

Slow Sex

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A Physical and Spiritual Revolution

Slow sex provides a simple and effective antidote to the ever-accelerating pace of modern life, allowing lovers to rest in a still point at the center of a turning world. Through the workshops we offer to couples, my partner and I have been able to see the profound effect that just one week of relaxing slow sex can have on a couple's relationship. We are true believers in the power of taking it slow, but sometimes it appears as if the whole world is bent on spinning faster and faster around us.

That is why it was so thrilling for me to read *The Slow Down Diet* by Marc David. David writes about slowing down in relation to food and I am concerned with slowing down while having sex, but we are really talking about the same thing—the ability to be fully present and aware in the current moment so that we can actually experience life on an inner cellular level, rather than racing through it so quickly that everything flies by in a blur.

David says that for food to be truly nourishing, the invisible “atmo-spheric” factors—*how* we eat—are even more important than the physical substances we actually consume. I have already mentioned two of the eight universal metabolic enhancers that he defines—relaxation and awareness. The other six are quality, rhythm, pleasure, thought, the sacred, and the story.

In essence, and in my own way, my teaching conveys the need to incorporate these great universal metabolic enhancers into the sexual act, organically elevating the physical exchange into something spiritual and fulfilling. I have also observed that the satisfaction of slow sex acts as a nutrient that boosts the immune system, with rejuvenating effects that increase vitality, creativity, and love. At the same time, slow sex naturally reduces the emphasis on food and eating because we find nourishment and fulfillment elsewhere. It naturally supports weight loss and brings balance into the system, not through vigorous calorie-burning sex, but through extended, deeply satisfying, sensitive sex.

I suggest, for instance, that couples incorporate relaxation and awareness into the sexual act. These two simple “Love Keys” (as I call these universal metabolic enhancers) can greatly transform the sexual experience from a perhaps short-lived and repetitive event into a captivating, extended, and inspiring one. When a couple embraces the universal metabolic enhancers, doing so creates a rarified atmosphere that strengthens and amplifies the field of love surrounding them. In an environment such as this, an inner radiance and vitality will remain as an afterglow.

Such expanded dimensions can even open up when only one person introduces metabolic enhancers into the atmosphere. Just as a sensitive person in the presence of a genuinely spiritual individual may experience a type of transmitted phenomenon that ignites feelings of being more open, alive, expanded, and present, when one person slows down in sex, the second person is naturally drawn into the expanded energy field and will tune in to and link up with the universal metabolizers. The slower we can learn to be, the more we can relax and hold awareness of the present moment; gradually the practice of slowness will begin to positively impact every aspect of living.

The conventional definition of metabolism implies it is a purely physical function, “the sum total of all the chemical reactions in the body.” Marc David's understanding goes beyond that, defining metabolism as “the sum total of all the chemical reactions in the body, plus the sum total of all our thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and experiences” (*The Slow Down Diet*, page 8).

David believes that these metabolizers have been in existence for a long time but have been completely overlooked because:

First, we've been moving too fast to notice them, since their chemical power is activated only when the requisite level of "slowness" has been met. Second, we've believed that a metabolic enhancer must be exclusively of the order of a food, a pill, or a push-up, yet the eight universal metabolizers are of a different category. (*The Slow Down Diet*, page 9)

As a professional nutritionist and expert in the psychology of eating, Marc David has applied these universal metabolic insights to people who seek his guidance for nutritional and weight issues. He observed their responses to his unusual dietary suggestions and noted the undeniably positive impact on the entire system. He writes:

The bottom line was this: These folks achieved more by doing less. The people I'm speaking of stopped fighting food and started embracing it. . . . They ceased being victimized by food, by their bodies, and by anyone else's standards and instead took responsibility for making simple but profound changes that created an empowered metabolic state. They slowed down and trusted life. (*The Slow Down Diet*, page 11)

I can say exactly the same thing about the couples who have attended our slow sex workshops. When couples learn to relax into the present moment while having sex, their entire experience is transformed into something deeply touching and nourishing for body and being. The entire metabolism is profoundly influenced and empowered. Because the eight universal metabolic enhancers defined by David apply just as directly to our sexuality as they do to our physical -nutrition, I have decided to organize the book around them, just as he has done in *The Slow Down Diet*.

As a way of approaching slow sex, each of the eight universal metabolic enhancers will appear as the focus of a separate chapter. Each chapter will act as an umbrella covering relevant information and guide-lines. At times it will be necessary to repeat some information as the sexual themes intertwine and form a bigger picture.

Chapter 2, "The Sexual Power of Relaxation," focuses on relaxing away from *doing* and into simply *being* while having sex—away from goal-oriented sex that strives toward the climax of orgasm, and toward sex that allows things to evolve of their own accord.

Chapter 3, "The Sexual Power of Awareness," focuses on awareness as the missing link to expressing our higher sexual potential. Through awareness we awaken to the body on an inner level and tune in to our intrinsic sexual vitality.

Chapter 4, "The Sexual Power of Quality," focuses on the sexual intelligence lying within our human bodies. It recognizes the fact that our genitals have an innate wisdom about how to connect when we give them the chance and space to communicate in their own language.

Chapter 5, "The Sexual Power of Rhythm," focuses primarily on the difference between male and female rhythms. These polarity differences are understood as complementary forces that can be embraced to bring sex to a higher level of expression.

