

## #1 Sensuality & Sexual

The sensual realm refers to the experience of pleasure by way of the five senses. We are sensory beings, capable of myriad feelings. Sensuality can be experienced alone (eating a wonderfully ripe mango, watching an incredible sunset), or it can be shared (being fed a piece of chocolate or stroked with a feather). Sensuality is self-contained and has no particular goal or end result. It cares about nothing but the present moment. Sensuality does not necessarily include sexuality.

Although sexuality is also a total body experience, there is a focus on hormones, desires, excitement, genitals and, usually, orgasm. Sexual intimacy always includes sensuality. There are many occasions in which sensuality and the sexuality overlap. The concept of leveling describes the delicate dance of matching energies between two partners who meet on the sensual/sexual continuum. Different people have different comfort zones when it comes to the degree of intimacy they desire during such a meeting. Leveling requires the willingness of both partners to recognize and adjust to an agreed upon common ground of intimacy, as a sign of respect.

Engaging our sexual energy requires a high degree of integrity. We must be clear in our communication, obtaining permission before moving from the sensual to the sexual arena. The right balance of self-expression and self-restraint is required of this virtue. Mistakes are inevitable, so be willing to give or to ask for forgiveness.

Our hunger for human-to-human nourishment is profound. It is important to make a clear distinction when one desires sensual affection only. Where sensuality ends and sexuality starts varies from person to person. When does a kiss or dance become sexual? Ask yourself, "What is the best way at this time, in this place, with this person, to express my sensual/sexual nature?" When you experience strong sexual feelings for another, it may be best, considering the situation and the friendship, to express yourself in sensuous ways only. You should adjust your own sexual energy like you would use a rheostat on a lamp, with many gradations, from ambient to bright.

One's sexual life cannot be separated or compartmentalized away from daily life, yet there is a need to be clear about the appropriate use of sexual energy. To maintain this distinction in one's intention and behavior is difficult. In one situation, it may be best to honor the sexual feelings but not act on them. In another setting, one may wish to have full sexual expression. Our sexual expression should include a high level of mutual respect. It is as wrong to treat another in a sexually disrespectful manner as it is to deny one's own sexuality.