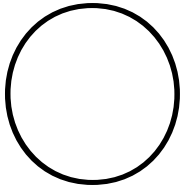




Jan Day explains how we can experience bliss beyond the bedroom by adopting a more Tantric approach to life and love



One interpretation of the word Tantra is 'the weaving together of all that is.' Tantra originated as an Eastern spiritual path and has naturally developed in many different directions

throughout the ages. There are Tantric paths rooted in Hinduism such as the Kashmir Shivaite tradition, and those found in Buddhism such as Vajrayana Buddhism. In essence, Tantra is a nondual path to ultimate oneness, or awakening.

In Tantra, the world and spirit are one. This is important because everything that may have previously been considered a barrier to our spiritual growth can now be a part of it, enabling us to bring everything to our path rather than having to retreat from the world in order to find God. Tantra embraces both dark and light; the chaos of creativity as well as the emptiness of consciousness. It also includes our body, our feelings, our mind and our soul.

Osho and Ken Wilbur

Traditional Tantra included intellectual pursuits, meditation and esoteric spiritual practices. In more recent times, Tantra has become widely known through the teachings of Osho. To his credit, Osho created a doorway that made Eastern spiritual wisdom accessible to Western culture. Psychotherapeutic methodology was integrated with Eastern spiritual wisdom.

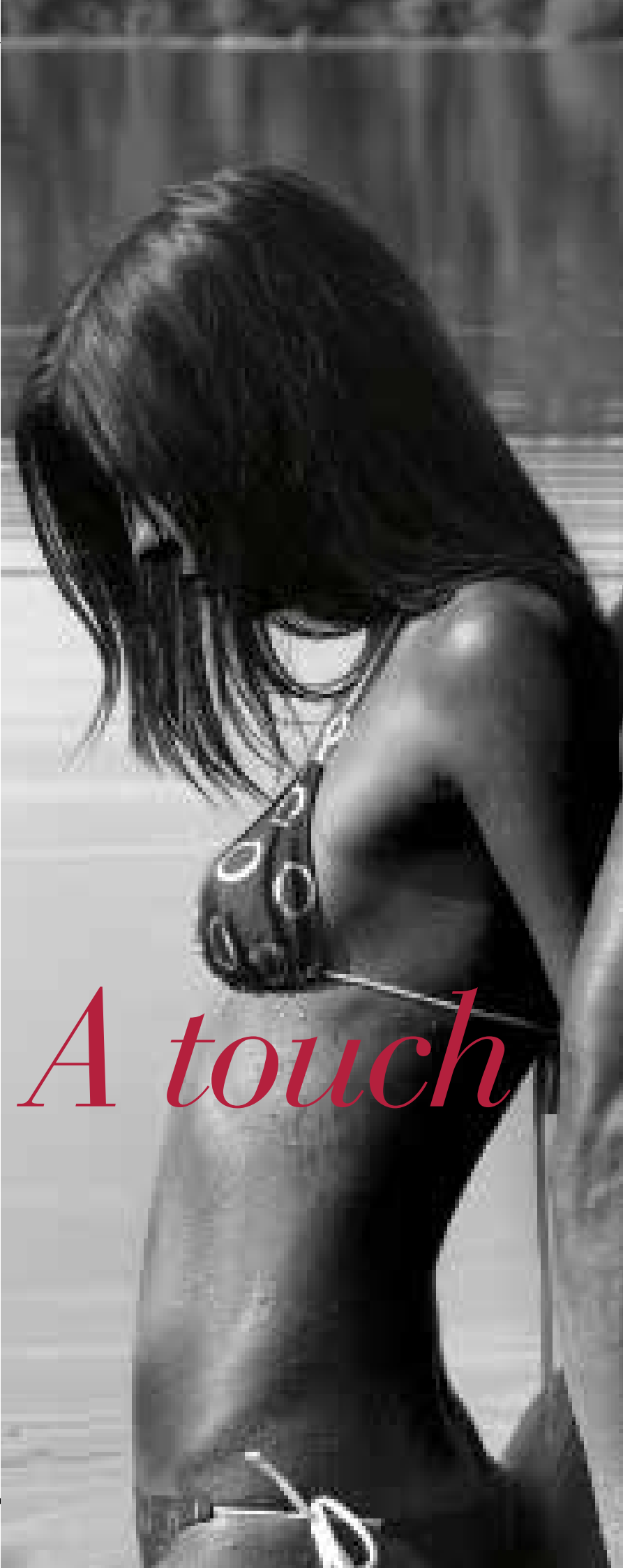
Osho's books are a good starting point for many Tantra students. These include *The Book of Secrets*; *Tantra: The Supreme Understanding* and *From Sex to Superconsciousness*.

