**How to Get the Spark Back:**

**A Tantra Workbook**

Goal of workbook:

It is difficult, if not impossible, to do this topic justice. The Get the Spark Back presentation was an overview and I wanted to stimulate your desire to learn more, to read more and to try out concepts. This workbook goes with the workshop. If you have read the other workbooks, you will notice considerable overlap and repetition. Consider that this is from a slightly different perspective and that you might need some concepts repeated.

I have summarized some points and given excerpts from some books toward that end. When you find yourself looking for reason and logic, remind yourself that you are dealing with emotions, which use a whole different system.

OVERALL GOAL OF THE WORKSHOP: Find your sexual passion by integrating your head, heart and spirit with your genitals.

* Throw yourself into it
* Know what you want and go for it
* Generate excitement and desire

You will do this through a combination of reading inspirational and educational quotes and doing the exercises.

*Art of Sexual Ecstasy* Quotes:

“One moment of ecstasy can transform your life.”

“…you, and not your partner, are the source of your own orgasm…you open yourself up to new feelings of relaxation, self-acceptance and self-esteem.”

“…the value of peak experiences in lovemaking-those special moments, either preceding or during orgasm when you feel transported beyond the limitations of your personal problems and preoccupations. Suddenly you are flying; you feel gloriously alive, filled with light and laughter, at home in a moment that seems to go on forever, in a space that fills you with awe. It is these rare, intense, often unexpected experiences that awaken fresh energies and inspire feelings of closeness and gratitude between you and your partner.

 Because we know such moments are possible, each time we enter into lovemaking, we secretly hope that this time we will enjoy them again. We hold the vision of a deeply fulfilling and joyful embrace, in which the vibrant pleasure of the body encompasses the delight of the heart, the meeting of minds, and the mutual recognition of kindred spirits.”

 “The Tantric tradition of ecstatic sexuality stresses the importance of skillful preparation so that when you come to lovemaking, you feel whole, unified and healed.”

**Exercises**

Allow your partner to have a different opinion than you have. Entertain that in your head right now. If there is a difference, what happens inside you. Feel into it and tolerate it if you struggle. Learn to value the difference or you will not be able to tolerate the spark when it ignites.

The ways in which we connect emotionally, and the ways we value emotions become more important than the ways we actually physically touch one another. Think about why your partner might want to connect, horniness and reduction of sexual tension vs desire for partner; wanting to share something with your partner. There will be differences.

When this difference arises, try to understand them. Allow them to feel heard and understood without feeling judged. This process alleviates most arguments or prevents them. Don’t try to change your partner or persuade or convert them. Let them be different and celebrate the difference. Watch what happens when you understand and hold space.

Do we allow the other to be different or do we think there is a relationship problem?

Do we break up or deal with the fact that we are two distinct individuals and are allowed to have different perspectives and ways of dealing with the world?

Early in the relationship, you focus on commonalities as long as you both agree you feel validated and secure. Or you can feel secure in yourself and can self-validate. If you cannot self-validate, you attempt to get someone else to validate you.

You end up presenting a false self (imposter) to ensure a steady supply of validation. They are validating this false self, so it naturally does not fill you. How do you stop this cycle without self-validation?

Differences help us. We run into developmental stages in every single relationship. We negotiate it differently if we know this is part of growing and developing instead of defining it as a “problem.”

Differences are made so critically important due to this Neocortex.

*Emotional stimulation is often a more powerful determinant of genital function and satisfaction* than is touch. W*e give meaning to sex*- how you feel about your sensations has a *bigger impact on overall arousal.*

Exercise:

Be in the moment- the untethered soul is capable of greater passion. Want to have passion, be 100% where you are right now. Continue this exercise every moment in which you breathe. Each and every moment can be experienced in its fullness. Imagine being able to be present. How does your beloved act when you are fully present?

Exercise:

Be authentic and risk it. Be genuine and real with your feelings. How do you feel when something happens? How do you relate to what just happened? That is the relationship, right?

Exercise:

Next time someone asks you to do something, try not accommodating them unless you truly want to do it. If you will feel resentful, definitely say no!

Why? You get tired of pretending you are this false self. I am not being honest. I grow weary and am less willing to violate my integrity. Who am I when push comes to shove?

You get tired of doing for (accommodating) the other, especially if they are not reciprocating.

