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Graceful Guidelines for Sexual Healing

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Most people in the “recovery” or “therapy” process yearn for sexual healing. I make this statement as a therapist and as a human being who has facilitated myself and many others on the journey.

Sexual healing is the shame-free revisiting of complex sexual histories, limitations and perceptions combined with new awareness, understanding, and compassion. In the process of this rejuvenation, we learn how to merge our spiritual and sexual energies. The "sexual-spiritual split" is a culturally induced, deep psychic schism that haunts relationships and precludes emotional fulfillment. Resolving this powerful inner conflict is necessary for true body, mind and spirit connections.

These guidelines can be used to illuminate and focus a core healing journey that is central to having life mastery, which is the awareness of aliveness, sensual pleasure and contentment.

Five graceful guidelines for sexual healing:

1. Increase Body Awareness
2. Share Sexual History
3. Dialogue in Relationship
4. Create Fusion Exercise
5. Rediscover adolescent awkwardness

1. **Body Awareness.** Introduce yourself to the possibility of bringing full body awareness and energy to your sexual regions. Some of us have depleted energy levels and a diminished sense of aliveness in their pelvic area and a fullness of energy in the heart region. Others feel constricted with their heart energy while not having intense pelvic charge. This is particularly evident in early intimacy and bonding. Because of these culturally fragmented energy disbursement in the body, sexual motivation usually has more to do with feelings like neediness, escape from other feelings, and proving one's self-worth, than pure pleasure and the normal desire for interconnectedness. For many, pleasure can only be realized in highly charged scenarios. Often they are avoided because they are dangerous and/or self-destructive. Some of us are just fearfully frozen. Others become frustrated at a perceived lack of ability to negotiate the complexities. Many repeat unfulfilling patterns again and again. Whatever one's history may be, the following exercises have proven helpful in energizing and awakening sexual aliveness.

In Latin and most Eastern and metaphysical philosophies, the word "breath" is synonymous with "spirit." Conscious breathing brings energy (and spirit) into the body. This exercise will help

improve anyone's ability to breathe and improve sexual aliveness. First, do conscious, deep breathing exercises focused in the groin. Imagine that you can take your breath all the way down to the perineum, that lowermost part of the crotch between the vagina and the rectum or the scrotum and the rectum. In reality, most feel they can't breathe into their perineum, yet imagination can produce surprising results. This exercise can be done while brushing your teeth, riding in a car, or for a few minutes before or after sleeping. While the results may not be immediate, with a little practice and patience, deeper breathing of this sort will help lead to spiritual-genital integration.

The "rotation exercise" is an exercise that you can combine with the conscious pelvic breathing. Stand up straight, put your feet shoulder-length apart, relax (unlock) your knees, and rotate your hips in a circular motion, stretching out in all directions as far as is comfortable. Imagine that you are standing in the center of a mostly empty peanut butter jar and you want to use your hip and pelvis, in a circular motion, to clean the peanut butter off the sides of the jar. Keep rotating, first in one direction, then the other. Lower and raise yourself to completely clean the inside of that jar. Attention to conscious breathing will be helpful. Take a moment or two to giddily and randomly move your pelvis, tuning into the energy and spontaneously moving and following your inner current. Just go with the flow for a few moments. You will begin, subtly at first, feeling a renewed aliveness in this region that is sensual, sexual, and centering - all at the same time.

These exercises are also excellent "warm-ups" for more pleasurable sexual experiences, alone or to be shared with a partner. (For additional information and exercises on all of the guidelines in this article see my book: *The Journey Toward Complete Recovery: Reclaiming Your Emotional, Spiritual & Sexual Wholeness*).

2. Sexual History. Begin a process of uncovering and sharing sexual secrets from your past with "safe" people. It is important to do this practice with those who are sensitive, understanding and compassionate listeners. These "secrets" are rightfully too sensitive to be exposed to individuals who will not afford them suitable respect. Along with these secrets there is a need to bring awareness to religious and other spiritually infused influences on your early sexual development and evolution.

I suggest writing a narrative history, or outline, to put one's sexual development in a historical perspective. This begins with the first remembered "exposure" to sex, sexual energy, or sexual material. Then, as best you can remember, recreate your development with subsequent incidents. This exercise will help put your current sexual expression in an understandable and historic context. By sharing this history with a safe person, one can further heal the sexual-spiritual split. After sharing "sexual histories in perspective" (in a shame-free setting), your psyche will gradually produce additional memories, further illuminating your history. Shared sexual histories provide a grounding and framework for your present experience while simultaneously creating a platform for new possibilities.