Philosopher Ken Wilber also brings together the teachings of the East and West in a way that honours Western development, growth, scientific understanding and Eastern traditional wisdom. His 'integral approach' includes the inner and outer world of the individual as well as those of relationships and social groups, providing a map or framework that is fundamentally Tantric in its outlook.

So how do we bring this spiritual path into our everyday lives in the West? To be able to weave together all that is, we have to access what has been disowned and shut down. By exploring how we behave, our emotions, our physical body, we can learn new ways to connect to ourselves and then to our families and friends. Eventually, we are able to connect to both our inner and outer worlds and enter a new, inspired and more expanded level of consciousness.

Living a Tantric life

By embracing a Tantric approach to life, we can develop sensitivity to ourselves and to others; we can learn when to open and when to close. We can learn about good boundaries. We can develop stillness; being able to meditate deeply, but unable to deal with the chaos and creativity in Camden High Street is no better than being able to be in the market place but unable to be



A touch

still. Tantra embraces the opposites: both stillness and action, both the masculine and the feminine, both the dark and the light; it brings together these polarities.

Reclaim your emotional body

We need to get comfortable with what has been uncomfortable, whether that is anger, sadness, tears or laughter. We need to allow ourselves to feel what we feel, open up to feelings we've shut down, own our anger, sadness and joy.

This often starts with uncovering our fears of rejection and abandonment. It's good to explore these issues in a Tantra group, where everyone knows it's a learning circle. Here, we can also learn that we don't have to get it right first time and that mistakes are essential to grow. By exploring our fears with others, we can learn how to love ourselves and what it means to be loved. Tantra is about coming home to ourselves, letting ourselves just be, exactly as we are.

Be present

We need a level of courage to be continuously in touch with whatever is happening for us. When we can be with whatever is touched in us, we can stay connected to ourselves, our experience and our environment, including the people around us. Then we can be present with ourselves and each other. This quality of presence may sound trivial, but most people are starving for the experience of another person to simply be present for them. Presence, in and of itself, is an act of love that nurtures.

So now, rather than react, we can allow the emotional energy to simply flow through us, and then let it change, knowing that we can use that energy in our lives. Many of the more advanced Tantric practices involve transforming one type of energy into another, such as anger into clarity. We'll be less stressed and the world will feel like a safer place to be in. Becoming connected and comfortable with ourselves at an emotional level is a fundamental Tantric practice.

Access your physical nature

Our skin is exquisitely sensitive and can be the source of nurturing, pleasure and ecstasy. However, this is not always the case. Many people are desensitised and feel very little when they are physically touched and so - to different degrees - are unable to enjoy sensual or sexual contact.

The slow reawakening of our physical body is another important foundational step in the Tantric path. We can't re-establish the connection between heart and sexuality if we aren't connected to our body in the first place.

Dancing and moving our body is a good place to start in awakening these feelings. Allowing different parts of our body to have the freedom - to move freely and spontaneously - can free us up to the flow of our emotional body. For example, allowing our arms to move above our head; allowing our pelvis to move; allowing our body to express its natural creativity and sensuality can evoke strong feelings. Allowing our breath to flow fully allows those feelings to flow through us like a river of energy.

