

Can you feel it?

Intrepid reporter Rose Rouse on what actually happens on a tantra course

There are still many media myths around tantra – like Sting and Trudy having tantric sex all the time, which was probably made up by Bob Geldof anyway and not much open, accessible information. What happens in a tantra workshop, for instance? I used to think it was all about sex, and nudity, and wonder how I could go as a single person because wouldn't that mean being naked and sexual with people that I didn't want to be with?

Oh, the worries. Then, I went on Jan Day's annual New Year five day workshop called Passion, Power and Love in 2006 and realised there were challenges but this was a world where there was compassion, softness, vulnerability, connection, sensuality and fun. I even met a future best woman friend there. We went on to do Jan's Living Tantra 1 seven day course and we were very enthusiastic about what we were learning to open up to, not only love but an existence that encouraged the befriending of our demons (anger, envy, sadness, loneliness)



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rather than their exclusion. It was such a relief. There are invitations to take your clothes off in a conscious way, some people do get sexual (although I have rarely seen people having penetrative sex), but Jan makes it clear that you can say 'no' whenever you like, and you can stay clothed if you wish. In fact, she encourages participants to be clear about their 'no' so that they can be clear about their 'yes'. Living Tantra 1 is the core Jan Day workshop that all participants must attend before going on to do any of the more advanced courses, although there are several introductory weekends – Inviting Intimacy and Being In Love – that are always open to everyone.

And so I find myself amid the gorgeous Somerset surroundings of the EarthSpirit centre, one of the best workshop venues in the UK – endless amounts of tasty vegetarian food, a hot tub with a view, a bountiful cottage garden – embarking on the five day Living Tantra 4 course not having read what it was about, but hoping to focus on opening my heart to men as some sort of practice for the future.

The heart

Gradually, we – all twenty six of us, from lawyers to teachers to a novelist, all willing to risk casting off our worldly masks to enter a terrain that is more about embracing softness and vulnerability than impressing others with our job titles – gather. Fate is obviously on my side, because the evening's meditation focuses on the heart and really feeling it. I can. I can. That's the good news – my heart feels tender and glowing, and I relish the chance to experience that. Jan asks us to shift between different places in our bodies – from the head to the sex to the heart – and to really feel the differences.

“Think of your intention for the week,” she says softly and I already have, “and can you feel the beloved? Are you willing to feel the beloved in every moment? The mystery? The soul?”

I have to admit I have a little bit of a reaction to this word, the beloved. I'm not sure what it means but it all sounds disturbingly intangible and ethereal. Then Jan plays some of Osho's words – 'Treat this man not as a man but as a god, treat this

“I am yearning for his hand to connect me to my heart and it does”

woman not as a woman but as a goddess' and I feel more reassured. Afterwards, we are invited to connect to the beloved and the others in the group. I do it by focusing on my connection with the other person as a human being rather than who I think they are. However, it's interesting how some participants are much easier for me to tune into. A man in his 50s with a mane of hair is playful, gentle, sensual. Easy. Another, younger, less willing to engage, is more difficult.

Embracing emotions

Every morning, there is a meditation at 8am. It prepares us for the day ahead. However, they are not just sitting, silent ones, they include visualisation and movement. Today, Jan invites us to connect with a part of ourselves that we struggle with, somewhere we've been recently. I remember my responses – envy, shame at my lack of success – to a close friend finding love on the internet almost instantaneously. I dipped into loneliness and loss of confidence. The aim, Jan explains, is not to get rid of these feelings, but to embrace them in our hearts. Eventually, we do sit in silence for fifteen minutes before breakfast.

Next is the opening circle where we all share who we are and where we're at in this moment. Some have only one word, others have many more. And tears, laughter and reflections. I let them know that I want to take risks, and that I've been hurt in the past by my relationships with men, but I want to start opening up to them again here. I hear myself sounding warrior-like and vulnerable at the same time. The woman next to me exclaims quietly: "How do I follow that?" I apologise laughingly for my passionate approach.