Chapter 6, "The Sexual Power of Pleasure," focuses on the need for a shift from sensation to sensitivity. Slowness increases sensitivity and trust in the body, and activates the metabolic power of pleasure.

Chapter 7, "The Sexual Power of Thought," focuses on the capacity to think and fantasize, and how these can act as distractions. However, thought can also be used in positive ways that will stimulate the sexual metabolism.

Chapter 8, “The Sexual Power of the Sacred,” focuses on sensitivity and coolness as the bridge to divine ecstatic experiences. It explains the healing and purifying power of the genitals.

Chapter 9, “The Sexual Power of the Story,” focuses on the inherent human aspects of sex and the historical personal aspects, as well as evaluating slow sex as a step in human evolution.

Each of these is a key to transforming your sex life, often in ways that feel surprisingly easy and natural. As you read each chapter, any insights or curiosities that are stimulated in you as a consequence can be put immediately into practice when you are next with your partner. You need to bear in mind that it’s not *what* you do, but *how* you do it, so in that sense it’s easy to make subtle changes with little effort. Naturally it’s impossible to incorporate all the different aspects at once and expect to get it right the very first time you try slow sex. Sometimes people take to the new way very easily, as if it were second nature, but this tends to be more the exception than the rule.

In a more sensitive society, the opposite would be true—slow sex would be the rule, not the exception. However, we have fundamental misconceptions about sex that act as a barrier to a simple, innocent, and spiritual sexual experience. Because sex has been practiced and presented in a certain way, generation upon generation, it is helpful to have an awareness of our collective conditioning, along with patience and compassion for yourself and your partner. Don’t expect instant results! It’s more of an unfolding based on exploration and discovery. You become a pioneer of your inner world. You simply start from where you are today—misunderstandings included. To an extent you undergo a process of unlearning what we’ve all inherited and rediscovering what is real and true. Each time you and your partner get together you will continue to make small exploratory steps, experimenting, incorporating what you discovered (or learned) the previous time, and gradually developing a new sexual language together.

At the end of some chapters, sensitivity and awareness exercises are suggested as a way to tune in to, support, and enhance the cellular perception of the body. The final chapter, chapter 10, “Your Personal Slow Sex Practice,” will pull together all of the previous information, offering basic suggestions on how to get started with your own personal practice.

This book is not a technical manual in the sense of being focused on *what you do*; rather, the approach is one of exploring *how you do it*. Much information on “how to proceed” and how to create the atmosphere necessary for an uplifting experience is embedded in the chapters ahead. As you read, you may perhaps begin to notice a subtle shift in the way you view and understand sex. And as I see it, this is the way to go—first and foremost, a change of mind is required. We need a new vision of sex that brings about a change or revolution in our ideas. When there is a change in the mind, the body will easily and willingly respond.

Whenever I get into the details of sex I will often begin by apologizing, because I tend to talk in generalizations that have the effect of bringing us all onto much the same level. As if we are all afloat in the same sexual boat. However, each one of us has an individual personal experience and sexual history, so it is likely that *not* everything I say will hold true for each person. If something does not ring true for you, it means only that it is not true for you as an individual, not that what is said is false; because *generally* speaking, what is said about sex is true. As an overall invitation, please feel free to discard anything that does not ring true for you. And at the same time, be open to something you may have *thought* is not true for you, as well as being interested in what is true for others.

Whether we like it or not, our sexuality affects our total being. Each of us feels the impact of sex from the moment of arrival on Earth in a human body, even if our adult lives may ultimately include rare or no sexual interactions with another person. The conventional and accepted speedy way we have sex circumscribes and

reduces our experience of living in our extraordinarily beautiful human bodies. Slow sex enables us to physically and consciously create love and happiness, nourishing us on extremely profound and life-changing levels.

THE SEXUAL POWER OF RELAXATION

Many of us are under the mistaken impression that relaxation is some kind of floppy, collapsed, and more-or-less dead state. This is definitely not true. Deep relaxation brings about a state of inner aliveness and vitality. The real by-product of relaxation is a sense of regeneration, of feeling refreshed and uplifted.

THE BREVITY OF THE SEX ACT

Humans are living not only longer, but faster. We seem to be speeding up by the day and by the decade. The stress levels that accompany all this speed are acute and cumulative, and penetrate deeply into many aspects of our lives, including our sex lives. Generally speaking, sex often is, and has always been, a speedy and short-lived event. If what we see in the movies and what we know from our own sexual experiences is anything to go by, then sex is mostly comprised of fleeting encounters of the “wham, bam, thank you, ma’am!” variety.

At present the universal average time of a sexual encounter is estimated to be anywhere from two to three minutes—a time span of 120 to 180 seconds out of a day in which we live through 86,400 seconds. These “quickies” seem to serve one main purpose, and that is (for the man especially) to have an orgasm as quickly as possible.

Reaching orgasm means that sex is usually finished shortly after it starts. The perhaps much longed-for, or much fantasized, event is compressed into an astoundingly brief period of time. As humans we seem to mimic the animals around us, who are very efficient in their reproduction. They get the job over and done at high speed, because there is usually only one chance, and it’s now. But as humans we are granted the privilege of choice. We can engage in sex at any time of the day, week, or year, because we are not restricted to hormonally dictated mating seasons. So why do humans tend to want to get sex over with so quickly, particularly when we have more options in the matter than our animal friends? And then, even with the privilege of choice, strangely enough it often happens that we continually have the urge for the same thing, over and over. It’s as if we are caught in a cycle of unfulfilled sexual desire—longing for it, getting it, but only as a temporary measure. Soon the urge or desire will arise again, but satisfying it doesn’t seem to leave us in a state of peace and contentment.

