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7 Elements of Self-Pleasure: Erotic Ritual

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Element 1

Breath

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Breath

The breath is the first of the seven elements of self-pleasure. It is really the foundation of our self-pleasuring and erotic ritual practice.

We breathe 20,000+ times a day and the way we breathe can have a profound impact on our experience, particularly how we experience the sensations of pleasure.

On a day-to-day basis, many of us are breathing in a way that engages our body's stress response. If I ask you to take a deep breath in right now, where do you notice you breathe into?

If you notice your chest or shoulders rise or lift when you breathe in, you're more than likely breathing in a way that engages your body's stress response.

Instead, in order to truly relax and slow you body down, which is imperative if you want to expand your pleasure, you need to learn how to drop your breath into your belly. This is known as diaphragmatic breathing.

Take a moment to breathe deeply again now, but this time keeping your chest and shoulders soft while noticing how your belly rises when you breathe in a falls when you breathe out.

Do you feel the difference?

When we breathe this way, we allow our body to relax and feel more, especially when we are self-pleasuring. Often, we can fall into the habit of speeding up our breathing we are being sexual. This is good for building energy and arousal, but not so good for expanding and exploring our pleasure.

Really, there are three ways that we can incorporate breathing into our self-pleasuring; (1) up-regulating our breath, (2) down-regulating our breath, and (3) bringing our breath to a plateau. All breathing techniques can more or less be categorized into these three ways.

Up-regulated breathing is fast, rapid breathing that elevates your heart rate and gets your blood pumping. It builds tension, arousal and energy.

Down-regulated breathing is slow, deep breathing that lowers your heart rate and releases tension from your body. It calms you down, spreading arousal and dissipating energy.

By bringing the breath to a plateau, you are coming to a steady, even breathing pattern that keeps you at a certain level of arousal, keeping your energy where it is. Box breathing, or square breathing, could be an example of this.

When self-pleasuring, you can experiment with how you experience pleasure by taking control of your breath and noticing the change in sensations when you alter your breathing.

My suggestion is to begin by down-regulating, bringing your body to a relaxed state, then building up from there, exploring the fluctuations and varying intensities of pleasure as you switch between ways of breathing.

Element 2

Sound

Element 2

Sound

As you begin to experiment with your breathing, you may notice that as exhale deeply you let out a sigh or moan or groan. This is the second element of self-pleasuring; sound.

Firstly, sound can be broken down into two distinct categories; (1) internal sound, or sound generated by you, and (2) external sound, or sound generated by something other than yourself.

The example above - letting out a sigh as you exhale - is an example of the first category, internal sound.

I cannot tell you the exact, scientific reason why this is, but if you consciously start to make more sound when you're experiencing pleasure, you will intensify the sensations that you're feeling.

My invitation to you here is to explore your voice and vocal expression of pleasure as you journey through your erotic ritual. One way of doing this can be starting off with deeper, lower-pitched groans and moans, noticing how these expressions feel in your throat and in your body, perhaps noticing if these lower frequency sounds resonate at lower points down your body.

Then, slowly starting to raise the pitch of your vocalizations, perhaps making higher, more ethereal sounding sighs and noises. You may notice that as you do this, the sensation in your throat changes and so to does the location in your body where these sounds resonate.

If you are feeling really adventurous, you may even like to try grunting, growling or squealing, as well as altering the volume of your vocal expressions. These things can all influence the amount of pleasure we experience, especially loudness as there is persistent a taboo about making noise when we're in pleasure.

Another way to incorporate sound into your self-pleasuring is to include music. External sound can influence our experience of emotions and sensations, particularly pleasure.

There are plenty of sex playlists online but how many self-pleasure playlists are there?

You may be familiar with certain songs or types of music that you enjoy making love to but what about making love to yourself? Do you have any songs that would be appropriate for that?

Experimenting with external sound during your self-pleasuring can include listening to songs that have memorable lyrics, although this can sometimes be a distraction. Music that doesn't contain lyrics may be more conducive. For example, listening to songs that have a steady rhythm or beat that you can follow, perhaps getting "lost in the music," a kind of sexual trance.

Music can also make us want to move in certain ways, which leads us to the next element.

Element 3

Movement

Element 3

Movement

The third element of self-pleasuring is movement. As mentioned above, when listening to music, we sometimes cannot help but want to move in a certain way. Also, when you breathe, parts of your body involuntarily move, like your chest, shoulders, diaphragm and belly.

When I survey people about their self-pleasure habits, I often notice that they describe their self-pleasuring as quite sedentary and stationary. Often, people will tell me that they are either sitting on a chair/couch or lying in bed. Of course, this can be comfortable but it can also be limiting.

Experimenting with movement during your self-pleasuring can be as simple as emphasizing or exaggerating the small innate movements of breathing. In fact, if you're not used to bringing much movement into your self-pleasuring, this can be a great place to start.

