

MACI DAYE

PASSION &  
PRESENCE

*A COUPLE'S GUIDE to*  
AWAKENED INTIMACY  
*and* MINDFUL SEX

Reviewed by Nancy Eichhorn

One simple sentence says it all: "Great sex is a mind-set, not a skill-set."

Maci Daye embodies the essence of her new book, *Passion & Presence: A Couple's Guide to Awakened Intimacy and Mindful Sex*, in this short statement. Yes, readers receive exercises to practice concepts presented throughout the book, but the crux of success resides in mindfulness including presence, curiosity, and authenticity, and a commitment to one's self, one's partner, and the relationship.

Daye offers a detailed experiential guide for readers wanting to increase their passion and deepen or restore their erotic connection. She shares engaging case studies and activities/exercises designed to help readers find and heal their inner obstacles to sex. She has created a clear and doable process, what she calls the 'naked path', a path of 'being' rather than 'doing'. She nudges readers stuck in a state of resignation and stagnation to turn toward intimacy and joy and pleasure.

"Passion and Presence is relational, embodied and goal-free."



Aside from the Introduction, each chapter (7 in total) adheres to a similar structure: an opening vignette/case study highlighting aspects of a couple's sexual relationship that many, if not all, readers will relate to; then cycles and steps, charts and graphics, and more to educate readers about what she calls our Pure Erotic Potential (PEP), its six barriers, and ways to move beyond. Readers learn they can access their Pure Erotic Potential by becoming present, curious and exploratory rather than goal oriented—she encourages readers to “look inward and to allow, instead of forcing anything or striving to reach a goal” (pg. 5).

The six barriers include: Automaticity; Trances; Fear of Vulnerability/Protective Strategies; Hidden Factors; Erotic Wounds and Trauma; and Shame. She also shares ways to create a safe container for exploration. Each chapter ends with “Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections”. The exercises/activities are do-able. Daye writes in a way that both explains what to do and offers support as readers enter new ways of seeing, hearing, touching, being, and revealing.

Daye is clear that while it may seem easier, maybe preferable to distance from one's sexual partner and avoid feelings (including shame, anxiety, fear, vulnerability, or even joy and sensuality), but in the end, avoiding one's feelings and avoiding sexual interactions creates barriers between ourselves and our pain, and we remain stuck. Daye notes that when we mindfully approach our feelings, our hidden factors, our wounds, our protectors, and protected parts, and so forth, alone and as a team we can find a portal to healing and transformation.

Daye offers readers emotional support and validation while encouraging them to reach out and try something new. Readers who are already versed in mindfulness practices, who can tune into their body and listen and feel what is happening beyond their thought patterns, and who are committed to work on themselves and together with their partner have the upper hand in this process. But the concepts are also presented such that beginners can learn if they want.

At one point, Daye teaches what she calls the Stop, Study and Share process. Readers are called to stop in the moment of a sexual interaction as needed. To turn within and check what is happening: is it a feeling, a thought, a something? She asks them to linger with these sensations in an open, curious way and then share the experience with their partner, who must be able to listen and be compassionate and supportive. Daye notes, "These exchanges are delicate, which is why it is essential to talk about yourself rather than about your partner. You want to share discoveries about your inner emotional life, even if your reaction was triggered by something your partner said or did. When we share our experience without blaming our partner, in turn is partner is likely to provide a caring response" (page 110). This process relies on readers having a high level of emotional maturity and healthy/effective communication skills.

"The process of befriending, exploring, and ultimately transforming blocks to erotic expression requires a deep and abiding couple alliance" (pg. 7).

The depth Daye offers comes from years facilitating Passion and Presence workshops as well as exploring life with her husband Halko Weiss. She shares their struggle with age-related changes, bewildering stressors, and overfamiliarity. They too have felt the painful effects of personal early experiences and sex-negative imprints from their past. The tools she shares come from a range of sources including: Hakomi Mindful Somatic Psychotherapy, neuroscience, sex therapy, trauma therapy, and systems therapy.

Each chapter is brimming with insights and exercises—there is enough to keep a couple exploring beyond the veneer of their current relationship and go within to touch the deeper recesses of their being to discover more about themselves, one another, and their couple-dom.





## **A Glimpse into the Treasures Contained within Each Chapter**

### **Chapter 1: Awakened Intimacy**

In this first chapter, besides learning about one's pure erotic potential, readers are introduced to Daye's stages of love and sex.

Stage 1 begins with the overwhelming sensations that come when we first fall in love: an oxytocin overload as hormones surge; we cannot get enough of one another.

Stage 2 drops into disenchantment. The endless 'To Do' list takes over. Sex isn't as hot and heavy. People often fall into the 'novelty trap'—they focus on new thrills, techniques, and positions to liven things up.