Seldom does one hear about a sexual engagement that is consciously extended, hour upon hour. My first really long lovemaking experience was thirteen hours nonstop, from dusk to dawn. At that point I had been more accustomed to five or six hours at a time. And then, at some time further on in my exploration, my new lover and I were in bed for a solid twenty-one days, apart from the minimum of time required to care for bodily needs. We ate only occasionally, finding ourselves satiated by something other than food. We were “in” love, constantly fused in an ecstatic state of timelessness and rapture, suspended in a miraculous web of the unfolding moment. We did not sleep, as we had no need of it. Night merged with day, day with night, in one continuum of sexual presence, passion, and spontaneity, literally tapped into an awesome, abundant source of life.

Some people experience similar remarkable exchanges and interactions of a higher frequency, but invariably

these connections happen spontaneously, and are likely to be relatively isolated. Usually a person is unable to consciously create similar experiences on a sustained basis as a style of sexual expression.

The Tedium of Repetition

Even though there is certainly pleasure to be had in sexual quickies, the experience is essentially brief and there is simply not enough time for anything exotic or extraordinary to happen between two bodies. Bodies are similar to musical instruments, and usually need to first be tuned individually. Then they need time to warm up and attune to each other. Only then is it possible for the sounds to dance together in the creation of a musically engaging piece. But usually, where the musical creativity of sex is concerned, many people will admit that the experience can be repetitive and a little bit boring (unless we change partners to spice things up). The repetition is not inherent to sex itself, but occurs because we are sticking to certain sexual habits and patterns. In some cases it's even an addiction—doing more or less the same thing, year in and year out. We don't really know how to bring variety and creativity into our sexual encounters. The full spectrum of human sexual experience allows us to consciously choose to make a fundamental shift in our sexual ways. When we are able to transcend our habits and patterns, we are easily able to generate and make love in the way we were designed by the Divine. Through engaging in a more informed style of sexual interaction we are able to create love, joy, and sustenance for ourselves.

RELAXATION IS VITAL FOR THE SEXUAL METABOLISM

The way forward for us as humans is to engage in sex with increasing ease, leisure, and relaxation. In taking speed and stress out of the sexual act, we remove the performance pressure that comes with filling expectations and achieving goals. We allow time and space for the experience, in the sense of being able to extend the meeting as a matter of choice. A slow approach in sex acts like a “medicine” that is easily able to resolve and heal many long-term sexual problems and wounds that cause unhappiness, separation, and insecurity. The majority of our problems can be reduced to our sexual problems, so it is obvious that we need to make some changes.

Being, Rather than Doing

Relaxation is generally something we afford ourselves only when most of our daily tasks are done. Trying to fit everything into our busy schedules frequently creates time-management stress, and we give little value to the benefits of sheer relaxation and the joy of doing nothing. When the endless list is more or less complete, only then do we grant ourselves permission to take a break. Often by this stage we fall into an exhausted sleep or drift off into a doze. Perhaps we read a book or watch television. These moments definitely represent time off, but they don't amount to true relaxation, which is highly refreshing in its effects.

Many of us afford ourselves very little in the way of relaxation because we believe that to be “doing” something has intrinsic value. In fact, we sometimes feel that we are doing something wrong or feel guilty if we are doing, literally, nothing. Simply relaxing into a space of being, or non-doing, is judged by ourselves, and perhaps by others, as laziness or a lack of ambition and goals. We don't approve of that in our speed- and goal-driven culture.

THE GOAL OF ORGASM INTERFERES WITH RELAXATION

Relaxation becomes a challenge when we have survival stress and anxiety compounded by many different goals to achieve, and dreams and expectations to fulfill. Sex, likewise, is filled to the brim with goals and expectations. We enter sex with an agenda, with a clear sense of knowing exactly what we want or expect. Then we set about engineering these desired results with intention and tension. We base our approach on previous experiences, which are, in turn, rooted in conventional ideas about sex that we unconsciously inherit from our society.

In sex it is not common to simply relax and enjoy what is happening in the moment, waiting to see where our bodies want to take us, allowing things to evolve of their own accord. Our desire to have an orgasm, or “come,” is often why most of us want sex in the first place. Having the goal of orgasm causes stress about performance and satisfaction, so we rush toward the finish to make sure we get there. We get ahead of the body and use the body, pushing it, forcing it to obey and follow the mind’s instructions. However, the pressure and tension we bring into the situation has the ultimate and actual effect of making us less sensitive. The sheer speed of it all deadens us to the vitality and inner aliveness streaming through our human flesh. Being distracted by an anticipated orgasm and work-ing toward building to a climax literally prevents us from being rooted in the body, from being in the here and now, connected to the actual moment-by-moment experience of the body.