Exercise:

Practice self-validation- Can you be empathetic with yourself and compassionate to yourself? Can you see and acknowledge your own point of view and validate it? Do you sell out?

Self-validated intimacy-hinges on your ability to present your solid self when your partner is not accepting or validating you

Exercise:

Trust your gut. When you are not sure of something, and your gut is telling you something, trust yourself first.

Trust yourself, not the expert or a book. This is important for differentiation. Know who you are and be who you are. Remember who you are. It is okay for you to have differences from your partner. It is an important stage.

The less differentiated you are, the more likely you need a series of crises to blast through emotional log jams. Be you!

At a certain point, we run out of commonalities. The easy topics that evoke consensus and reduce anxiety are done; only the hard ones are left. I either confront myself or my partner at this point. Easier to confront partner (proxy fight). We can escape situations we have created. We cannot escape ourselves.

Emotional gridlock is when I am no longer willing to adapt to partner and not willing to confront myself. This will happen in any relationship that has growth. This is not pathological. This is "falling out of love." The above was from Passionate Marriage by Schnarch.

Want more sex?

Sociologist Julie Brines notes that sexual frequency was higher in couples where the man spent more time doing such traditionally masculine chores as bill paying and yardwork.

Quotes from The Art of Sexual Ecstasy

“Tantric masters had always said; Your true nature is blissful. If you close your eyes and go inside, if you give yourself a chance to go deep enough, past the chatter of everyday consciousness and outside distractions, you can discover that you already have ecstasy within you, 24 hours a day.”

Exercise:

Find the ecstasy within you. Spend time developing your capacity to be with passion and ecstasy, pleasure and bliss. Experience it and keep your heart open. Imagine what that will be like when you are with your partner and you already have that skill.

“From the Tantric perspective this “orgasm of the brain” greatly stimulates the brain cells and creates a bridge between the right and left hemispheres, fusing the intellect of the left hemisphere with the intuitive faculties of the right.”

“You explore ways of escaping the gender trap that identifies you exclusively as either masculine or feminine…to establish a balanced partnership….develop a spirit of adventure, spontaneity, and erotic creativity in your love life.”

Exercise:

Practice having sex in a limited mindset and then try the adventure of an open minded sexual encounter with your partner. Be spontaneous and creative. Spend time making it a priority and watch how it affects you and your relationship. Expand into being your partner or taking on their mindset and experience it as they might. Use this to allow any rigid thoughts to leave.

 “High Sex is a simple, step-by-step process that is accessible to anyone who wants to find a gentle and conscious way of bring the spirit back into sex, of honoring sexual union as a bridge between body and soul.”

Exercise:

Picture yourself doing the above. Now expand the picture and feel the feelings deeply. Repeat that and be there in your mind. Your mind doesn’t know it you are visualizing or if it happening in what we describe as “reality.”

“High sex takes the experience of orgasm to a new dimension- a dimension in which genital orgasm is only the beginning. It inspires you to explore the full capacity of orgasm, culminating in ecstatic body-to-body and soul-to-soul communion. It is an experience of the whole body, the whole being. The path helps your body to be free of tensions, your head to be trusting and open, and your mind to develop such psychic skills as visualization, imagination and meditation. When this integration has taken place, you are ready for a new, qualitatively higher sexual experience in which physical pleasure becomes a delight of the heart and an ecstasy of the spirit…Ecstasy is a state as natural as sleeping or breathing… a transformation of sex…a recovery of our ecstatic self in love. We need to bring the spirit-the inspiration to manifest our highest potential- back into sex…cultivating the art of sexual ecstasy to reach higher states of consciousness and in this way deepening our intimacy with our loved ones.”

Exercise:

Re read the above. What do you need right now in order for that to be your reality?

Do you need more mental preparation so that this is just more natural? Do you need to rehearse and practice physically until it just flows?

Are you willing to do what is necessary to get there?

“I have seen relationships between couples who had become bored-not only with sex, but with each other- suddenly blossom into entirely new love affairs, with open, heart-to-heart communication; renewed sexual intimacy; and an underlying spiritual connection that gave their lives together new meaning and fulfillment.”

Exercise:

Re read the above and ask yourself if you want open, heart-to-heart communication, fulfilment and meaning. Relationships are there to help you grow as a person. Relationships are not meant to make you happy. Happiness is a side effect of growth and mastery. A relationship that does that is within your reach and you have to do some work to get there. It is pleasurable and intimate and vulnerable. It will challenge you to grow if you have the requisite courage.