Stage 3 is the heart of this book: Erotic Re-enchantment. Daye explains that a mindful approach can re-ignite a couple's erotic flame.

Erotic Re-enchantment is achieved by accessing/realizing one's pure erotic potential. The process involves letting go of goals, expectations, and inner models. What sparks awakened intimacy she writes is a mindful approach: It works with your consciousness, not your behavior.

Daye offers a short accounting of the six barriers and which chapters they are explored in, in more depth. She also explains that they are 'checkpoints', not necessarily sequential, nor a one-time deal. "Individually and as a couple, you may go through one or several on your journey" (pg. 26).

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections invite readers to notice their reactions to having goal free sex.

## Chapter 2: Erotic Presence

This chapter involves the PEP barriers of Automaticity and Trances (induced blindness, no longer noticing who the person is). Like coming home with a new haircut and your spouse doesn't notice, or when you have this sense of, I know this person, there's nothing new for me to see. You see what have always seen, an image in your mind rather than the person in the present tense. In this trance state, mindless repetition becomes habit driven sex.

Daye notes that our state of mind determines how we show up for sex and what experience we have when we have it. Here she invites readers to cultivate an internal observer to notice habits of the mind in real time.

"Mindfulness helps us gently wake up from distorted perceptions and beliefs that have become automated and can lead to trance like states" (49).

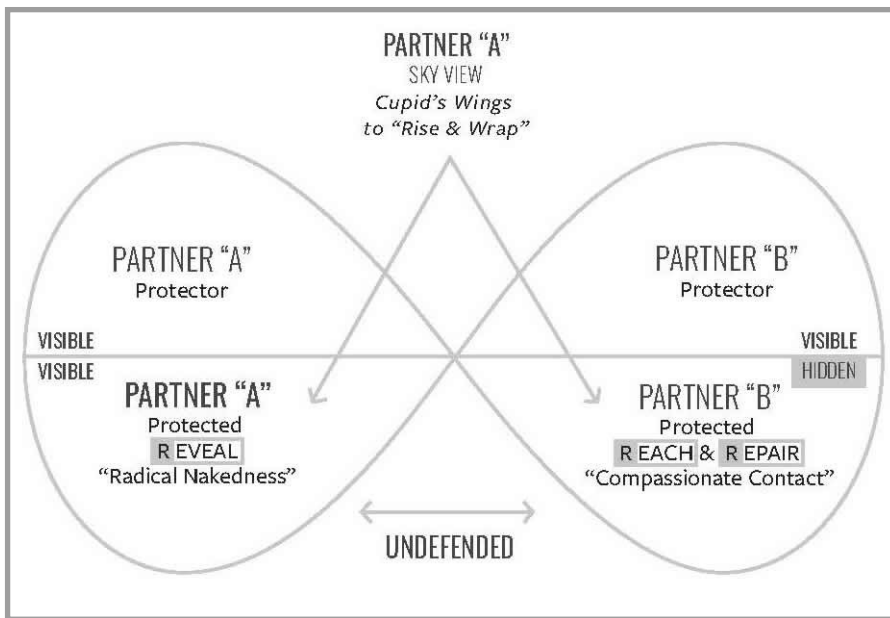
She offers Five Features of mindful sex (page 43)

- Eliminating goals and reference points
- Embracing both the joys and challenges bundled with sex
- Accepting the impermanence that runs through our erotic life
- Cultivating a state of novelty
- Becoming present and embodied

Mindful sex is not slow nor is lusty or rough, she writes. Any kind of sex can be mindful. It is the quality of presence that we bring to whatever type of sex we are having right now that matters. This presence is curious and allowing. We feel ourselves emotionally, energetically, and physically. "The inner observer has open eyes enabling us to notice our thoughts, habits, and impulse throughout the experience" (page 43).

There is also what she calls wakeful sex that comes when we wake up from habits and trances. "Waking up is an act of love, not a whack on the head" (49).

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections involve seeing fresh and mindful touch.



The Care Cycle consists of the three Rs, which are how we love actively. Here partner A is initiating the cycle by revealing their discoveries from mindful self-study to partner B. Partner A can also reach into partner B's "underneath" and compassionately guess B's hidden pain. Partner A may initiate a process to repair the hurt they may have caused partner B when partner A was acting from their protector.

### Chapter 3: Erotic Cooperation

The PEP barriers are: Fear, Vulnerability, and Protective Strategies.

In this chapter Daye helps readers to discern their stubborn interactional patterns, what causes an impasse between partners. She discusses what she calls a reciprocal interaction loop (70-71) and how partners can move from 'Stale Mate to Soul Mate' (72).