Having orgasm as a goal causes a kind of absence because the focus lies slightly ahead of where we actually are. It make us always more inter-ested in the *next* penetration, and not particularly interested in *this* one, because the next one will bring us closer to the desired goal, to the climax. In being one step ahead of ourselves, we miss the pure joy of devoting total attention to each glorious penetration, man giving and woman receiving in perfect communion. When we can be more still in mind and body, we can listen to our inner wisdom and and honor the natural ways of the body. Slowing down and relaxing away from goals will open up a new window of sexual experience to explore. Finding full value in sex, pursuing its human aspects and its great potential, lies beyond the boundaries of the common quickie.

Premature Ejaculation

Man has an easier time than woman in the quickie approach, in that sex is usually over when the man ejaculates. Often the man will finish well before the woman has sufficiently warmed up to the -experience. For the majority of women, reaching an orgasm within a few minutes of penetration is not so easy. Ten, fifteen, or twenty minutes are not necessarily enough either. Women will often require additional stimulation of the clitoris in order to reach a climax. Yet the majority of men are not really able to hold back their ejaculation in order to intentionally extend lovemaking. Ejaculation will usually be experienced as an overwhelming wave, impossible to stop or sidestep. It takes control of the body, somewhat like a sneeze that suddenly emerges from nowhere and takes you over. To intentionally refrain from ejaculation, a man must from time to time relax back into his body and take several deep breaths. These pauses take the focus off increasing the excitement and help to bring more attention to the body in the present moment. As soon as orgasm as the goal of sex is dropped, relaxation into the present follows naturally.

The underlying reason for a man’s premature ejaculation is too much stress and tension, particularly in the form of sexual stimulation and excitement, which (as we will explore in later chapters) has little to do with pure pleasure and ecstasy. There are also many psychological stresses that create tension and contraction in the system, such as performance pressure and wanting to be successful, fear of not being good enough, fear of coming too soon, wanting to satisfy and please, ego desire to be this particular woman’s best lover ever, and so on. With relaxation, ejaculation can easily be postponed. The effort and stimulation necessary to achieve orgasm falls away, with the result that the whole system relaxes and the body is then able to be more present. If

you want to avoid premature ejaculation, then drop the idea that orgasm is central to sex. Slowing down movements will automatically reduce the level of excitement, which is a good thing; it's what we want. Even if a man has suffered from untimely ejaculation all his life, miracles are definitely possible when a relaxed sexual attitude is adopted. One man shared during a couples retreat several years ago that he had been able to overcome a thirty-year premature ejaculation problem *overnight*, simply by monitoring and reducing his level of excitement.

The suggestion to reduce the level of excitement holds true for women, too. If a woman wishes to make love for longer periods of time, she should reduce movements that cause stimulation and excitement, instead holding still at times, poised and present. One particularly good reason for a woman to avoid high levels of stimulation is that her excitement is frequently the trigger for a man's early ejaculation. Fortunately, it is well within a woman's power to relax back into herself and thereby postpone her partner's ejaculation. Instead of going for an orgasm, she creates a situation that is inviting and welcoming, without being exciting. Remaining in the cooler zone of sexual experience will naturally keep a man's ejaculation at bay.

The Containment of Semen Empowers Man

One tablespoon of semen is incredibly powerful stuff, almost atomic in its potency. In addition to sperm cells, seminal fluid contains an immense amount of protein, vitamins, minerals, and amino acids, as well as vital energies. Semen contained within the male body represents tremendous individual potential and creative power. It should really be viewed as a type of liquid gold, and not taken so lightly. Dispersed semen represents a loss of personal energy resources, particularly when a man's climax involves the buildup of much tension and stress that leave behind traces in the body, brain chemistry, and psyche. The vast majority of men will admit that after an orgasm they feel depleted, low in energy, disconnected, or withdrawn. Containment of semen will empower a man because the vital substances nourish his intelligence and creativity; he becomes more centered and master of himself.

Relaxation happens easily when we change the idea that orgasm has to happen as a necessary part of sex. When we take away the goal or intention of orgasm, there is no need for a push toward the finish line. With nowhere to go there is no hurry, so everything can unfold in a unique organic way. There is no need to force the body along a certain direction because the body's innate intelligence has other plans in store for us.

DEEP SLOW BREATHING INVITES RELAXATION

Relaxation is supported through deep slow breathing, because breath brings an infusion of vitality to the system. Deep slow breathing causes an increase in the release of endorphins—neurochemicals produced by the body that act like opiates—into the system, which helps to produce relaxation and a sense of well-being. When we neglect to pay attention to our breath, it often remains only in the chest and shoulders. It's beneficial to invite the breath downward through the diaphragm and into the belly, allowing the belly to rise and fall with the in-breaths and out-breaths. And if you wish you can imagine, or with practice perhaps even feel, that the breath is able to internally caress the genital area.

Conscious breathing in the direction of the genitals during sex increases the oxygen intake and enhances the whole metabolism, providing you with sexual vitality and aliveness. Throughout lovemaking, simply paying acute attention to the process of the in-breaths and the out-breaths can shift you to another realm of experience. Normally breathing is involuntary and happens whether we're thinking about it or not, which makes it extremely easy to slip out of conscious connection with the breath. It is a function of the autonomic nervous

system, meaning that its function is independent of the conscious mind. We are not able to consciously affect most processes of our autonomic nervous system, but we can take an active part in our breathing process. The extent to which you relax and deepen the breath as you make love will definitely pay off with the rewards of greater presence, enhanced cellular sensitivity, and inner expansion.

