothing more than to glug a glass and bury myself in Netflix. I won't lie: many nights the wine won. But when I used wine or food to cover up my feelings, I just felt worse.

Pain can't be healed by pleasure; it can only be healed by presence, compassion, and time. And when I used pleasure to cover up my pain, I was starving myself of what I really needed to heal. It was like eating sugar when I needed vegetables.

Using pleasure to cover up our Missing Piece disrespects the power of our senses. Wine is delicious; popcorn is a treat. However, by turning these pleasures into painkillers, I undermined the sacredness of their offering.

When we find ourselves seeking pleasure, it's time again to *practice the pause*. Why do we really want it? Are we using it to escape or cover up our pain?

When we realize that we are using pleasure as a cover up, then we can take a breath and do the hard spiritual work of sitting with our feelings rather than avoiding them. And if we truly want the yummy thing because it's a great time for a treat, then we are able to enjoy it.

Brahmacharya

"Celibacy." A yogic guideline for living, brahmacharya describes the practice of chastity. However, as non-celibate yogic practitioners, brahmacharya can be seen as an invitation for mindful sensuality. Are we trapped by sensual pleasure, or can we experience the sensuality of the world without fear, attachment or over-indulgence? Brahmacharya is an

wisdom." Did you know that Buddhism and yoga grew up in the same circles? The Buddha was enlightened in India, many of the early practices of yoga and Buddhism are indistinguishable. They're good buddies.

invitation to an open inquiry and search for moderation and accountability in our experience.

When we trust ourselves to deal with our feelings, then we can trust that we aren't using pleasure as a cop out. We can enjoy pleasure purely for its own sake, freely and fully. Sex becomes an affirmation of our humanity, an explosion of experience, a ridiculous romp through all the shivers, tingles, and delight that our beautiful human beauty has to offer. What a glorious experience to share with another human!

“The wise prefer the good to the pleasant, but the unwise choose the pleasant through love of bodily pleasure.” – Katha Upanishad. We often confuse pleasure for happiness, but they are not the same. Pleasure is a temporary sensual state. Delightful as it is, it will only be truly satisfying when we enjoy it in integrity with our hearts and minds.

And just as importantly, we can take pleasure - and we can leave it. Reducing our dependence on pleasure is essential for having a healthy relationship. After all, we do not have sex alone. Just as you have the right to say yes and no, so does your partner. When we aren't attached to using sex as an ego booster, power trip, or Band-Aid, then we can be with our partners more fully. When we're not attached to a pleasurable outcome, then we can offer our partners the gracious space to make their own best choice regarding sex - without the pressure of disappointing us.

Wholeness

Relishing your sensuality - and your sexuality - is a process of self-trust: trusting that you have the capacity to experience the wild, tumultuous, and exuberant oceans of cravings, sensations, and feelings responsibly and with grace.

Bringing a yogic mindset to your sensuality is not about dulling or restraining your experience. Rather, it's about evolving your mindfulness and care to the point that you can feel more, experience more, and express more – but with an equal measure of compassion, respect, and responsibility. With such awareness, you can trust that you won't compromise yourself or someone else in the process. You can enjoy pleasure without dilution, shame, or doubt.

Sexuality is about far more than just sex; it's a reflection of your relationship to your *sensuality*. While sex is an occasional act, you are perpetually immersed in the world of your senses. It's time to practice coming home to our bodies and ourselves.

Svadisthana chakra

Our second energy center located in the pelvis, svadisthana is the locus of our sensuality, fluidity, and deep emotion. When well balanced, we experience our sexuality freely and intuitively, generously and with integrity. The element associated with

Svadhishthana is water, indicating that feelings and sensuality have a natural ebb and flow, inviting us to experience our emotions and feelings while recognizing their inherent transitory nature.

Opportunities to nourish your senses are ever-present! Eat one meal exquisitely slowly and savouring what you taste. Take a walk through the woods and see the individual colors of the trees. Enjoy the texture of a cashmere sweater or a cat's soft fur. Read lush poetry and taste each word. Take a deep breath and luxuriate in the sensation of expansion and space. In Tantra, this respectful delight in your senses is called, "feeding the gods."

"We must increase our capacity for pleasure." – My anatomy and dissection teacher, the wonderful Gil Hedley.

Practice your wholesome *sensuality*. Own your pleasure. And share it with wonder, respect, and delight.

Practices

Life Practice: Awakening

This practice is designed to bring us "back" to our senses throughout our day. Set a timer to go off each hour. (A timer on your phone or an app can be used for setting intervals.) When you are pinged by your timer, stop and do a "sense inventory." This may include:

- Feeling the pleasure of breathing and feeling your lungs stretch
- Smelling your coffee
- Tasting your food
- Hearing the sounds around you
- Seeing the colors around you.

Most of the time, we rush past these everyday delicacies. This simple practice connect you instantly to your body, you will also notice that each hour brings you something different.

Dating Practice: Delight Your Senses

If you already have a partner, explore the sensual feast at your fingertips. Rather than rushing to sex, take the time to explore the sensual possibilities of taste, touch, smell, and sound. Exquisitely linger.

If you are on a date, give yourself the time and space to experience this person through the lens of your senses. How does this person smell, sound? What do you feel in your own body when you are around him or her?

Meditation Practice: Nourish Your Senses

Select a sense to focus on: sound, taste, sight, sensation, smell. Although I will use sound in this particular guidance, you can choose a different sense each time you do this practice.² Do this slowly the first time (take about five minutes). Once you get the hang of “tuning in,” you can take a few moments at any time in your day to connect to your sense more deeply.

- Find your meditation seat (see chapter two for more detailed instructions if needed).
- Close your eyes in order to refine your awareness.
- Begin by hearing the sounds close to you.
- What is the texture of the sound, the rhythm? How does the vibration feel?
- Allow yourself to hear the sounds arise and fall away.
- After a little while, expand your awareness to include sounds that are far away.
- Hear the sounds arise and fall without expectation.
- Let go of the need to identify the sounds and give yourself permission to hear without labeling sounds as “good” or “bad”.
- Sit in the spaciousness of the field of sound.
- Begin to feel your own presence, hearing the sounds as they arise.
- Become aware of your sense of hearing, tuning you into each vibration.
- Pause. Ask: Who is hearing?
- After a few minutes, take a few deep breaths and open your eyes.
- Does the world feel any different?

Yoga Practice: Sensual Experience

- Lizard
- Saddle

Hip openers are famously linked to our deep, sensual and emotional centres. As you explore these poses, consider: how could your yoga practice feel 10-15% more delicious in your body? Rather than treat your yoga practice as something to “perform,” use your yoga practice as a tool to connect to the pleasure of moving your body and feeling your breath. How does your practice change if this is your priority?

² Two wonderful resources for this kind of work: Jon Kabatt-Zinn’s “Coming to our Senses” and Reginald Ray’s “Touching Enlightenment.”