

10.

The Magic of Breathing and Presence



“The way to do is to be.”

–Lao Tsu from *Tao Te Ching*

Sexual communication is indeed the most important aspect of creating good sex, because good sex can't be sustained without it. But when it comes to the mechanics of great sex, the skills of breathing and presence are the most basic and powerful.

What's the relationship between breathing and presence? The state of presence is what great sex requires; conscious breathing is how we can get to it. These are such important aspects of an evolving sex life that they each deserve special attention of their own.

Presence

The ability to stay present at anytime is one of the greatest challenges of being a human *being*, and that's because we get so wrapped up in the state of human *doing*. For example, even as I sit here writing about the state of presence, my mind creates many distractions and I have to stop myself from following them. Because I have a tendency to dissociate (i.e. not be present), one of my lifetime goals has been to work on becoming increasingly present. I have my work cut out for me!

Since we are all on a continuum which goes from being totally distracted to being fully present at any given moment, you are probably familiar with this concept. An extreme example of total distraction is a person with schizophrenia whose mind sometimes slips totally out of reality. An example of a fully present person would be an enlightened one; we all know they are extremely exceptional. So, other than rare enlightened individuals, very young children are our best models for presence, as they are often able to be totally engrossed (i.e. present) in any particular moment.

The following exercise helps you explore where you are on the presence continuum, during your sexual encounters?

Exercise: Observing Your Ability For Sexual Presence

Purpose: To focus on your ability to be present during sexual activity.

Activity: Observe yourself during your next few sexual encounters. Then assess your own level of sexual presence by checking the boxes below that apply to you. Then put an X on the presence continuum line below.

During sex, which of the following describes your level of presence?

- You are able to stay focused on your own physical experience.
- Your mind wanders when you have sex.
- Anxieties about different things get in the way of your enjoyment.
- If anyone else is in the house, your mind gets focused on them instead of your experience.
- You're more focused on what your partner is thinking than on your own experience.
- You're wondering what it's like for your partner to feel the imperfections of your body (fat, wrinkles, moles, etc.).
- You're more concerned about how you smell than what you feel.
- You're wondering about your performance.
- You're thinking about tomorrow's dinner.
- You're wondering how long this is going to take. You've already moved on in your mind to the next activity.

The Presence Continuum

100% distracted

100% present



I haven't come across anyone yet who couldn't do with a lot of improvement in their level of presence (either during sex or in other parts of their lives). My personal thinking is that many of our problems in relationships, parenting, business, and even our health, stem from our inability to be present with ourselves and each other. That topic definitely requires a book in itself and has been well addressed in both, *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle and *The Presence Process* by M. Brown².

I encourage most of my clients to pursue their ability to stay present but especially clients who are having sexual difficulties. Many sexual difficulties are caused from our inability to be fully in our body, as well as our strong tendency to be wrapped up in the uncontrolled musings of our mind. The *Timeless Pleasure* CD which accompanies this workbook was designed to help you become more present.

Sex and the Breath

Of all the multitudes of personal growth and wellness techniques I've come across throughout my career as a therapist, I have found nothing as useful as the power of the breath! There are very good reasons why it is always the central

factor in practices of higher consciousness like yoga, tai chi, meditation, and martial arts.

The power of the breath has been well known for centuries, yet still we are a society of poor and shallow breathers. Even though the concept of deep conscious breathing is simple it's not that easy. That's mainly because it is normally an unconscious activity and moving anything from unconscious to conscious takes effort.

What makes breathing so powerful is the fact that it's a function of the body that can be either conscious or unconscious. By taking conscious control of an unconscious body function, we can drastically increase our control over body functions not normally under our conscious control. This is as true for our sexual function as it is for our overall health.

Like presence, breathing is a topic that deserves a publication of its own. If you want more information on breathing, I recommend Dr. Keith Jeffery's DVD, *4 Minute Fitness*³ as well as the *Breathing* CD set by Dr. Andrew Weil.⁴ Both these publications give a detailed description of the breathing process and how to increase your breathing capacity and control.

So why is breathing so important for high quality sex? Well if you don't have the ability to stay present in the sexual experience you limit your experience drastically. Breathing locates us in the body where the sensations are occurring, thus making them more intense. **With increased breath control we can take more control over our excitement level, by consciously slowing the breath to avoid orgasm or quickening the breath to allow it.**

Our habit of shallow breathing certainly does start very early in life. If you look closely at how pre-school children breathe you'll notice that they breathe from their diaphragm. This is the way we are designed to breathe. The abdomen moves up and down with each breath. This is our model for healthy breathing. As you observe a child who is scared or upset you'll

see they breathe more shallow or practically hold their breath altogether.