My suggestion is to begin exaggerating the movement of your belly, it's rise and fall, as you breathe

When you do breathe deeply like this, you may begin to notice that your pelvis gently rocks backward as you inhale and forward as you exhale.

As you breathe in and your belly expands, your hips roll away from you and there is a subtle arch in your lower back. As you breathe out and your belly contracts, your hips draw towards you and there is a subtle tucking of your hips towards your chin.

You can emphasize these movements, connecting your breath to your body, allowing your breath to guide you.

What are some other ways you could incorporate movement into your self-pleasuring? Take a moment to write some ideas down.

There are plenty of ways to bring movement into your self-pleasuring, from dancing to shaking to yoga postures to complete stillness. Try bringing yourself to full arousal, fully sexually charged, and then transition into some sensual dancing or gentle yoga or nude stretching.

Notice how this affects your experience of pleasure. You might find that there is a certain way of moving that feels really enjoyable, facilitating your pleasure even more.

By moving your body, you're also promoting the awareness of pleasure in areas of your body that aren't your genitals. Your whole body has the capacity to feel pleasure and by moving it, by waking it up, and by allowing it to express, you give yourself the chance to notice this pleasure in other areas of your body.

Lastly, specific bodily movements can promote the movement of sexual energy through the body. For example, the oscillation and undulation of the hips can help move sexual energy from the genitals in to the navel and solar plexus. Also, the rolling of the shoulders and raising of the chin can help move sexual energy higher.

Element 4

Touch

Element 4

Touch

Possibly the most obvious element of self-pleasuring is touch. When I tell people about expanding their experience of pleasure, the first thing that usually comes to their mind is novel ways in which they can touch their genitals so as to enhance their pleasure.

This is because of our relatively limited understanding and experience of masturbation. You'll notice that I've been using the term "self-pleasuring" throughout this instructional material. I do so because the word "masturbation" is loaded with connotations.

For example, the typical masturbation scenario for many people plays out quite routinely, like a habitual pattern. It often involves being sedentary and focusing touch predominantly, if not solely, on the genitals. Usually, it is framed as a means to get something (read: pleasure and orgasm) from the genitals, like it's their genital's job to give them these things.

Self-pleasure on the other hand can, as the name suggests, involve anything that is pleasurable to yourself. It doesn't even have to involve genital touch at all, although it often can and that is perfectly fine.

My invitation to you with this element is to be curious and exploratory with your touch.

Most of us have two amazing tools on the ends of our arms that can offer myriad types of stimulation. With your hands you can press, pinch, grab, squeeze, scratch, thud, rub and do many other things that elicit differing sensations, quite often pleasurable.

And, not only can you apply these different types of stimulation to your genitals, you can also apply them to other parts of your body. Your whole body is covered in nerve endings, sensory receptors that feel pleasure. When you explore your body with your hands, you'll usually find that there is a particular type of touch in a specific area that you really enjoy. You may even surprise yourself by what you discover,

In this example, your hands are doing the touching and you're noticing the sensations being elicited by that touch. But, you can also focus on how your hands feel when they're doing the touching. You are both giving and receiving touch when you self-pleasure. So, you may like to tune into how it feels to be touched by your hands and then notice how your hands feel when they touch certain body parts or objects.

In addition to your hands, you can also include objects in your erotic ritual. From more obvious examples like vibrators and other adult toys to feathers, silk scarves and other items of sensory delight. If you're open to it, you can explore other types of stimulation, such as those from rope or the blunt end of a kitchen utensil. Indeed, your whole kitchen is stocked with items which can be included in your self-pleasuring

Element 5

Container

Element 5

Container

The fifth element of self-pleasuring and possibly the most important is the creation of a container.

I don't mean the plastic Tupperware container. I'm referring to the safe space in which you feel comfortable to explore your self-pleasuring.

For many of people, the container for their self-pleasuring is their bedroom or private office, simply for practicality reasons. Finding a place where you feel comfortable and confident is the perfect start to creating a strong, safe container. You may have a room or place in mind already.

The next step in creating a container is finding and including things in your space that facilitate your self-pleasuring. Sure, your bedroom can be a great place to explore your sexuality, but what about if you lit some candles, laid down some silk bed sheets and put on some incense?

Essentially, creating a container is creating an environment that puts you in the mood to explore your pleasure, adding to your sensations, not detracting from your experience.

For some, that can look like the aforementioned candles, silk and incense. For others, it's very different.

What are some things that make you feel sexy? What puts you in the mood?

Whatever these things are, if you can incorporate them into your self-pleasuring, they will facilitate your expanded experience of pleasure.

This element is very much the determining factor for turning a masturbatory activity into an erotic ritual. The creation of a container, for anything, such as other spiritual practices like yoga, meditation and prayer, requires attentiveness and consideration.

It is these qualities that help create a space that you personally feel comfortable, safe, confident and relaxed in so that you can then freely employ the other elements of your self-pleasuring.