As an exercise to get us to recognise what we do to limit our aspirations and our longings, our joy of living, Jan asks us to take pieces of paper, dance, feel into our 'yes' and then our 'no' in life. We're not naming them yet, just drawing them. Blue petals of vulnerability appear on my yes sheet, and then in dark black on the no one because of the humiliation and exposure I feel sometimes when I'm vulnerable. Sensuality appears as a kind of flying pink and orange vagina in 'yes', and scratched out on the 'no' where I won't allow myself to open in that way. We make sentences that combine our 'yes' and 'no'. I write – I am loveable but I don't allow myself to be loved by a man, I want a long term relationship but I'm unavailable and many more. I'm being deliberately man-specific.

That LOVING FEELING

Try these three tips to access the beloved by Jan Day



1 Slowing down out of the 'busy-ness' of your life – take 10 minutes to do nothing but focus your attention on something, for example a cobweb with dew drops, a flower, the clouds in the sky. Allow your breath to slow down and deepen. Take in the beauty in whatever you are seeing.

2 Start by breathing into your heart. Gently scan your each part of your body, noticing all the feelings moving or held in it. Imagine each one accepted and welcomed by your own heart. Feel the spaciousness and warmth of saying YES to yourself. When you have done that for a while, allow your attention to move to others around you. Notice how you are feeling towards them – or move on to tip three.

3 Wherever you are, see the faces of the people around you as 'the Buddha in disguise'. Allow yourself into it totally by thinking of them as 'the Buddha'.

Past grief

We take our sentences and pair up with a member of the opposite gender. A beatific, smiling, older man is chosen by me. I want to feel utterly safe as I open up to the rawness of some of these sentences and what sorrow I feel around them. It works. We read our sentences over and over again to each other. As I'm reading mine out loud, I express my grief over bad relationships and ill-chosen lovers from the bottom of my being. Sometimes, I'm in utter despair. My partner is at all times compassionate and a rock. I've chosen well on this occasion. We are asked to take the judgement out of the sentences and replace the 'but' with an 'and'. It's so good to be more understanding to myself. I write and read – I am loveable and I fear getting rejected, I want a long term relationship and I've been hurt by men a lot so it is difficult, and many more. There are more tears, this time they are a release.

That evening, I'm feeling drained and exhausted but we haven't finished. There is a pulsing exercise again with a partner of the other sex. It is hard work. I lie down and he places his hand – after I invite him – on my belly and pushes the heel of his hand up and down in a rhythmic pulse. I've never experienced this before and it is amazing. I feel everything from desolation (briefly visited) to grief to finally calm. I

talk a lot. Then, his hand pulses on my sacrum. This is such a simple energy by comparison, I simply glow easily here. Which is reassuring. And then finally, the heart. I am yearning for his hand to connect me to my heart and it does. It feels so steadfast when it's pulsing there. This exercise is the most profoundly affecting for me in the entire week. I discover – I knew intellectually but not physically – how often my heart is shut down, although the other areas are so alive.

Afterwards, I'm totally energised and have a fun time in the hot tub. There is lots of singing and raucous laughter after a long day spent in more difficult emotions. Sometimes there is flirting, and sensual showers together but today it's purely playful for me. And everyone else.

The final preparation

The finale of the week is our love ritual. We work towards this eventuality. Mine is gorgeous. It lasts for two hours. We choose our three angels initially. Some people select their angels out of a hat. I'm more specific. I choose the man with the mane of hair who is comfortable in his body and his sensuality, a woman who is equally delicious and another man that I've worked with a few times. They prepare a mattress with the most wonderful items, roses, poems, a picture of my father at 21. Six of us have our ritual at the same time. But no-one is watching each other. Some are very intimate and sexual (there are couples present), some are more soulful than sexual, mine is a mixture of sensual, humorous, still, and sexy. And during that two hours I am thoroughly celebrated. They whisper wonderful compliments in my ear, delicately take the clips out of my hair, stroke me, remind me of the beloved, of my heart, of stillness, of my sexiness. My angels truly enable me to be all of myself. Everyone should have this experience... I feel thoroughly prepared for that future man.

More info

Living Tantra 1 is open to singles and couples who wish to experience richer relationships and deeper intimacy. The next course runs from 5 to 12 April 2012 at the EarthSpirit Centre, Somerset. This course is the pre-requisite to the other Living Tantra ones. More info on other courses from janday.com, call 020 8123 9831 or email jan@janday.com





Body | **SEXUALITY**

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