3. Dialogue in relationship. Encourage yourself to risk cultivating meaningful dialogue around sexual issues in dating situations and with significant partners. The deepest interpersonal healing takes place in relationship. Finding and cultivating a safe partner(s) is, of course, pivotal. One can do a great deal of healing with therapists and within community. However, that healing will be limited by the appropriate professional and cultural boundaries of these relationships. To ultimately heal the sexual-spiritual split, we must explore relating to another human being while attempting to bring both polarized aspects of the split to this relationship without walls of shame arising. It is important to work through shameful aspects and feelings of inadequacy about sex with a partner. It is fine to move slowly. "Intention" and "willingness" are paramount.

4. Fusion Exercises. Consciously combine meditative, spiritual, or contemplative experiences with your own sexuality. Such experimentation is a very different and awkward experience for most

people at first, but in time one feels a new and deeper connection with both pleasure and release. Sexual experiences often grow from being simply physical, (with genital concentration), to becoming a *full-body*, kinesthetic event that can be powerful and rewarding.

Suggesting a combination of sexual and spiritual experimenting often brings laughter and confusion. People always ask, "How are we supposed to do that?" They often break out in further embarrassed laughter and disbelief when I suggest, "Try experimenting with masturbating (or self-loving) and praying at the same time!"

This laughter is a defense. Notice how foreign the suggestion feels, emphasizing the reality of an internal dichotomy! Think about this in relation to merging your core sexuality with a spiritual, loving union or relationship with yourself or another.

Create rituals with candlelight, mirrors and incense for sessions of self-loving and self-pleasuring. Slowly begin to make a "special time & place" in your life for, and begin to exalt in, your body (however you may perceive it), your sexuality, alone or with a companion, as an ecstatic all-encompassing manifestation of your humanity.

Use your intuitive creativity and responsible, courageous risk-taking abilities to create your own additional practices to merge sexual and spiritual energies. Like flowers growing toward the sun, as we humans experience this fusion in our psyche, our bodies and our defensive reflexes organically grow toward sexual and spiritual unity.

5. Rediscover adolescent awkwardness. Become willing to enter a period of discovery which I call "adolescent awkwardness." In dating or in a significant long-term relationship - a time comes when the healing of this internalized sexual-spiritual schism must be addressed for the relationship to grow. We must surrender preconceived concepts regarding sexuality and intimacy and join another person in authentic adolescent discovery. Many of us missed a healthy adolescence, and therefore cannot go further into intimacy without visiting this important building block. It is important to give yourself permission to feel adolescent and awkward with yourself and another. It is rich, fertile ground in which to plant seeds of new awareness. Very workable and pleasing possibilities will grow from these seeds.

Appreciate Resistance

Appreciation of our own resistance signals the most important awareness of healing. All of the above exercises will initially bring resistance to the fore. This is good: we want to bring resistance up out of the unconscious, where it has ominous rule, and expose it to a "process of resolution." By connecting with the resistance, and moving through it, we have the opportunity to discern and untangle the diverse feelings and incidents that have formed themselves into walls of shame.

Whenever shame or blockage surfaces (often feeling like a wall) in a budding or long term intimate relationship, the struggle to share it is also the process of healthy adolescent development. It is the joining of less mature and more mature aspects of ourselves together in a sensitive, growing relationship. In this process, there is great value in the shame. Shame flirts with us. It lures us while at the same time it tries to hide. As suggested by the author Max Scheler, in his book, *Shame and Pride*, "It is from in and under the shame that our *shimmering* magic emerges."

Healing is possible: belief creates the experience

Combining love with sexual expression is an act of higher consciousness. It is important to believe that when two human beings share love's energy combined with erotic energies, a transcendent experience occurs, one that is often profoundly healing and enriching. This is a very

sacred sharing and a goal of a fulfilling sexual experience. Reaching this goal is the result of a conscious *give and take*, a negotiation of the open-hearted experience of interconnectedness. Accepting that this is awkward, we need to learn to communicate our needs, desires and fantasies. Under each of the three currents are powerful and subtle feelings and energies that want to be expressed. Releasing these expressions help us grow holistically; they teach us about natural aggression and passivity, about our feminine and masculine energies, and about pleasuring and being pleased. They help dissolve shame, insecurities, and to accept contradictions and complexities. It exposes the need to experience them fully for healing, growth and self understanding.

Contrary to what some believe about healthy sexuality, we need to learn that healthy loving expression includes the expression of our more shadowy desires as well as our tenderness. The delicate opening up of our repressed sexual histories, variations, deviations, and fantasies is enriching as well as healing. True and spiritual lovemaking is the interweaving choreography of our higher and our shadow selves. A holistic experience involves bringing together aspects of higher and lower self -- how beautiful, and so very intimate to do so with open hearts.

Evaluating healing progress

To evaluate your progress in healing the sexual-spiritual split, I encourage you to simply ask yourself: What motives do I bring to sexuality? What do I want from the sexual aspect of my nature? You will know that the healing is progressing when the answers to these questions emphasize spiritual fulfillment, integrating aggression and passivity, power and surrender, femininity and masculinity, and the desire for personal and shared experiences of fulfillment, pleasure and higher consciousness.

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