Partners, she writes, must work within themselves to interrupt viscous cycles that keep them looping out of connection and out of control. Each person must "take the high road to being reflective and aware, rather than reactive under stress" (75).

She introduces the PREP process to help readers stop and become self-reflective:

Pause

Regulate

Explore

Peaceful presence

And she offers her CARE Cycle to create a loving container and learn how to love actively, to invest in the relationship. This involves three Rs: Reveal (reveal your vulnerability) Reach (choose intimacy over protection) and Repair (connect with your partner).

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections involve: Getting to know your protector and protected parts.

## Chapter 4: Erotic Transformation

The PEP barriers are: Hidden Factors, Erotic Wounding, and Trauma.

To start healing, Daye writes, we need to be able to recognize the five main features of what she calls our hidden factors, then she describes each of the hidden factors. From here she teaches readers how to heal and grow through sex via somatic self-attunement (“Using your interoceptive or ‘felt sense’ to determine whether to go toward or decline a sexual activity” pg. 224).

She defines the Defend cycle versus the Befriend cycle (pg. 104) and offers six steps to detach Now from Then (pg. 116). Stop, Study, and Share extends to include Select and Savor, thus becoming a five-step path/practice to work with hidden factors.

“The essence of sexual response agility is mindful co-investigation and mindful self-study,” she writes.

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections involve: Mindful self-study and planting a heart.





## **Chapter 5: Erotic Expression**

The PEP barriers in this chapter look at Shame and Trances.

“Shame is a lie that someone told you about yourself” (131).

This chapter offers insights into Parts Play, the Passion Pyramid, and the Four Flavors of EROS.

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections involve experiencing the creative potential of parts play.

## **Chapter 6: Erotic Attunement**

The PEP barriers including: The Performance Trance, Automaticity, and Hidden Factors.

“There is nothing that kills desire faster than the pursuit of what works, relentlessly” (162).

To recover full bodied PEP, Daye offers that we need to recover the sense that there are infinite paths we might take each time we make love (163). Feelings of shame and living in a trance trigger hidden factors that disconnect us from our EROS energy. Barriers lock us into outdated sexual scripts and what Daye calls outside-in pathways to pleasure. “The dance of sex becomes no longer an improvisation but more a polished routine” (163).

She offers an amazing exercise on page 163 to help readers sense their body and trust their felt sense and internal guide. When readers learn how to sense and respond to their eros energy in an organic improvisational way and be present in the moment, they can enliven their passion and pleasure.

“Good lovers do best when they do less thinking and planning about sex, and let their bodies move in response to the energy unfolding between them” (166).

“Erotic attunement connects us to ourselves and to eros energy in the pursuit of sexual pleasure” (165).

Daye dives into her 'Plane of Possibility' (169) and teaches us that to transform ourselves through sex we need to wake up something vast, untamed, and authentic within ourselves (169). "A mindful approach to sex is about sensing, feeling and responding to the elemental wild spirit of eros in a free-flowing dance" (171). Sex is thus a "creative collaboration, an interplay of eros energy filtered through our shifting states and moods" (171).

People who tend to be goal oriented are invited to empty out their thoughts, expectations, and previous ways of being and assume an 'anything is possible' state of mind before having sex. Daye offers a replacement process: Start with a few minutes of mindfulness and set an intention to embrace uncertainty, then find a way to imaginatively put away what you have known so you can follow your curiosity. The issue is, when we are preoccupied with our thoughts, be it about performance or trying to achieve a different outcome, we become disconnected from the present moment and our partner. This is where the EROS CYCLE comes into play:

- E** embody and attune
- R** relax goals and relate
- O** open to impulses
- S** savor pleasure

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections involve: Moving mindfully through the EROS cycle.