Some people like to make a little ritual of taking several deep slow breaths before actually doing anything. For instance, before you start the ignition of your car, stop, take a couple of breaths as you relax your shoulders. Or, when practicing slow sex, take a couple of conscious breaths and become centered in your body for a few moments before you hug your partner. And again, take several breaths before you bring your lips together in a sealed kiss, repeatedly using breath to relax and prepare you for any meeting and exchange. The same thing can be done when a man poises with his penis at the entrance to the vagina, immediately prior to actual penetration. And then once inside, stopping frequently for a couple of deep breaths along the way. The penis can travel breath by breath and fraction by fraction into the vagina, and this journey into woman's body can last for many pleasurable minutes. Once fully inside, a man can remain within the depths, alert and breathing consciously for an extended period of time.

When you touch your partner's body, hold your hands still and give your partner your full inner attention as you take a few breaths into your belly or genitals. Or breathe deeply and consciously as you slowly caress your partner's body with a feather-light touch. Avoid any kind of stimulation that will trigger the desire for orgasm, which can easily leave us a bit breathless. Or at least take a few breathing breaks between bouts of excitement. A little excitement, then relax and breathe; then a little more excitement, and again relax. Whenever you find yourself focusing on the next penetration and eventual orgasm, if you stop all movement and be still for a while, taking a few deep breaths, it will help you to cool down and relax into the here and now.

LINING UP THE BONES

I have found that the depth of relaxation depends substantially on the physical body position; literally, how the bones line up as a skeleton. Relaxation requires a certain physical poise, which means physical alignment, and alignment brings presence to a body and grace to movement. A certain tension level is required to hold most upright sitting positions, and tension is part of our physical integrity, but any extra or habitual tension can be consciously released. The body will usually respond to this conscious letting go and relaxation of tensions with a spontaneous deep breath in gratitude.

CREATE TIME FOR SEX

It is much easier to be relaxed about sex when you grant yourself adequate space and time for the sexual exchange. To support relaxation you can actually make an appointment with your partner for sex, in the same way that you make time for meals, work, the gym, friends, and children. Set aside enough time and space to allow yourselves to warm up and physically attune to each other. Decide together on the time and place for the experience.

Exercises: Daily Observation and Conscious Relaxation Practices

Scanning from Head to Toe for Tension

You can do this simple practice at any time of the day and in almost any place. The body gets tense and a bit contracted without our realizing it, and this type of tension has a compressing effect on your body energy during daily

life, which also carries over into sex. The body carries many subtle and not-so-subtle tensions. As you make love (or sit, walk, drive, and so on), repeatedly scan your body from head to toe, or toe to head, and deliberately and consciously relax any areas of tension that you encounter. The following are some classic places where we hold tension without realizing it:

- Around the mouth
- In the joints of the jaw (the temporomandibular joint, or TMJ)
- In the neck and shoulders
- In the solar plexus (the soft spot below the upside-down V formed by the rib cage)
- In the belly
- In the feet

Relaxing the Pelvic Floor

Another central and significant place to consciously relax is the pelvic floor, which means the web of muscles and tissues that surround the anus and genitals. Invariably this muscular floor will be slightly contracted and pulled upward, without our being aware of this tension. Let go of any tightness you discover there, and do so a hundred times during the day or whenever you happen to remember. Intentionally relaxing and releasing any subtle holding and tension in the muscles will allow the pelvic floor to widen and drop slightly.

- For a woman, relaxing the pelvic floor means taking the attention to the vagina and relaxing any tightness or holding discovered there.
- For a man it means consciously relaxing and letting go of the anus and the muscles of the buttocks.

To feel the difference between tension and then relaxation, you can first exaggerate the tension, and then release it. Tighten genitals and anus, pulling upward and inward, hold for a few seconds, and then release slowly.

Make Conscious Relaxation an Everyday Practice

Invariably, as soon as our attention has moved away from the part we have consciously relaxed, the tension gradually begins to return and assert itself. So scanning the body from head to toe and relaxing tensions can be done intermittently. We will probably never completely rid ourselves of these subtle tensions, and that is really not the aim or goal. The aim is to remember that you are first and foremost a body—and to notice when and where you are tense, and then to intentionally relax these tense parts. Let go, take a deep breath, and feel your body. This little process is something to be done billions of times, not just once or twice. Relaxation of different body parts creates inner space and expansion and is usually followed by a wave of sensitivity on a delicate cellular level.

There are myriad small, insignificant daily actions in which we can practice conscious relaxation: brushing our teeth, washing dishes, preparing food, driving, opening and closing doors, sitting at the computer, and standing in line at the bank or checkout, to name but a few. Paying attention to your level of relaxation during the day will support your experience in bed, and vice versa.

THE SEXUAL POWER OF AWARENESS

If you have tried scanning your body and relaxing any tense areas that you notice, that in itself was an act of awareness. So if you are not sure what awareness means, and you managed to relax your jaw, shoulders, and belly, you are already using that particular witnessing power or aptitude. Awareness is not far away from us, and indeed, we would not be able to survive without a certain level of awareness. At the same time, we know remarkably little about the power of awareness and how it can change our every moment.