“As you open the Inner Flute channel, you learn how to amplify your arousal and redistribute your sexual energy, your orgasmic sensations, to your entire body. Without the Inner Flute the sexual music played on the single instrument of the genitals could not expand so readily into a symphony in which the whole body becomes involved…It would be like rock and roll without the lead guitar.”

Exercise:

Do you already know all you need to know about amplifying your arousal, redistributing energy or do you have more to learn? Are you aware of nuance and subtle sensations?

“In High Sex, instead of intensifying stimulation, we are developing an expanded awareness of increasingly subtle sensations in the whole body.”

“…disappointed…because most of us are like owners of a precious Stradivarius violin that we have never learned to play.” Jolan Chang, *The Tao of the Loving Couple*

Exercise:

Ask yourself if you have room for improvement.

Exercises:

Are you killing passion? Pay attention to your communication with another gender. Are you exchanging information? If not, are you talking to connect? It is usually one or the other. That is a common challenge in relationships. We communicate for different reasons and don’t realize it.

Exercise:

Are you killing passion? Do not fix someone who is telling you they had a rough day, no matter how much you love them. Simply listen and hold space by listening and being there in solidarity. Pay attention to the quality of the connection when you do that. Does this lead to the kind of passion you want?

Exercise:

Are you killing passion? Hearing him tell about his day, she demonstrates her interest in him and in their relationship by following up with questions and requesting detail. He feels interrogated and now wants to have some space. She feels rejected and wants to talk about the relationship and he retreats further.

Does this lead to an intimate encounter?

“The individual is flooded by light of supernatural beauty and experiences a state of divine epiphany. He or she has a deep sense of emotional, intellectual and spiritual liberation and gains access to breathtaking realms of cosmic inspiration and insight.”

Stanislav Grof, *Beyond the Brain*

Exercise:

Be gut-level honest with yourself. Does that intimidate you? Do you want supernatural beauty and divine epiphany? Do you really want liberation? Do breathtaking realms of cosmic inspiration and insight appeal to you?

“The secret of sexual energy, therefore, is not only that it is capable of begetting new generations, but that it has a second function of much greater importance for man; to lead his consciousness step by step up the great Jacob’s ladder of consciousness to God.”

Elisabeth Haich, *Sexual Energy and Yoga*

Exercise:

This is the goal of tantra and sacred sexuality. Turn back if you do not want the higher levels because they are inescapable once you arrive.

“When you are in love with someone, you do indeed see them as a divine being. Now, suppose that is what they truly are and that your eyes have by your beloved been opened. Through a tremendous outpouring of psychic energy in total devotion and worship for this other person, who is respectively god or goddess, you realize by total fusion and contact, the divine center in them. At once it bounces back to you and you discover your own.”

Alan Watts, *Play to Live*

Exercise:

Are you okay discovering who you really are? What if you get there and it scares you? What if you realize you didn’t really see life and your partner clearly? What if it transformed your relationship, your partner, your life- would you still be willing to do the work to get there?

“To play is to be unfettered and unconditioned, to perform actions that are intrinsically satisfying; to sing, dance and laugh. To play is to step out of the ordinary world of the humdrum, to enter a special, magical world where one can revel in the superfluous. To play is to display oneself aimlessly and gracefully. As players, then, the gods are revealed to be delightful, joyful, graceful beings whose actions are completely spontaneous, unconditioned, and expressive of their transcendent completeness and freedom.”

David Kinsely, *The Sword and the Flute*

Exercise:

Can you imagine sex as playful and not so serious? Can you imagine expressing the transcendent? Try being more playful and see what happens to your lovemaking, to your connection to your partner and to yourself.

Exercise:

Try to not communicate.

Try to communicate your love, without using any words at all. Do it physically, non-verbally.

We communicate 100% of the time. We cannot help but communicate. Sometimes the communication is really clear. For example, someone came in for a session and told me that he appreciated my help with his wife’s communication, now she is very clear she does not like him.

Exercise:

List how you are communicating that your partner is a priority.

Are you initiating conversations, talking about who you are and what makes you tick? Are you paying attention to their likes and dislikes? Are you communicating that you do not care?

Exercise:

What are you consciously communicating about yourself? What communication is the other person focusing on and what meaning are they getting from it?

