

## *'Yes' and 'No' from the Heart*

by Rose Rouse

Recently, I was doing a poetry reading from my pamphlet which happens to be called Tantric Goddess (it refers to my partner asking me to be his tantric goddess and me saying 'yes' then backtracking and implying 'No' for the next year) and then Monique Roffey (award-winning writer who has an erotic novel out at the moment called *The Tryst*) had a Q & A session on Tantra. Funnily enough, we've both done quite a lot of workshops with Jan Day.

So when the host asked me what I'd got from doing Tantra workshops, I immediately replied: "For me, the most significant aspect of Tantra is relational and emotional rather than technique. From Jan's workshops, I've had practical experience of saying 'Yes' and 'No' in all sorts of different circumstances whether it's where and how to be touched or simply how close I chose to be to someone. And it's not just practical, Jan has held this group space in a safe, emotional way. In other words, feelings might arise and I could voice them and pass through that stage."

In fact, I'd go as far as to say that my relationship – which is now into its fifth year – would not have lasted if I hadn't learnt to be so sure of saying 'No' to what I couldn't cope with. For about six months. Yet, also saying 'Yes' to what I could offer and receive. So initially – I had been out of committed relationship for ten years – I was so anxious that I had to say 'No' to most sexual activity. However I could offer loving touch because I'd learnt to give this kind of soft, generous touch in Jan's Living Tantra 1 seven-day workshop and so my partner (then more of a boyfriend in waiting) could see that I was in connection with my body and feelings at some level. And actually we had baths together too which was non-threatening for me, and became the cornerstone ritual for our relationship.

I have found that being able to say 'No' clearly but from the heart has such a different effect to the rather brash Yorkshire 'No' that I used to utter more frequently. I am still learning. But to say 'No' in a caring way - makes it so much easier to receive for the other person. Even this morning, something happened between my partner and I, which caused a 'No' in me. It was something he put on Facebook that should have remained private. I thanked him sincerely for the message but then explained why I had to delete it. And we didn't have an argument. This is major progress for both of us.

A 'Yes' is so much stronger, so much more trustworthy, so delicious to receive when you know that the speaker/friend/partner has a very connected relationship with his/her 'No'. "Intimacy is deepened by learning when 'No' is real for us, by putting ourselves in exploratory positions where we can find out," says Jan. "I think of work with boundaries as the key learning in the work that I offer. Everyone is interested in finding out how to be more connected to others, to experience rich, loving, close relationships and putting ourselves in a situation at a workshop where we have permission to say 'No' and 'Yes' is a hugely good beginning."

This reminds me of the pervasive silence of my previous committed relationships. Nothing difficult around what we liked or didn't like was ever discussed in the arena of sexuality or in a mature way around relationship. It would all turn into a melee of dismay and accusa

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tion. When underneath was the vulnerability that we never touched. "Getting to that vulnerability is so important," says Jan, "I encourage people on my workshops to practice saying 'No' and 'Yes' but also accessing the feelings that go alongside those words. That's how we break open to each other, and love."

This time in my present relationship, I can access the hurt and vulnerability and express them. I have found that my emotional and erotic vocabulary has grown out of being able to practice with other men and women on this journey to true intimacy.

And now I can proudly announce that I am my partner, Asanga's Tantric Goddess.