AWARENESS IS THE MISSING LINK

For human beings, awareness during sex is the missing link to expressing and living our higher sexual potential. This uniquely human capacity to observe ourselves as if from a distance has a tremendously powerful impact on metabolism and sexual responsiveness. Awareness acts as a highly potent aphrodisiac. Through awareness we awaken to the body on an inner level and tune in to our intrinsic, God-given sexual vitality. Awareness is the capacity to observe and witness oneself—as a body and as a mind filled with the thoughts that distance us from the body—in any given moment of any given day, including, of course, while we are having sex. As Marc David notes:

One of the most unusual scientific revelations of the last century is the mathematical proof that the act of observing any phenomenon in the universe—be it the flight of a bird or the rotation of a planet—has a direct influence upon that phenomenon. According to the laws of physics, we have no choice but to alter the bird's course or the planet's speed simply by focusing our awareness on it. So if we have the power to tweak the orbit of a heavenly body, it should come as no surprise that vitamin A—awareness—also has a profound impact on the human body. (*The Slow Down Diet*, page 62)

Awareness is the driving force behind slow sex. As we become intensely aware of each and every breath, touch, movement, or shift of the body, the sexual experience unfolds and flows easily and effortlessly moment by moment. And if we so wish, the exchange can continue for hours on end according to, and being guided by, what wants to happen between the bodies themselves. For extended lovemaking there needs to be no agenda, no goal, just an appreciation of the here-and-now experience. So to some extent you are faced with dropping the ego and the sexual personality with its demands, likes and dislikes, habits and addictions. Slowness is basic to a shift in sexual experience—slowing down in all you do, giving yourself the space to tune in to yourself. Be slow in your approach to the other person as well, and above all be slow, easy, and relaxed as you join your bodies and become one.

Relaxation and awareness actually go hand in hand, because you have to become more aware of your physical body in order to release any tension, clenching, tightness, or holding. Awareness, therefore, precedes relaxation,

and relaxation in turn deepens the awareness. When you consciously relax you will usually feel an inner wave of vitality, light, or aliveness expanding through the body. The delight of these inner sensations in turn engages the awareness, enabling you to fall into even deeper relaxation.

Once we find our way into the intangible present through awareness, we develop the qualities and radiance of true “presence.” Awareness is the capacity to be alert to what *is*. It’s the ability to be in touch with what is happening inside you and around you this very moment. When we build awareness into our sexual expression, it is the most powerful metabolic force.

IT’S NOT WHAT YOU DO BUT HOW YOU DO IT

As we explore further we will discover that it is well-nigh impossible to make rules about how to be slow. Creating a shift in our sexual experience is definitely not about following a set of rules; it’s more of an inquiry. It’s an ongoing effort to feel yourself and be self-observant during sex. It is examining not only what you are doing, but more importantly, how you are doing it. We simply do whatever we do as consciously as possible, with all the alertness we can muster in any given moment.

We usually say in our workshops that when you are making love, everything and anything goes, because it’s not what you do, but how you do it. Any act done with awareness is changed by that awareness itself, so the “what” can be transformed through the “how.” In this way being slow can never be a special sexual technique. It is not something you can do as such, because slowness is actually an outcome or by-product of what happens when an action is carried out with awareness.

You may already have discovered how difficult it is to *do* slow, especially when accustomed to a faster approach. Most of us have had the experience of driving along in a car, totally engaged in the movement and momentum, when all of a sudden a road sign saying “Slow” or “Stop” appears. At such a point, being forced to go slowly is a disturbance that can lead to irritation and frustration. Imagine, then, during sex when you are in full swing and then unexpectedly you remember the suggestion to go slow. Or you have it fixed in your mind that you have to be slow because you have been instructed to be slow. With this kind of rule-oriented attitude, the exploration of slowness will be tedious, not easy. In fact being slow will probably be the last thing you feel like doing when in the throes of a sexual encounter. The mind likes to do things right and stick with the rules, but this lack of flexibility closes the door to exploration. An inquiry requires curiosity, alertness, and a willingness to step into the unknown.

BEING CONSCIOUS INSTEAD OF MECHANICAL

The bottom-line truth is that most of the time we humans are not fully present in, or aware in, our beautifully sensitive fleshy bodies. We are not really connected to them on an inner level. We habitually use them in mechanical ways and do not really pay attention during most of our activities, except when physical pain is experienced. We remember the spine when we unexpectedly have a backache or the knee only when it hurts every time we bend it. Over time, especially as our bodies begin to show signs of wear and tear, our associations with the body can become negative and draining, not positive, nourishing, and uplifting.

Seldom do we focus ourselves sufficiently to consciously experience the actual “how” of what we are doing. Because we do the same things again and again, there is a mechanization in the way we conduct our daily

activities—walk, sit, stand, lie down, drive, cook, clean, shower, shave, shampoo, or whatever. We don't use our awareness. How are you sitting right now, as you are reading, for instance? Where is your body and how is your spine, your head, your neck? Collapsed forward or in one connected line? Shoulders up or down? Jaw clenched or relaxed? Breathing? When did you last consciously feel your breath? Are you holding your breath or is it shallow? Enjoy a deep breath right now!

As we get busy dealing with the demands of the day, our focus is, for the most part, outside of the body. Our attention is on achievement, getting something done, but not on the physical process involved in getting there. We lack a certain presence in all of our activities, including, of course, sex. We all have personal goals and doggedly set off each time in a mechanical, driven way in an attempt to reach a pleasing end. And as mentioned before, satisfying our immediate desires causes us to be absent, marginally present to the moment, ourselves, the other.