Exercise:

Think about how you think.

How do you feel about feelings?

When we communicate, we are letting others know how we feel about feelings themselves. Some people are very emotional, value emotions highly and others do not. When the couple does not see eye to eye on this one, emotional connection can be a challenge. Gottman calls it meta-emotional mismatch- how we feel about feelings does not match.

Exercise:

Pay attention to how you show love to your partner. We almost always show love in the way we want it. Pay attention to how your partner shows you love.

Consider reading Chapman’s book on Love Languages. Each person has a preferred way to hear that they are loved and appreciated. Most people give what they themselves want, not what the other person needs.

Exercise:

Pay attention to how you grow passion in your relationship.
See the beauty in the relationship, feed the relationship, give it energy, be involved and engaged in it.

Exercise:

Practice not taking it personally that one of you desires more intimacy. Ask for reassurance that they still love and desire you, just have a lower level of desire in general.

The person with less desire for intimacy always controls the intimacy as long as they are dependent on validation from one another. Not going to go there if afraid of rejection or dismissal.

*Hot Monogamy* Quotes:

“…the burst of sexual passion that accompanies a new relationship is time limited…couples that want to sustain passion and intimacy have to consciously create it. If you do not have intimacy skills, you will struggle to create it.”

“There is no upper limit to passion and intimacy!”

Exercise:

What does it mean there are no limits? How can there be no upper limit to passion? Can your brain figure it out or do you need to experience it? Same for intimacy.

Sexual Style Inventory (Exercise: please do these pages with your partner 21-35) “I created other exercises that help couples explore- romance, sexual desire, sensuality, body image, communication about sex, technique and sexual variety”- do the exercises.

“The strongest indicator of sexual and marital satisfaction for women was the ability to express sexual feelings to their partner.” (speak openly and honestly to their partner)

Exercise:

Practice admitting and acknowledging these to yourself first. Do you want sexual satisfaction enough to look at the old messages you have heard? Do you want a better, more satisfying marriage? Face the truth of who you are, what you want and prefer, what your fantasies might be… Be who you are. Own it. You want certain things and they told you that it was shameful to want sex or to be fulfilled. They may have told you that sex is dirty or some variation of that. You believed them for awhile and now you realize that they were controlling you. They lied to you. On some level, though, you fight the messages. Talk to a counselor or a sex therapist about the messages and what healthy messages can replace the old ones that were unhealthy.

“We all long to feel loved, cherished and desired. If you always want sex, when do you want *me*?”

Exercise:

Consider how sex has changed for you over the years. Can you be more intimate and disclose more about yourself and your needs?

 Can you be open, manage your emotions better than when you were younger and cope better? If you can do this, you are more likely to handle the profound experiences of tantra.

Profoundly meaningful sex is determined more by personal maturation than physiological reflex.

“People who can let themselves be known have more potential for profound sexual experiences. If you are interested in sex with intimacy, there is not a 17 yr old alive who can keep up w a healthy 60 yr old.” (Many thanks to David Schnarch and his book Passionate Marriage.)

Exercise:

Practice hearing the word, “no” when you ask to be sexual. How you respond to “no” is key.

“Does the person have the right to not want it? Do you follow up w that person because you are emotionally connected? Do you insist on never having needs again to protect from feeling rejected? Can you be true to your adult self in the midst of feeling rejected? Do you really want to make love with someone who is not in the mood? Wouldn't you rather know it than force or coerce a yes? When you shut out the needs of your mate- it hurts each of you and it hurts the relationship between you.” Passionate Marriage

Exercise:

Consider the concept sexual desire, as opposed to arousal. How do you harness more desire for your partner? How do you build it? Are you sexual only when you feel arousal? Sexual behavior is not about sexual desire many times.

Slow it down

and

Build your capacity for emotional connection. How? Clarify, read between the lines and check your assumptions, validate the other person, validate yourself and be able to tolerate intense emotions

Exercise:

Want more sex? Help out so that neither party is exhausted.

Sociologist Constance Gager has conducted studies- found that sharing chores actually helps couples stay connected. The more housework men do, the more sex they have. It affects how much energy the woman had overall for everything.

Exercise:

Men, talk about what it is like to say no to your partner when you are not in the mood. Compare this to hearing no from your partner. Talk about the similarities and the differences.

