

>>> in a relationship. 'The first date is about physical reaction – do you find each other attractive? The second is, can you talk freely and enjoy each other's company? The third is... is a romantic spark there?'

By date three, I realised Sean was not for me. I liked him but the spark wasn't there. But Alex I really liked. We went on date three and it was romantic, a dinner in London and we held hands. The next day, he texted to say how much he'd enjoyed it and would I have dinner with him again. I texted back saying I'd like that very much. And then... nothing. He went utterly quiet on me.

I never heard from him again.

My experience with Alex didn't put me off, though. I decided the best thing to do was to continue 'multi-dating'. And 18 months down the line, I've met someone very special – on social media, via some mutual online friends. However, when I look back at my online dating experience, I think it was brilliant. It did help me to consider all my options. As Dr Victoria Lukats, psychiatrist and dating expert for PARSHIP.co.uk, says: 'Provided people choose a site that helps them to meet like-minded people, it can be a great way of meeting someone special. The internet allows single people to be much more proactive in finding a relationship.'

Things have moved on even since my time flitting from one profile to the next – some sites now run events where you can bring a friend along as a sort of wing-woman. Or you can wear a friendship-bracelet-style 'single band', that works in the opposite way to a wedding ring, alerting nearby singles to your availability (think of it like a human version of a bird's colourful mating feathers).

And, if we were in any doubt about the much wider array of options open to us, new research shows that contrary to previous beliefs, having more choice helps us to make decisions, rather than inhibiting us.* It seems there's never been a better time to be single. ■

“You don't trust, so you're attracting untrustworthy men”

Grace James, 32, was married in her early twenties but divorced a year ago. After a year of disastrous dating, she tries a new approach

So there I am, sitting on a cushion in a white-walled room, staring into the eyes of a stranger. I collapse into the giggles. Unfortunately, the young, handsome man holding my hand does not share the joke. Which makes me even worse. I laugh so much that I spit on his hand.

It's not the greatest end to the day. I'm on a Manifest My Soulmate one-day workshop run by Elena Angel, an 'intimacy coach', who bases her work on Tantric principles. During the course, I learn that Tantra is far more all-encompassing than sex (although Tantra is one of the only spiritual belief systems that celebrates sexuality) but it's a framework that teaches us how to live well – especially in the area of relationships and intimacy.

'It's a spiritual path,' says Elena. 'Tantra invites you to become intimate with yourself so you can be intimate with another and ultimately with the divine.' But will it help me find a boyfriend, I joke? 'Yes,' she answers simply.

And that's why I've spent the last five hours meditating, sitting on cushions sharing my feelings with a group of around 15 women and 15 men – mostly attractive, 20 to 50-year-olds. And dancing. In a movement meditation before lunch, I danced for 40 minutes. I don't

think I've ever danced without the use of alcohol since I was about nine years old.

But I enjoyed the workshop and decide to explore further. I reach out for more help from Jan Day, a relationship coach who also specialises in Tantra and runs dating workshops called Dating Without Masks. I wasn't quite ready for another workshop but agree to a one-to-one session via Skype. Within 15 minutes, Jan establishes that I have rather huge trust issues. 'You don't trust, so you're attracting untrustworthy men. You're proving your beliefs right,' she tells me.

So how do I change my inner belief so I can attract trustworthy men? Jan advises me to go slowly. Take it step by step. 'You need to learn to trust yourself.' Her words resonate completely. Jan gave me some homework around loving and accepting myself. Finish this sentence, she said: If I knew you would accept me just the way I am, I would show you / share with you

I don't tell you about _____ because _____.

'Appreciation and acceptance are crucial to building the trust that allows us to reveal ourselves,' Jan says. Absolutely. But perhaps my first step would be to refrain from spitting on someone on a first date.

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