



our starter course in Tantric sex



Can an intimacy workshop really revive a couple's love life? We sent Helen Lederer and her long-suffering husband Chris to find out

Was I wearing the right outfit, I wondered – after all, no one had mentioned dress code? “Don’t worry, it’ll only seem kinky the first time,” quipped the partner as we drove through busy Sunday night traffic towards our first, ahem, Couples Intimacy Workshop.

“Are you kidding, this is a one-off, ok?” I announced, only slightly hysterically. My top worries about an intimate couples evening were these: could I be intimate with my hubby in public, how much sharing would be required and did he have holes in his socks etcetera, and would the etcetera

be more scary than the other concerns?

The venue for this “love fest” was an attractive coach house nestling discreetly off a minor road. The discreet element was particularly welcome, as I was still harbouring a deep fear of being made to swing in my pants from a chandelier shouting “Geronimo”. What if I bumped into someone I knew coming the other way? I couldn’t claim that I was “just passing” could I? However, I spotted all manner of herbal teas and a boiling kettle in a cosy sitting area, which calmed things down a bit. I decided against mentioning our glass of Dutch courage in the pub just seconds earlier and selected a soothing camomile to

help get me into this uncharted zone of brazen self-discovery.

We had opted for a one-off “Creating Love” session, but these intimacy evenings can also be experienced as part of a course if desired. As we waited for all the other couples to assemble, I coddled my mug of camomile and took a peek into the “workshop” room itself. (I left the polite exchange of travel anecdotes with some other new arrivals to the partner.) A swathe of silky material undulated beneath a circle of twinkling mauve candles in the middle of the floor. Little camping seats (a bit like a very low stool you might use for a car boot but amazingly comfy, as I soon discovered) had been placed around the candles.

Priyatama (I wasn’t entirely sure if this was her original name, but frankly I had enough worries at this point to be nosy) and Bob (her American hubby) were to be our intimate couple workshop leaders. They did exude a very friendly aura of welcome, as I decided to go for it and even slip my socks off (no holes, praise be) and tiptoed inside the sacred room with our four fellowcouples.

Our first task, once balanced on our little stool cum cushion thing, was to go round the circle and say something positive about our partner. Sitting on the floor in candlelight reminded me ever so slightly of playing strip-poker when I was a teen, but once I’d got a grip it was unusually touching to hear my partner say something nice about me. What a surprise! Apparently he liked it when I introduced him to people.

Listen, if that “did” it for him, I could arrange to make further introductions all round South London next weekend!

Our leaders reinforced these positive offerings with responsive sounds and nods, which made for a nice warm start I have to say. Next we had to face our partner and close our eyes – a killer, this – as we both cheated at the same time and smirked simultaneously. When we opened them for the second time, we had to imagine that we were seeing each other for the first time – if you follow. I became slightly hysterical when hubby whispered “nicely shaped eyebrows”, but since I didn’t want us to get chucked out, I buckled down and came up with “nice

intimate moments

eyes”, which was a bit standard but the best I could do at this early stage.

The “looking at each other” lark is not as easy as it sounds. A lot of people who go on these courses do it because they feel they’ve become too busy with life to just “be” with each other, or perhaps it’s to pop back a bit of “sparkle” or even to combat a bad body image (show me a woman who doesn’t have one of these and I’ll show you my 36-24-36 figure).

However, it’s quite a challenge to take three minutes to say whatever you want to your

partner, while they have to simply listen. I resisted the urge to remind him about how the outside of the house needed painting, but whispered in a teeny voice some stuff I haven’t found time to say in years. Remember that one does murmur sweet nothings when one first meets a partner – it was a bit like that, only a few years down the line (a sort of subdued and more mature version of “phwoar”).

I kept it to a whisper because I didn’t want the neighbouring couple to hear anything, but everyone seemed so engrossed in their own murmurings that no one seemed to bother. It felt a bit like being at a parents evening, where you just have to get on with it.

When we’d finished that, Priyatama told us that the word “intimacy” could also mean “into me you see” and boy, was she right. Three minutes of telling each other a few things about whatever came into our heads made us feel really close. And this was before the drumming!

While we were still in our “pairs”, we were invited to stroke our partner’s hair (having asked their permission first) and I was subjected to a rather vigorous scalp massage. When Priyatama added this exercise wasn’t to be a massage – just a “gentle stroke” – my scalp buffing was reduced to a light tapping forthwith. No one can accuse my partner of not taking instructions well.

A nice bit was when we faced each other to do the “workshop straddle”. This position was impressively demonstrated by Priyatama and Bob. Either the lady can have her legs over his or he can have his over hers or, surprise, surprise, you can have one of each on top (we opted for this last, being a modern couple). We

were to stroke the face of the other person, all the while being serenaded by ambient music. The partner could then put their head on the other’s shoulder, which all felt quite peaceful, until I began to worry if I’d switched off my phone.

It hotted up when we were invited to stand. Each pair was to stand back to back and listen to some drumming and do a bit of gentle stamping if so inclined.

Priyatama suggested we might want to verbalise at this point, but I was too busy trying to make contact with my partner’s behind. Our height

discrepancies meant that our derrieres could not connect (mine reached around his calves), so we made good work of some independent swaying, which felt very agreeable.

Then came a tantric demonstration. Suddenly it felt a bit... controversial. You know that joke that goes, “I’m not a good lover but at least I’m fast?” Well the tantric idea is the antithesis to that joke. In fact the tantric concept, Priyatama explained, is really another way to describe weaving. Or to put it another way (I’m glad she did actually), “tantric” offers a more spiritual and sacred approach in the bed department. I was all ears as you can imagine.

So our mini tantric exercise went a bit like this. Person A stands to the side of person B and puts their hand on the base of B’s spine. Then you both start breathing deeply together. Then A puts their hand up and down B’s tummy and, err, genital area – about four inches away, mind – and then you swap and that’s the weaving bit done. I enjoyed my weaving immensely, but got distracted by thoughts bobbing in that I needed to go to the cash point for my daughter’s guitar lesson the next day (very annoying, especially as it turned out to be cancelled).

We watched Priyatama and Bob do a spectacular Tantric demo. They looked very nice together. Then they did a bow to each other, finding their third eye (come on, you know you’ve all got one), and said something like “amisdais”, which is what I’m going to say after I’ve done

“A nice bit was when we faced each other to do the ‘workshop straddle’”



tonight’s supper and our breathing practice. As we drove home, we definitely felt in tune. The act of going to something unknown together is in itself an adventure (and I don’t mean trying out a new wine bar). We were in the hands of a sincere couple, who genuinely love what they do, and that authenticity is catching. It was the whispering section that did it for me and no, I’m not going to tell you what he said – but it perks me up no end when I’m in moody.

Definitely recommended for couples who have got more used to discussing shades of outdoor paint than re-living those heady first moments of falling in love. Intimacy works – yes it does.

What is Tantra?

The word “Tantra” is Sanskrit, the sacred language of Hinduism, and is not a religion but a spiritual path. Bob and Priya describe Tantra as the art of waking up our love lives by bringing heart and spirit into our sexuality.

Do try this at home...

Bob and Priya’s tips for couples to try:

- Create special loving time together (close and non-sexual)
- Slow down and breathe (together)
- Honour one another with appreciations (every day)

Intimacy Works is about relating, loving and communication skills; it offers private sessions, courses and retreats for couples and individuals. Call 020 8441 8038, email enquire@intimacyworks.co.uk or visit www.intimacyworks.co.uk