



The following is an excerpt from the book

*Radiant Wise Woman:
Breaking Free from the Myths
of Menopause and Aging*

by Lee Sumner Irwin.

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BOOK EXCERPT

Joygasm

Feeling More Sexy, Sensual, and Happy

My friend Jill and I kicked off our shoes and settled into the couch on my back porch. She took a sip of tea and looked down, embarrassed. She was entering menopause and was feeling anxious because while making love with her partner Alex, her sexual desire seemed to be fading. Although sex had been a beautiful part of their relationship for years, now she was having to work harder to become aroused. She confided, “I’ve been overthinking it and getting distracted. Then I feel self-conscious, which is definitely a buzzkill. I’m afraid it means we’re going to lose what we’ve had.”

As we enter our wisdom years, many women, like Jill, worry that loss of sexual desire is inevitable. We may assume changes in our bodies indicate it’s time to give up having sensual and sexual pleasure in our lives. But, contrary to the myths we’ve been conditioned to believe, we do not have to forfeit passion as we age. In fact, as Esther Perel, author of *Mating in Captivity* declares, “Passion is about a quality of aliveness. It’s about the permission to feel good.” Based on conversations I’ve had with female friends and clients, I believe we all want this full-on engagement with life where “joygasm” — spiritual, embodied, mental, emotive — shamelessly surprise and delight us.

Pleasure is Our Birthright

Not valuing our erotic selves can undermine our physical and emotional well-being and ultimately our potential for fulfillment in life. The medical view in the mid-nineteenth century was that women did not have organs of sexual pleasure. But the truth is that women are designed to experience pleasure, and it's our birthright to enjoy sensual satisfaction. As Eve Ensler comments in *The Vagina Monologues*: "It would be years before I learned that females possessed the only organ in the human body with no function other than to feel pleasure."

Most of us were not given sufficient guidance on women's pleasure, and it's hard to find accurate information about this topic. Honestly, how many women know what reliably brings them to a satisfying orgasm? Whatever your age or situation—if you aren't in a sexual relationship with a partner, if your partner's sexual desire is less than yours, or if you're ready to learn more about what feels good—now is an ideal time to become more familiar with your body and discover a variety of ways you can pleasure yourself.

One valuable resource is an affordable, private membership website called OMGYes. Through discreet videos where women ages eighteen to ninety-five demonstrate techniques and talk about their experiences, you can find advice and methods for enhancing your sexual enjoyment. The information is based on research involving more than twenty thousand women and is categorized so you (and a partner) can learn how sexual gratification differs for each woman. The founders, Lydia Daniller and Rob Perkins, created this site to normalize conversations on intimacy, stating: "We want people to see pleasure the same way they see cooking. If you read a cookbook, it doesn't mean you're a bad cook and need help. It means you're probably

a good cook, and you're curious and want to explore and try wnew recipes."

Sex for the Soul

Techniques are valuable, but sex is most rewarding when we venture beyond the mechanics involved. To explore this novel approach, a helpful audiobook is *Tantra: Sex for the Soul* by Niyaso Carter, a guide for creating sexual awareness based on the ability to be transparent with another person.

Tantra is commonly misunderstood to be a series of difficult, esoteric sexual positions. But to Carter it's about the practice of being real with someone. We spend vast amounts of time building our careers, making money, and taking care of other people but usually not much time making love or being transparent with our significant other. And the time we do spend often becomes a little humdrum if we've been with that person for a while, sometimes making us think our sex drive is disappearing. However, it doesn't matter how many years we've been with a partner as long as we're willing to start fresh with a different point of view, which Carter's insights provide.

Particularly enjoyable are her partner exercises, starting with eye-gazing and breathing together, then progressing to energy touch and genital massage. Another benefit is that this material reframes the idea of making love from an activity in which partners satisfy each other sexually to one in which they actively express love by engaging their imaginations, playfulness, and curiosity. What's more, you don't need to have a partner to explore this type of lovemaking. *Tantra: Sex for the Soul* reveals ways of working with your own energies. By doing so, women often report feeling more voluptuous and are pleasantly surprised to find themselves ultra-magnetic to new love.

Life as a Sensual Feast

When we embrace pleasure, life becomes a sensual feast regardless of our stage of life. We don't have to buy into the nonsense that older women are not sexy or that after menopause they can't enjoy pleasure. Consider these women who are seventy or better and whose talent, vitality, and grace remind us of the joy of being older and bolder: Tina Turner, Helen Mirren, Jane Fonda, Diana Ross, Cher, and Dolly Parton.

Aging doesn't have to mean contracting. We can vow: "I'm aging, and I'm expanding my mental flexibility, my resilience, and my ability to experience pleasure. I'm expanding my imagination, my creativity, and my heart's capacity for love."

If you're not already turning yourself on to life, now is the time to begin. Cultivate awareness of what you are doing with your energy and how sexy you feel. It starts with your relationship with yourself and how you show up for yourself, including how you take care of your body, how you honor it, and whether you feel frumpy or self-confident in the clothes you wear.

Every part of your day can be a mini pleasure ritual, from wearing a plush robe and cozy slippers to smoothing creamy lotion over your face, neck, and legs. Enjoy connecting to your playful inner child who greets life through her senses by touching, tasting, and getting messy as she savors the delights that give life sweetness. By staying curious about what brings you more alive, you will discover how to feed your inner fire and fall passionately in love with yourself.

Experiencing pleasure can be especially beneficial if your busy, overscheduled life is keeping you agitated. If that's the case, you need more oxytocin—the pleasure hormone—to balance cortisol—the stress hormone—your body is producing. Fortunately, your body secretes oxytocin during many enjoyable

activities, such as hugging, laughing, petting animals, hanging out with friends, practicing yoga, breathing deeply, performing random acts of kindness, meditating, enjoying massages, having orgasms, or listening to music. You just need to remind yourself: oxytocin over cortisol, fun over stress. The more fun you have, the better you'll feel and the more enthusiasm your actions will reflect, whether you are writing a postcard to a friend, stirring a pot of soup, walking your dog, or making love.

When you learn to embrace the pleasure you were born to enjoy, you will:

- Love yourself and beam more love to others.
- Trade overwhelm and obligation for passion and ease.
- Inspire other women by modeling self-celebration instead of self-denial.

By nurturing the ability to receive pleasure, you're likely to become the happy recipient of other perks, like fresh flowers delivered to your door, a new job offer, an upgrade to first class, or a fun dinner invitation when you least expect it.

Awaken to the Power of the Feminine

Orgasmic energy literally creates this thing called life, reminding us of how connected we are to the creative source that flows through every living thing. You, too, are worthy of having this energy course through your body and spirit until you burst into bloom. Experiencing joygams awakens us to the power of the feminine to spread love over the planet, radiating the supple and generous energy of life to all. As Dr. Clarissa Pinkola Estes, author of *Women Who Run with the Wolves* writes, "When women are glad they are alive, happy to be here, more conscious of love, and heightened with eros...that is sacred."