“Men- higher value on autonomy, more motivated to establish independence, prove that I am an independent man and have mastery. Hard to say no to my partner because I am supposed to be a sex machine.

Women-higher value on intimacy, more motivated to seek interconnection, feel close”

Exercise:

When she asks for something verbally or sexually, do you take it as an affront? Does the following sound like you?

 “Together- she asks for more kissing and touching- he hears criticism of his performance”

“She asks him to talk about unmet sexual needs- he hears invasion of privacy. He withdraws emotionally to protect himself and she views this as proof that he does not love her.”

“She wants to talk, well really communicate, but her only valid form of communication is talking. He – sex is the most intimate way for me to communicate. It shows caring. It shows my desire to please. It shows my love on the most profound level. Women need to appreciate the depth of passion that can be expressed through eye contact, touch and body language. Men need to be more verbally communicative.”

“Goal: Express your sexual needs and wishes in more positive and specific terms…A greater sense of safety and intimacy develops between you, which greatly increases your change of experiencing the kind of sexual pleasure you long for.” (Margot Anand has 7 exercises on this alone)

Exercise:

Think about the differences in desire in your partnership. How well do you talk about the differences? What do you need to know from your partner to feel better about it?

“Sexual desire: Why can’t we just both want sex the same amount?

Some studies suggest that a third of all women rarely have enough spontaneous interest in sex to initiate lovemaking.

Exercise:

Read the following and then talk about testosterone and its role in your relationship.

Testosterone fuels the sex drive in both genders and men have 10-20X as much Testosterone (T). A man’s testosterone level can double in the morning hours.

When given the T additive, most of the women…dramatically higher level of desire and arousal…and were more sexually active… weighed an average of 18 lbs less…had higher incomes…and had an enhanced sense of well being…and more assertive and inquisitive and…had more difficulty with love relationships.

Breast feeding releases prolactin which reduces testosterone…T level of many women dips below a critical threshold at regular intervals throughout the month, diminishing or eliminating their interest in sex. (It is not personal!)”

Sexual Hunger

Exercise:

Consider how you say yes and how you say no, taking this into account. Also consider these when you feel rejected.

“Sex was offered to me whether I wanted it or not, morning and night. I began to long for a break.”

“Think about a partner who serves you a meal an hour before you are hungry. Do you eat? If your partner persists in feeding you when you are not hungry, you may become resentful. You do not want your partner determining when and how often you eat!”

*Mating in Captivity* Quotes/summary:

Exercise:

How verbal are you? Many men are just not terribly verbal and they still love their partner. How do they express their love?

“Men-Sex= pure pleasure of connection without the prison of words- relief that puts an end to anxiety”

“For verbal partners it is pure anxiety”

Exercise:

How do we work together to make this successful?

Dependent on men to seduce and initiate us into sexuality- “I will leave it up to you to figure out what I want”

Exercise:

Choose between inhaling and exhaling and do just that for a few minutes. Now consider the following:

“Breathing exercise- take a deep breath and hold it. Release it when you feel it is appropriate. What do you mean you want more breath after that fantastic release?”

“You cannot choose between inhaling and exhaling. You have to do both. It is the same way with passion and intimacy. Cannot have both at the same time.”

Exercise:

Think about sexual inhibition once you became committed.

“The more he loves her and depends on her, the more he is inhibited sexually.”

Exercise:

Read the following quotes and describe to your partner how it lands.

“Erotic intimacy is an act of generosity and self-centeredness”

“The children become the centerpiece of her emotional gratification”

“Feel intimate before feeling vulnerable”

“Sex is a prelude to intimacy, a pathway to emotional vulnerability”

“You cannot just buy her a ticket -you have to get her interested in the trip”

“She has relinquished her freedom and her independence-both cornerstones of desire- and has forsaken herself as a person in her own right. Reconnecting with her erotic self, separate from her maternal self, is crucial.”

“I am puzzled by your willingness to forgo such an important part of yourself. How did it come to be that, on the extensive list of things your children need, parents who have sex is not one of them?”

“Premeditated sex implies intentionality, which conveys value. When you plan for sex, what you are doing is affirming your erotic bond.”

“The man who relishes making tender love to his wife has no need for concealment. Nothing about their romantic aspirations is cause for discomfort or guilt. What turns us on often collides with our preferred self-image, or with our moral and ideological convictions.”

