

## ***Exercises in self-love and acceptance***

For many of us, getting past the many internal blockades and hurdles we have established in our lives is a hugely difficult process. Some of these are so deeply embedded into our psyches and bodies that it can feel impossible, and often simply drives away from our own self as well as our friends and partners.

Here are a few exercises that are specifically designed to be done solo. There's no expectation that you share these with anyone (and you shouldn't do so if you're still struggling with this aspect of being your whole self).

### **Love your body**

While these exercises were originally designed by Gloria G. Brame (from *The Truth About Sex A Sex Primer for the 21st Century Volume I: Sex and the Self.*) to help overcome inhibitions about our bodies, they are also particularly useful for those trying to work through past trauma. As such, these really do need to be done alone. There's no expectation or outcome here, no "right way" to do it. I recommend repeating these over time as you are able, paying particular attention to the difference in each experience. You may discover that your sense of your own self, and your self-image, shifts a bit with each one. For either exercise, it's recommended you plan to spend a minimum of 30 minutes, and I recommend allowing a full hour.

#### **Exercise 1: Love You in the Tub**

If you have a bathtub, this can be a very enjoyable process.

For this exercise, it's a good idea to "set the stage" by adding elements that enhance the experience. Bath salts or soap bubbles, a candle (safely, please!), dimmed lights, maybe some calming music or even incense are all good additions. I suggest you refrain from any alcoholic beverage beforehand (or other mind-altering substances) as this can be a distraction from the process. You're creating your own ritual space here. It's worth being 100% present for just that. If you can, do this when no one else is at home (this can be challenging and is not intended to create a division between you and those in your life – it's simply part of how you can best be fully at ease and completely relaxed with the entire process from start to finish).

Open the ritual itself after you have set the stage. Fill the clean tub with warm water, slip in and begin the task of washing every single part of your body with a favorite soap or just your fingers. The goal here is not a get clean bath but rather a leisurely exploration of all of you. Move slowly and very, very gently. Be mindful of places that are wonderful, and notice if you discover a place that feels new. It's particularly important to notice any spot that you're uneasy about – this can be a gentle signal to pay some attention. You might be surprised at where some of these spots appear – it might not be places you think are on that "do not touch" list!

It might be helpful to have a positive affirmation or mantra, something along the lines of "all parts of my body are wonderful" or "all parts of my body deserve care and attention".

Take all the time you need and gently wash each part of your body, using your fingers as much as you can. Don't hesitate to explore the orifices you encounter, and be open to how you feel when you do this. It's fine to become aroused; you don't need to do anything about that except notice it. It's fine to feel neutral, and it's perfectly okay to feel a bit of discomfort. Notice all of it. The goal here is to relax fully into your own body, to reacquaint yourself with every single centimeter of your own skin and sensual body.

You may find that the post-bathing part is enhanced by a slow gentle drying off. A short time to lie down quietly afterward (be sure to keep warm) is also suggested.

## **Exercise 2: Love You in Bed**

Not everyone has a bathtub, and some don't love immersion in water. Here is a similar exercise, also developed by Gloria G. Brame, is structured in the same manner as the first exercise, but is set in your own bed.

Again, take the time you need, and, ideally, be at home alone. Set the stage with dim lights or candles, perhaps some music, maybe some incense. Be sure you are able to be and stay warm – use soft blankets and covers if needed. An important part of this process is creating both the ritual process and being in a relaxed state of mind. You're welcome to use oils as part of the touch process, and you might want to use either a spare sheet or an extra one to protect things (some oils can stain). When the stage is set, begin the ritual. Clothes should come off (and you can choose to make this part of the experience), and then slip into the coziness of your bed. Using your fingers and, optionally, any oil or other unguent, gently and slowly begin to explore every part of your body.

It can be helpful to follow a sequence. You can begin with your toes and work your way slowly up the body. Move slowly and very, very gently. Be sure movement is smooth, using a bit of oil if you need it. Be mindful of places that are wonderful, and notice if you discover a place that feels new, undiscovered. It's particularly important to notice any spot that you're uneasy about – this can be a gentle signal to pay some attention. You might be surprised at where some of these spots appear – it might not be places you think are on that “do not touch” list!

Here too it might be helpful to have a positive affirmation or mantra, something along the lines of “all parts of my body are wonderful” or “all parts of my body deserve care and attention”.

Take all the time you need and gently explore and touch each part of your body. Don't hesitate to explore the orifices you encounter, and be open to how you feel when you do this. It's fine to become aroused; you don't need to do anything about that except notice it. It's fine to feel neutral, and it's perfectly okay to feel a bit of discomfort. Just notice all of it. The goal here is to relax fully into your own body, to reacquaint yourself with every single centimeter of your own skin and sensual body.

After you've moved through your entire body, bring the process to a close by lying still, perhaps placing your hands on your body in places that feel warm and good. Some may like to place one hand on the second chakra (right over the pubic bone) and the other hand on the heart. When you're ready, get up and end the ritual with intention by stopping any music, bring up the lights and being aware that you have completed the exercise.

## **Reflections**

These exercises are intended to help you reach a level of comfort in your body. There's no expectation or “doing it right” here. Just notice, enjoy, explore – be curious.

If you write or keep a journal, it can be very helpful to write about the experience in any way that feels right to you. If you do these exercise over time, having this account can be a useful way to look back at how your perception of yourself has change.

## **Credits**

The basis of these exercises came from Dr. Gloria G. Brame, in her book *The Truth About Sex A Sex Primer for the 21st Century Volume I: Sex and the Self*. Her approach to an appreciation of self is a wonderful and heartfelt guide.

I have adapted the core framework of these exercises as part of a method to move through personal struggle, be it body dysphoria, mild trauma, or more challenging traumas. These are simply explorations of the body and are not intended to be a full therapeutic remedy.