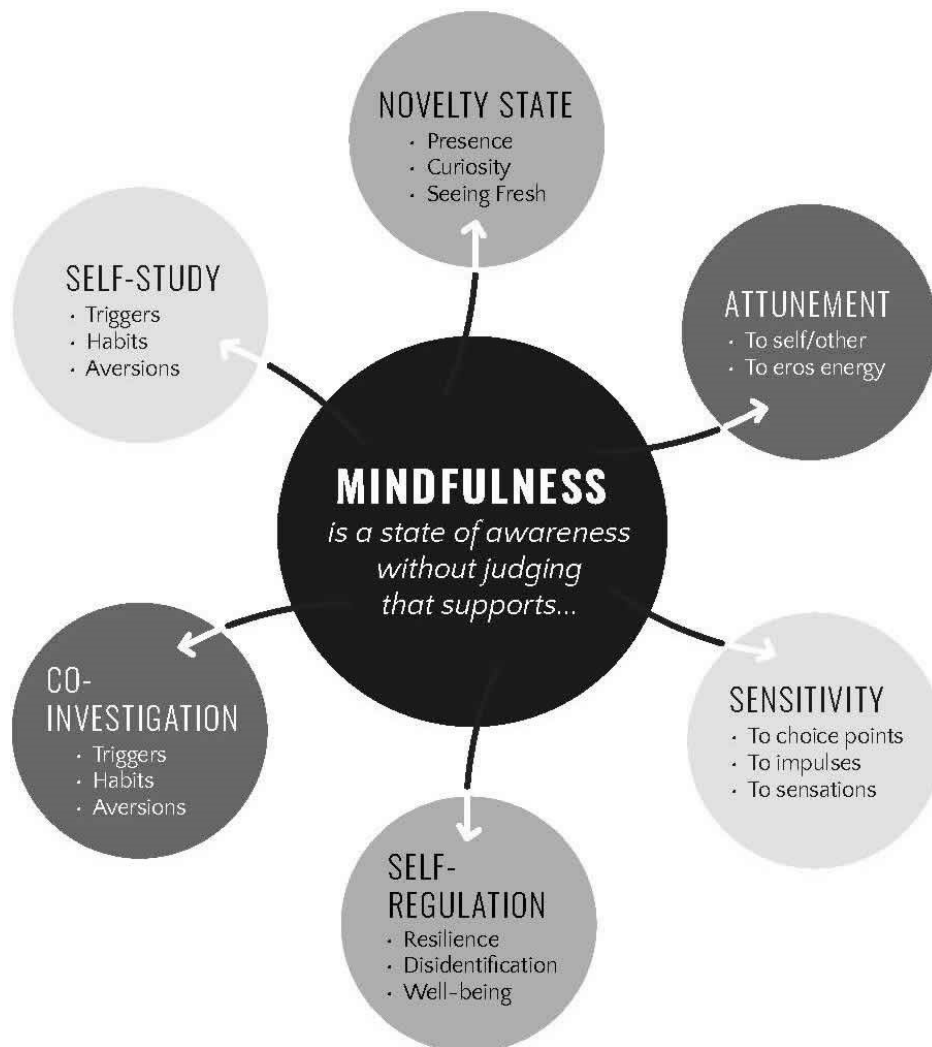
## Chapter 7: Erotic Sustenance

### The golden years

While we cannot go back in time and recapture what was, we can step out of numbing routines every day. This chapter helps readers understand that sex, like life, is a daily practice, and we can become “mindfully and sensually embodied no matter our ages or years together” (190). Readers learn to tap into the transformational aspects of their visions and to stay awake to the ever-changing now.

The Mindfulness Hub on page 211 illustrates how all of the passionate and present skills grow out of mindfulness and a mindful mind-set.

The Mindful Activities and Naked Reflections involve crafting a sustenance plan.



## **In Conclusion**

I honestly have not read many books about improving one's sex life, so my insights are personally guided. I was blessed to study with Stella Resnick, PhD, a clinical psychologist who specializes in couple's sex therapy, during my graduate program at the Santa Barbara Graduate Institute. I also enrolled in several of her seminars at Esalen Institute, one with my partner at that time. No one had ever taught me about a healthy sex life, nor had I explored experientials with a partner in such an open and affirming way.

Daye's book gathers a wide scope of concepts and experientials and funnels them into a step-by-step, user-friendly process that couples can do on their own. Though I think that mindfulness beginners might find it useful to work with someone who can help them create a safe container to delve into their more vulnerable states, someone to talk with and process their experiences. Not all couples have the emotional maturity to do this type of work on their own. Perhaps attending one of Maci's Passion and Presence workshops, then bringing the experience and the book home will help couples grow forward.

### **A Note About Transparency:**

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Maci Daye courtesy of Shambhala Publications



**Maci Daye** is an AASECT Certified Sex Therapist, Licensed Professional Counselor, and Certified Therapist and Trainer of Hakomi

Mindful Somatic Psychotherapy. As a sex therapist, her focus is on helping couples deepen their erotic connection mindfully. Maci has been leading Passion & Presence® couples retreats and professional workshops in the USA, Europe, Mexico, Australia and New Zealand since 2010. A frequent conference presenter, Maci has graduate degrees from Harvard University and Georgia State University and a doctorate in Human Sexuality from the Parkmore Institute. She also completed the Level 2 Somatic Experiencing trauma training developed by Peter Levine. To learn more about her programs or to contact Maci go to [www. passionandpresence.com](http://www.passionandpresence.com).