“What do you seek in sex? What do you want to feel?”

“We seek love, pleasure and validation. Rebellion and escape. Transcendence and ecstasy, even spiritual communion.”

“When we cordon off our erotic interiors, we are left with a sex that is truncated, devoid of vibrancy and not particularly intimate.”

“The romantic model of marriage, which stresses together-ness and honesty is much better at spelling out the criteria for intimacy than for autonomy. Emphasis is on closeness, not on sustaining individuality.”

“Committed sex is intentional sex. “I could not resist,” becomes “I did not want to resist.”

“We just fell into each other’s arms,” becomes “let me take you in my arms.”

“We just click,” becomes “Let’s click tonight.””

“I cannot help noticing the discrepancy between the attention they devote to chores and the attention they devote to their sex life- as if sex operates according to a different principle.”

“Sex is pleasurable and inviting, not duty”

“Longing, waiting, yearning are fundamental elements of desire”

“You do not even need the act of sex to have an erotic experience- a safe space where we experiment, reinvent ourselves and take chances. “

“You are supposed to love me no matter what”

Exercise:

Do you really want passion in your relationship? “Passion” comes from the Latin root of the word passion, which is *passio*, and means to suffer or endure. It's only through the English language that it has expanded in meaning to desire or intense emotions.”

Passionate Marriage Quotes:

Exercise:

What is your first priority in sacred sex?

“Learning sex techniques and how to touch your partner is no longer your first priority.”

(P79) “… our neocortex developed only 400,000 yrs ago-it determines the *impact*\* of the physical stimulation we receive, whether or not we reach orgasm and how emotionally involved we are.”

Exercise:

Read the following and talk about it with your partner.

“If you are dependent on sex drive to get you started, you will inevitably find that sex tends to drop off as you age.”

“When you harness more desire for spouse and the capacity for emotional connection there is more eagerness and anticipation for sex. This is unrelated to the sexual drive provided by biology.”

**How to Develop Passion**

Let’s start with how easy it is to kill passion.

Exercise:

Think of all the ways you have killed passion over the years. The fear you created in the stories you told yourself, that existed only in your head. Blocking energy, not letting yourself feel the pain or the pleasure. Not allowing yourself to dream or to communicate your fears and hopes.

Your job, your family, your home, your car, relationships etc. Go ahead and take responsibility for killing passion and watch how less likely you are to do that in the future.

Exercise:

Ask yourself how you killed the conversation.

Words are how we convey meaning when we read and write. Add non-verbal to this when you are in person or video etc. If you are not using words to convey your passion for your partner, it is possible they are not getting the message. What message are you giving non verbally? Strengthen this message and stop making talking the only viable way people can connect.

“He is not a talker,” is a pretty clear statement that the relationship is headed south. Likewise, if someone talks too much and fills all the empty space with words, it kills the conversation.

If you find that conflict is troubling your relationship, you can download the “Talker/Listener” handout that has job descriptions for each. It helps couples tremendously! My website is [www.boicecounseling.com](http://www.boicecounseling.com)

Exercise:

Imagine the communication included the message that you do not care about the other person. Doesn’t matter whether it was implied or misread. Talk to me about the level of passion (healthy positive passion) in that relationship.

Exercise:

How do you cope when it seems stale?

When it seems stale, it usually means I am not seeing my partner clearly. Or I see them as they used to be, not at the fluid, dynamic person they are, always changing, growing and developing.

We get bored of one another time and again. It is not exciting and new all the time. When we stay in the present moment, we feel more passionately about whatever is the focus of our attention. How do you stay in the moment?

Exercise:

Remember how you felt when you were courting. Those feelings…

Do you remember how much time you spent together and you could not get enough? It felt effortless. You probably did some things that surprised you. Passion seems to need time together and time apart. Everyone needs to recharge batteries sometime.

So focus on your partner and be 100% here with them in this present moment. Be open to every single experience that is occurring, not changing it or manipulating it. Not making it last longer or pushing it away, just allowing it to unfold and develop naturally. (Want more on this topic? great book- Untethered Soul by Singer)

You will find reservoirs of passion here. Be with one another. In our busy lives, we forget that simply being is a high priority in life.

Be with yourself and take care of your own needs, as well, so that when you get together, you are not expecting them to meet all of your needs. It is normal to have needs and wants. People can feel the vibe you send when you are desperate or clingy or cannot stand on your own two feet.