USE AWARENESS TO REMAIN IN THE NOW

As your level of awareness grows, everything becomes slower and more deliberate, creating an opportunity to feel and follow the wisdom and intelligence residing within the human body. A change in sexual experience becomes possible with the insight that the goal or habit of orgasm acts as a temptation in the future (see previous chapter), seducing us away from an awareness of the simple, authentic here and now.

Imagine for a moment that you have been used to spinning happily along in an automatic car and then unexpectedly you have to adjust to a less familiar manual shift. With a manual shift, gears are changed by hand in a more sequenced step-by-step way, coordinating with the clutch and engine speed. More awareness is needed, naturally, especially in the beginning when it is quite easy to stall the car. You are required to pay attention to the engine, tune in to its sounds, listen to the engine revolutions until they reach the right pitch, then do some speedy fancy footwork to release the gas, press the clutch, shift the gear with your hand, then release the clutch, and reapply pressure to the accelerator, all in one flowing move. These shifts are repeated again and again depending on traffic density or the road's curves, shifting gears down and up again. At first this kind of deliberate driving is bound to feel awkward and unfamiliar, and to get it right takes practice, but before long it becomes an integral part of driving. Eventually the moves will flow smoothly, but maintaining attention to the sound of the engine is an ongoing process.

We can change our patterns of lovemaking in much the same way. Instead of accelerating immediately to top gear, we can consciously cause a change in the course of events by choosing to become more aware of each shift in the situation. And the transition begins with *not* running after something, which makes it simpler. We do not fast-forward directly toward orgasm. Deliberately and with intention we stay here, remaining present. We already have some kind of awareness of the components required to pull an orgasm together, so to create the opposite and not dash forward must be an option as well. When we withdraw from fantasy or stimulation or anything that puts pressure on or inflames the situation, we forestall the urge that so easily becomes a compulsion. We no longer feel forced to give in to the pressing urgency to climax and release.

Open Eyes Increase Awareness

Our eyes are tools that put us in direct contact with our immediate surroundings in the present. Often sex takes place with closed eyes and in the dark, and usually sexual fantasy involves closed eyes, but during slow sex you can begin to experiment with keeping them open and receptive. You can begin to make a

practice of receiving with your eyes when you are looking at nature, imagining that nature is looking back at you. You reverse the perspective of vision. You are not looking out, but are being looked into by the other. This can be done with a tree, a flower, a bird, a beautiful sunset, the moon, stars, snowcapped peaks, a waterfall, the sunrise, or any lovely creation of nature, including another human being. The eyes can just be open, receiving, and inviting. (See the soft vision exercise at the end of this chapter.)

With the eyes open, staying in awareness, we naturally slow down to the extent that the usual triggers for climax are minimized. Sounds like contrary sexual advice, doesn't it? Usually the recommendation would be to maximize whatever brings us to a peak, but here we are placing attention on a critical point. We want to gently simmer and not boil over. We are monitoring ourselves—noticing what we are doing and how we are doing it—by engaging our awareness.

ENERGY FOLLOWS ATTENTION

Direct your awareness to your own body during lovemaking. You take the focus away from your partner's body and direct it inwardly toward yourself. As you relax and remain present to what is, you become better able to actually feel what is happening in your own body. Instead of attention being focused on orgasm or the other, you have the opportunity and space to turn inward and connect to your inner world at the outset.

The physical body ought to be given primary place in your field of awareness. When you focus on being rather than on doing, you can now bring attention, using your inner eye, to a flesh and bone level. And here you uncover new realms, a cosmos of cellular aliveness and vitality that is the domain of the invisible inner body. Uniting with the inner world makes a world of difference to your experience of sex, because you enter the domain of your awe-inspiring senses.

Allowing your awareness to penetrate the body tissues brings you alive to your embodied self. Love is made with and between bodies, and the body acts as an anchor to the present—a simple bridge to the inner qualities of sensitivity, being, and love.

Shifting focus from outer stimuli to the sensitivity of the inner body requires some practice, which means it may take time to get the knack of feeling yourself from another perspective. It's no big deal, really; instead of the more familiar "up and out," where the attention is focused outside yourself, you draw back and pull your attention into your own body. Simple. Your attention becomes free to move inward, and you will observe that if you put your attention on any pleasing inner experience, that sensitivity, energy, vitality, aliveness, chi, prana, or life force (call it what you will) actually increases. That's the power of awareness. Any sensations of streaming, tingling, vibrating, or warmth, for instance, will respond to the awareness and amplify, expanding deliciously into other parts of the body.

In *The Slow Down Diet* I found confirmation of this thrilling inner phenomenon:

In the yoga tradition there's a saying that has helped practitioners reach for greater levels of mastery in working with the body: "Where attention goes, energy flows." Decades of research in biofeedback have certainly proved this axiom, for when we focus on most any area of the body we can increase blood flow, alter bioelectric potential, and influence the secretion of numerous biochemicals. (*The Slow Down Diet*, page 75)

In other words, all these physiological responses to awareness create pleasurable, engaging, sensitive subtle sensations within the body. These experiences are touching and fulfilling; they make you feel better about

yourself, improving your sense of self-worth and dignity. With awareness you can set out on a journey into the abundant delights and thrills of relaxation. As you become more aware, you relax more. And the more you relax, the more your awareness increases. With more awareness, relaxation can deepen even further. And so it goes, ad infinitum. The forces of the universal metabolic enhancers complement and weave together in a magical, mysterious, consciousness-enhancing way.