The word that sums up these notions is "Intention."

Being intentional is the creation of your container is the key to a beautiful and powerful self-pleasuring practice and erotic ritual.

Setting an intention at the start of your self-pleasuring can help guide your experience. For people with penises, an intention that I often suggest is to explore as much pleasure as possible without ejaculating. For people with vulvas, an intention could be to explore as much non-clitoral pleasure as possible.

In any case, your erotic ritual intention should generally emphasize pleasure, be framed positively and focused on the present tense.

By doing these things when you set your intention, you are ensuring that your self-pleasuring is for you, now, and is beneficial. All things outside of your container are distractions.

Element 6

Distractions

Element 6

Distractions

Have you ever been in the zone while self-pleasuring, building arousal, feeling great, and then all of a sudden your phone rings, or there is a knock at the door, or something happens that takes you out of the moment, out of your body, and quells your pleasure?

If this has happened to you, then you're already familiar with the sixth element of erotic ritual; Distractions.

As mentioned above, distractions are everything that do not fall within the parameters of your container. It may be helpful to think of the two elements as opposites.

In order to create a relaxing, safe, comfortable container, we need to limit the amount of distractions present or likely to interrupt our experience of pleasure.

Some distractions are more obvious, such as technology. Our phones, laptops and televisions are all amazing devices but they can also be some of our biggest distractions. It can be an act of intention setting to turn your phone off, put it on flight mode, or put it away, so as not to be disturbed by it. Similarly, locking the door, can be an act that minimizes the potential for distraction.

What are your distractions?

Common distractions are other people (particularly kids if you're a parent), external sound (music can sometimes distract us, as can outside noises), and time.

The notion of time is interesting because it can be both a distraction but also part of your container. Have you set aside enough time to fully explore your body and your pleasure? Are you rushing to do your self-pleasuring before your housemate or partner gets home? Do you only have a certain amount of time to play with?

We can think of distractions as things that inhibit our arousal and pleasure, things that turn us off. This is in contrast to the previous element, "container," where we're emphasizing things that promote our arousal and pleasure, things that turn us on.

You should aim to minimize your turn offs while maximizing your turn ons. Limiting your distractions while strengthening your container.

However, some distractions aren't as easy to minimize. For example, another common distraction is our own wandering mind. Sometimes our thoughts can carry us away, out of our body and into our head. Buddhists call this the Monkey Mind, a term meaning restless, inconstant and uncontrollable.

A simple way to alleviate this distraction, albeit temporarily, is to catch yourself when you've been carried away by a thought, don't judge yourself for it, and return your attention back to your breath or the sensations in a specific body part. If you're familiar with meditation practices, you may like to integrate those into your self-pleasuring.

Element 7

Closing Practice

Element 7

Closing Practice

The final element of self-pleasuring is your closing practice. This is how you bring your erotic ritual to an end.

There are many ways to close a practice, you may even be familiar with some if you have attended a yoga class, spirituality workshop, or group activity.

When it comes to self-pleasuring, particularly for people with penises, a very common closing practice is ejaculation, although it is usually not named as such. For many, an ejaculation signals the end of a sexual experience due to the immediate onset of the refractory period.

But, if an intention has been set to abstain from ejaculation, a different closing practice is necessary. This can also be true for people with vulvas, as an orgasm may not signal the end of the sexual experience, although just like an ejaculation, it can and that is a perfectly acceptable way to bring the ritual to an end.

There are however, other means by which you wish to close down the space you've created for your self-pleasuring. This could include simply allowing the sensations to gradually subside or bringing stimulation to a gentle halt or even placing the hands on the body in gratitude.

Some other ways of bringing your erotic ritual to an end could include meditating or chanting, as is the tradition in many yoga practices, or maybe saying an affirmation.

More elaborate closing practices are also available. These may come from tantric and sex magick traditions whereby certain activities, exercises and invocations are performed.

For the purposes of expanding your pleasure, a suggestion I have for your closing practice is the a technique called the breath and energy orgasm.

Lie comfortably on your back without a pillow, keeping your knees up and your feet flat on the floor. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Take in as much air as possible in a relaxed manner. Think of your breath as a circle, with no pause between the inhale and the exhale.

Don't force the exhale. As you inhale, let your belly fill up like a balloon. As you exhale, flatten your lower back to the ground. This rocking motion helps to move sexual energy. Squeeze your pelvic floor muscles on the exhale. Begin to use your mind and your breath to pull energy into your pelvic floor. Inhale the energy up your body slowly and exhale as you circulate the energy back down. Place your hands on each body part as you breathe into it.

Raise the pitch of your voice on your exhalations as you move the energy up your body. When you've reached your crown, take three deep breaths. On the third inhale, breathe in as deeply as you can while lowering your legs to the ground. Hold the breath and tense your pelvic floor, core and then your whole body simultaneously for as long as you can. When you're ready, exhale and relax. Just notice the sensations in your body.

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