I offer the following experiments for you. Without judging the author or yourself, allow yourself these experiences. Allow yourself to get to know your mind a tiny bit better through these experiences. You will see patterns as you go into them.

Note: I have to remind myself that none of us see the world exactly as it is. There is room for difference of opinion, perspective and point of view.

**Try these passion building experiments:**

1. Think of your partner on their best day, they are not overly busy, rested, in good spirits, not worrying about anything. Focus on what you find attractive about your partner when they are their best self. Stay with this for 5-10 minutes a day. Do this for a week- really dwelling on their good points. Note: Gottman talks about appreciation and how well it correlates to staying married. No appreciation leads you closer to divorce quickly.
2. Call to mind several things that **you** do that bring passion into your relationship. For example, I plan dates for us and take care of all the details, I make a special meal for her, I pay attention when she talks and ask her about her day, I call her at work, I write notes for him, I buy clothes I know he would like, I give back rubs a couple times a week, I read poetry, I ask her to dance with me, I tell her how I feel, I tell him how manly he is, I tell her how beautiful she is, I compliment a few times a day. You have to actively bring passion, engage them, get to know them and allow them to know you.
3. Call to mind several ways you take your partner for granted or otherwise diminish passion. How do you block the love and passion yourself? For example, I work too much, I don’t tell her that I love her, I can be really selfish, I don’t help out around the house, I nag too much, I don’t make time for him, I invalidate her feelings, I don’t listen, I try to fix the problem instead of just listening, I am too critical, I expect too much. Come up with a solution to unblock and to appreciate.
4. Call to mind a time the two of you struggled with a power play and then one of you realized how silly it was to do this, apologized and the other person apologized and you both felt close again. Sameness and lack of change are boring and stifle passion. Growing from making mistakes, admitting them and bonding can draw out quite a bit of passion.
5. If you have children, call to mind how your relationship changed once kids were in the picture. There are many jokes about how children kill a good marriage. The comedians might not realize research also exists that confirms their conclusions. People mistakenly think that once they have kids they cannot be a couple and have their marriage one of the highest priorities in life. Exhaustion contributes, as does unwritten and unspoken ideas about sharing the burden of chores. Make sure that you are not making the typical mistake of putting the children before the marriage. This mistake is so common in our culture that people do not even question that it is damaging to the children and to the marriage. Be a couple.
6. Pay attention to gender stereotypes in your marriage. When he does the stereotypical manly chores, what do you notice? When she does the stereotypical womanly chores, what do you notice? Now swap chores according to these and pay close attention to how each of you feel about yourself and your mate.
7. Visualize spending all day with your partner (similar to in the beginning of the relationship, no kids) remember how that was. You got to know each other, connect, touch, share stories and you could not wait to do it again the next day. Some people revise history and say it was never good and yet when they look at photographs and recall all the good memories, it is hard to deny. You can get it back.
8. Remind yourself of those times you had 3-4 uninterrupted hours to do something you both wanted to do, no obligations (date)
9. Call to mind recognizing the differences the two of you have and will continue to have. Pay attention to how that feels for you. It is part of being human, no fixing needed, just be with the experience. Those differences are what helps us grow as people. The differences are not a problem if you can see the situation clearly. How you deal with the differences and grow from them determines the future of your relationship.
10. Pay attention to when you feel more attracted to your partner. When do you have desire and interest in them? You probably do not realize that neuroscience has a lot to teach us about parts of the brain, hormonal influence on attraction and just spending time with your partner. We have ways to stimulate this attraction. It is not just a feeling that comes and goes. We cultivate it, or we do not. It is a choice. Here are things that influence that “in love” feeling: kissing, touching, while on birth control, off birth control, while on an anti-depressant, while ovulating, while trying to get pregnant (no infertility issues), while trying to get pregnant (with infertility issues), while talking about the children, while talking about either his children or her children (if you are not both the parents)
11. Imagine hearing, “I love when you do that. It really turns me on!” How you feel about you makes you more responsive to the other person’s approach. When we are confident and can stand on our own two feet, it makes a huge difference.

Consider also reading the Art of Sexual Ecstasy by Margo Anand for esoteric and practical exercises of building intimacy, both physical and emotional. She recommends you develop the ability to tolerate intimacy before actually generating intimacy.