COME HOME TO YOURSELF

The fundamental step to developing awareness is to come back to yourself. In order to shift your attention “in and down,” rather than “up and out,” begin by making the effort of being more aware of your body, noticing how it feels and where it feels. As suggested earlier, sometimes it’s easier to become more aware of tensions if you first tighten and deliberately exaggerate the level of tension. Contract and tighten your upper body for a few seconds, and then suddenly let go in one instant, releasing and relaxing all the muscles of the shoulders, jaw, belly, arms, and hands. Your body will take a beautifully deep breath and you will easily be able to feel the subtle pleasure and delight of relaxation course through your body in waves. In the same way, you can consciously (not mechanically) contract and relax the pelvic floor to increase your inner awareness and enhance the vitality of the area. If you wish you can contract on an in-breath to the count of four or five, and then relax on the out-breath to the same number of counts.

Returning to your body requires that you invert your attention on yourself. If you continue to scan your body throughout the day, making it a daily practice to do everything with as much physical awareness and relaxation as you can manage, you will become immersed in your body and develop a natural sensual grace and slowness.

Remember to honor yourself first; your inner connection to your own body is more significant than any connection to your partner’s body. It may sound confusing to hear that you and your body are the priority, and not your partner, but this rerouting of attention will help both of you to be alive to yourselves right from the outset. Focusing too much on the other person would be like leaving home, abandoning your own fire tending, and instead going to ignite somebody else’s fire to warm that person’s house.

When you honor yourself first, you stoke your own fire. You don’t depend on someone else to do it for you, and neither does your partner. The two individual fires join, they augment and enhance each other, and fueled by awareness, flames rise in splendid unison.

When our attention is split, partly on the other and partly on ourselves, we disempower ourselves by reducing our sexual potential. The simple act of attending to two or more stimuli at once can dramatically decrease the sexual metabolism. In sex there is a need to focus on yourself first and foremost to boost the fire of your own sexual metabolism.

Exercise: Going In and Down to Find Home in the Body Identifying an Inner Center of Deep Relaxation

You can do this exercise right now, wherever and however you are sitting in this moment. Or experiment with it later when you are lying or standing. It’s a simple way to connect to the inner dimensions of the body.

1. Close your eyes gently.
2. Scan your body and relax your shoulders, jaw, belly, or any place where you feel some tension or holding (see suggestions at the end of chapter 2). Take two or three easy, full breaths through the diaphragm and into your belly.

3. Then, with your eyes closed, begin to imagine that your eyes are looking backward into your body. Keep looking backward and use that inner vision to help you draw your attention into the body and then downward, so that you can sense yourself more from the inside.
4. Start to look around for a place inside the body that feels like home to you. A place that connects you to your body, the inner realms of ease, a place you can settle in to, one that makes you feel rested, as if you are arriving at home in yourself.

Home can be anywhere below the head—spine, buttocks, belly, genitals, heart, breasts, low back, feet, or anywhere that feels good and right to you. Home can also be the entire body.

5. From home, wherever it happens to be, however big or small, you can begin to spread your attention and link home to other parts that feel good, as if embracing other pleasant cellular sensations. Or you can expand symmetrically outward from the spine as the midline of the body.

An inner home acts as a resting place, a connection point, working like an anchor that roots the awareness within the body.

Exercise: Practicing Soft Vision with Your Partner Using the Eyes as a Window into Your Being

The practice of being receptive with a tree or some aspect of nature, described earlier in this chapter, can be extended to a very nice practice with your partner.

1. Close your eyes and connect internally, as described in the previous exercise.
2. When you feel rooted within your body, you can begin to open your eyes fraction by fraction (without losing contact with your inner body—if you do lose this connection, please close your eyes again until you inwardly reconnect, then again slowly open).
3. When your eyes are fully open, gently meet your partner's eyes. Allow your partner into you through the eyes. Let your eyes be easy, soft, receptive, and inviting. It's okay to blink, this is not a staring exercise.
4. Gaze receptively at one eye at a time because trying to engage both of your partner's eyes simultaneously has a mesmerizing, unfocused effect. Perhaps you will notice it is easier to connect with your partner's left eye than the right. Or vice versa. Whichever eye feels comfortable for you, stay with it. Shift to the other eye at any time. If you have a vision deficiency, make any adjustments in distance that you need.
5. Take a deep breath into your belly and allow your eyes to receive what is there in front of them, rather than looking outward in an objective or judgmental fashion.
6. Take several deep breaths into your belly. Scan your body for random areas of tension, and relax them. Relax the belly and soften the muscles surrounding the genitals.
7. Enjoy another breath. Be present in your body, simple and easy.
8. Remain in receptive eye sharing mode for as long as it feels comfortable, and close the eyes whenever it feels necessary, either to reestablish an inner connection or as opportunity to sense yourself more deeply on the inside. Keep coming back to open eyes and being available to yourself on the inside as you receive your partner's soft gaze into you. Avoid keeping the eyes closed for extended periods.
9. When it feels appropriate or when there is a spontaneous drawing together of your bodies, move into a sustained embrace in which you can close your eyes; stay present and attentive to inner details as you relax your body and melt with your partner.