We use physical touch to reconnect the body and feelings because physical contact touches so much of our emotional body and also gives us the opportunity to express and communicate what we want and don't want. This expression of our boundaries - learning when to say 'yes' and ▶

of Tantra

'no' - is also an important part of reconnection - bringing together sensing, feeling and our cognitive ability. For example, when someone strokes our body, we are attentive to the sensation of the touch, we open to any feelings that are evoked, we notice when we like or dislike the touch and whether we are comfortable or not with the emotions that arise - then we choose to say 'yes' or 'no'. We also notice that sometimes what we are saying in words is not consistent with what our body is saying.

We can take this a step further by opening to the powerful energy of our sexual nature. It's important to say here that we don't have to do anything with this energy. It's about feeling this sexual energy flow within us; acknowledging it and befriending it as man or woman. This is profound because sexual energy is a strong energy and because culturally, sexuality has been condemned, mistrusted and misused so widely. Tantra celebrates our sexual nature as a man or woman and this includes our innocence, playfulness and spontaneity.

Many of us have learned to tone down our sexual energy if we aren't in the bedroom for fear of being judged. Realising that there is nothing wrong with our feelings - whatever they are - and that we don't have to do anything about them releases a lot of life energy within us.

Find your spiritual self

Most of us have experienced a soul connection, whether in nature, love-making or in religious rituals. These experiences stand out from everyday life as more profound, expansive and intense than 'normal' interactions, and they give us the inspiration and longing to enter into these states more readily; they call to us, igniting our longing.

Developing this spiritual connection within ourselves can be as simple as loving and opening to what is, here and now. It's about being willing to see the sacred.

We might begin by looking at man or woman and seeing the essence of Shiva or Shakti.

We can practice meditating in silence, staying with whatever arises, or bringing the 'yes' of our heart to our own experience and to each other. This supports us in being able to stay centred, compassionate and loving at work as much as it does to enter a sacred love ritual and be able to stay present and spacious with intensity, without getting lost in stories or needing to cut ourselves off from the experience.

The development of our spiritual self is a commitment to grow beyond our small, limited self and to have access to a boundless love and consciousness that has no need to get anything or be anywhere else. This capacity to be present opens the door to our soul and to an infinite source of love and bliss.

A daily spiritual practice such as meditation, prayer or forgiveness supports us in being able to maintain focus and presence in our everyday life and during Tantric rituals and practices that we engage in. Tantra enables us to be more alive on all levels of our being.

So what happens if we bring this Tantric wisdom into everyday life? We'll have a range of practices that open us to experience and rest in diverse states, developing an ability to be



SEE THE ESSENCE OF SHIVA AND SHAKTI

present and alive, without numbing out or getting lost in or addicted to our experience.

This can take place whether we are sitting in stillness, dancing in ecstasy, making love or eating dinner with the family. We'll be using everything in our lives as a tool for developing our presence and our vitality

- for instance, we see the challenges of our lives as a way to bring awareness and focused attention to that area, in order to enable transformation. We also open ourselves to the fullest possible expression of love and presence that we can access, moment to moment. We practice increasing our levels of consciousness, which, in turn, increases our ability to rest in expanded states of consciousness, which are also often quite taboo in modern and post-modern culture.

This might include practices for our physical body such as dance, resistance training, aerobics and running, as well as practices for our subtle body, such as yoga, Tai Chi, meditation and Chi Gong. It may also include practices to open and clear our emotional body such as bio-energetics, forgiveness meditation and the 3-2-1 process, or practices to develop states of consciousness such as trance dance, meditation, dream work, prayer, mantra and visualisations. ■

Intro to Living Tantra from 26th to 28th October is a very useful introduction to Jan Day's work. Visit janday.com or email jan@janday.com for more information

FIND YOUR SEXUAL ENERGY

Start by bringing your attention to your body, feeling your skin, the musculature and the places where your clothing touches you. Bring your attention to your breath, and then begin to visualise sexual energy flowing throughout your body, keeping your focus on your sexual organs and slowly contracting and releasing the pc muscles (the muscles you would use to stop the flow of pee). Allow yourself to enjoy any sensations that arise - just for yourself - and make sure that you keep your energy within your own skin. It's your energy - don't let it escape unintentionally.