Exercise:

Take responsibility for how you feel. When you feel a feeling, pay attention to the story in your head. The story in your head is how the feeling was created. It did not happen to you. The same is true for sexual feelings. If you are not creating them, they are not going to just appear out of nowhere.

Please ask yourself these questions: Where do my feelings originate?

Who is making me feel these feelings?

When I change my perspective or point of view, why do my feelings change? Do I have to feel the way I am feeling?

“We just do not have feelings for each other anymore,” is said in my office too much.

Feelings do not happen to us. We work for them. We are responsible for how we feel. Do not like how you feel? Change it. If you really want to be happy, no one can stop you. Stop expecting your partner to make you feel a certain way. That is your job.

One pattern to observe from above is that simply by imagining these things, my feelings are involved.

Emotional Connection

When you are connected to yourself, you are more likely to be open to connection with your partner, which opens you up for passion. Passion is always there, it is simply not recognized and accessed. Other times it is actively being blocked by our defenses. I defend myself from feeling certain feelings.

Exercise:

Which feelings do you avoid and how are you avoiding them?

For example, I do not want to feel rejected, so I do not ask for anything from anyone. I simply stop having needs (or so I think). This protects me (or so I think) from feeling rejected or feeling needy. Denying that I have needs and wants does not truly protect me. It actually makes me delusional.

Exercise:

Develop the ability to actively ask for what you want/need and be okay that sometimes in life, you do not get what you want. Learn how to tolerate the anxiety that comes with asking for what you want and sometimes not getting it. It does not feel good. Compare that with not asking for what you want and not getting what you want due to that.

Sex

Exercise:

Be open to whatever happens, without preconceived notions. You can have preferences, just realize simply because you have a preferred outcome, you are not entitled to that outcome. Be open to many different ways it could work out and you will be pleasantly surprised. We also call this being spontaneous. It is really attractive in a partner. It keeps things interesting, keeps us on our toes.

Gratitude List

Exercise:

Make a list of ways in which you feel thankful for the wonderful things in your life, the bigger the list of things for which you feel gratitude- the happier the person. I would rather be with someone who is grateful, can see the good side of everyone and everything than someone who is critical of self and others and complains about everything. Want to be more attractive? Be grateful and cultivate this outlook.

Positive Energy

Both you and your partner benefit from each of you having positive energy and being in good spirits. Take good care of yourself!

**Behaviors to Develop Sexually Intimate Passion**

Theory: Start with emotional connection and learn how to express that through sexual behaviors. Follow the connection and let it determine what you do sexually (spontaneous). Follow it right into the unknown. (Thank you, Dr. Schnarch- Passionate Marriage)

Exercise:

Keep your heart open if you want closeness. If you struggle to stay open to yourself and others, we can help with that. This skill is vital to being intimate and connected.

Exercise:

Soothe yourself when you feel like clamming up. Clamming up interferes with passion. That means you need to relax yourself on the spot and tolerate some difficulty. Passion is not always easy. If you can talk yourself through it, stay there and remain open, you will be amazed at what you can achieve.

Exercise:

Gottman calls it “DPA- Diffuse Physiological Arousal” and it kills intimacy, conversation, vulnerability and blocks access to parts of our brain. You need to relax or parts of your brain are not open to you. It is helpful if your partner can help you relax when you need it, but it is ultimately your job to cool yourself down. You need to have this skill if you are to be successful in life.

James Coan of the Virginia Affective Neuroscience Laboratory- wrote that the “prefrontal cortex is key to calming the emotional brain. A fear response is expensive to the brain and usurps many of its processes. fMRI-see what gets it worked up and what calms it down. When partners held hands "everything went quiet" massive decrease in emotional responding

Prefrontal cortex helps you regulate yourself when you are by yourself- exhausting. You can do it but you are self- involved, which inhibits focus on the task at hand, like having sex. Holding hands is more efficient brain wise- leaving you more able to play and connect w others. It offloads what is not relevant. There are fewer distractions. "

Exercise:

Opening up is easier when you do not feel defensive, challenged, threatened or anxious. The challenge is to remain open even when things are difficult. My teachers would joke that when you can do this, it means you are now an adult.

Exercise:

Can you still be you, even when things get difficult, when you feel rejected, can you still be true to yourself? That is preparation for passion. Can you handle the passion or does it trigger you to either collapse or go off?