We learn early in life (by about 7 years) that we can reduce or avoid uncomfortable feelings by making our breath shallow. This keeps us somewhat in our head and out of the body where the feelings actually are. As a defense mechanism it works very well, but unfortunately it becomes too habitual and limits our positive experience as well.

For sex we want to be fully in the body, because obviously, that's where the sensation is. Therefore, the habit of shallow breathing and getting distracted by our uncontrolled mind both hinder high quality sex. Some other ways to use conscious breathing during sex are:

- To reduce anxiety
- To relax a muscle cramp
- To bring yourself into the experience of presence
- To slow the excitement down
- To intensify excitement
- To breathe into particular parts of the body to increase specific sensation (e.g. pelvis)
- To slow down ejaculation
- To intensify orgasm

So here are some simple ways to start working on making your breathing more conscious and controlled, thus training yourself to be more present and have increased physical sensation. The pay off will be better sexual experience.

Exercise: Abdominal Breathing

Purpose: To practise comfortable relaxed deep breathing into the pelvic region.

Activity: Lying on your back (this is an excellent thing to do when you can't sleep) put your hand on your abdomen. As you breathe in, let your abdomen rise up. As you breathe out, let it fall. Some breath teachers suggest breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth. But there are many different ways of breathing to discover. In the meantime the most important thing is to deepen the breath and get it more under conscious control.

As you breathe out, use your hand to push out all the air left in your lungs. Breathe out more than you usually would just for the purpose of this exercise. Breathe slowly and notice how often you can let your abdomen rise with the breath. Throughout the day, begin to notice how often you are actually holding your breath or breathing very shallow.

As you observed your breath throughout the day, what did you notice?:

Exercise: Harmonizing Breathe

Purpose: To learn to synchronize your breath with your sexual partner. This activity is very nurturing, energy giving, and harmonizing.



Activity:

- Lie in the spoon position with your partner. The partner on the inside is enveloped in the arms of the partner on the outside. Whoever feels most in need of nurturing (or is most energetically depleted) goes on the inside first.
- You should both be as comfortable as possible with your chakras or energy centers lined up together as close as possible

- If the person on the inside is feeling tension or pain, near any one of the seven chakras (see chapter 17) , then the outside person can rest their hands over those spots. For example if the inside person has a headache then the outside person could put one hand on the inside person's head and the other near their center (just under belly button)
- Close your eyes, relax and breathe together
- First just breathe normally for a few minutes focusing on your breath.
- Then consciously begin to pace your breathing with each other until you are using the same breathing pattern, inhaling together, hold breath together, exhaling together, hold breath together. This is usually experienced as gentle and relaxing.

Exercise: Reciprocal Breathing for Energizing

Purpose: To learn an energizing breath to use with a partner

Activity:

If you wish to energize, you can do a form of reciprocal breathing. Lay in the spooning position as in the previous exercise. The outside partner consciously breathes out while the inside partner breathes in. Try some variations of the breath (deeper, more shallow, faster, and slower) As you experiment with this you'll see how each way gives you a very different result, thus providing a good demonstration of the power of the breath.

This exercise is a good one to do after a hectic day, especially *before* attempting to be sexual. It's a good way just to connect any time. After you have achieved more conscious use of your breath, breathing can easily be incorporated into sexual experience for the different sexual purposes mentioned earlier in this chapter.

What did you notice during this exercise?

Exercise: Observing Your Breath During Sex

Purpose: To become more conscious of the power of your breath during sex.

Activity: During a sexual encounter (alone or with a lover) notice what happens when you speed up, slow down, or hold the breath.

What did you notice when you increased the pace of your breath?

What did you notice when you slowed and deepened your breath?

Did you hold your breath? If so, when? Did holding your breath intensify your experience or calm it?

While observing your breath more during sex, what did you become more aware of?

Ways you think you can use this awareness during your sexual encounters might be:

¹ Tolle, Eckhart. *The Power of Now*, New World Library, California, 2004

² Brown, M., *The Presence Process*, Namaste Publishing, Vancouver, 2005

³ Jeffery, Keith, *4 Minute Fitness*, 2002, www.4minutefitness.com

⁴ Weil, Andrew. MD, *Breathing, The Master Key to Self Healing*, Sounds True Recording, Boulder Colorado, www.soundstrue.com, 1999.