

Lesson 1

The Case for Pleasure

I felt it was time to play. Most of my thoughts, time and energy had gone into creative effort. And this restriction of the love drive, the headshrinkers will tell you, is the greatest urge one really has. When one sublimates the sex drive into creative work it puts a person in high gear, mentally. I admit it. But it is against my nature to bottle up the biological plans of pleasure for any length of time. I hope I don't sound as if I have discovered the secret salve that soothes the universe, but I do want to add my small footnote on the subject.

—Mae West

Example A. Picture this:

You are on a long road trip, in a car, by yourself. You're kind of hungry, kind of cranky, but too impatient to get where you're going to stop at a rest area. You keep pushing yourself, ignoring your discomfort, so you can cover more distance.

Example B. Picture this:

You are on a long road trip, in a car, with a couple of girlfriends. Each of you packed a basket of delicious goodies to snack on, and you are currently passing around some crudité's with guacamole. Aretha is blasting on the radio, and some of you are singing along. You have a stack of CDs, books on tape, and *The Story of O*. You have a destination, but you keep stopping at all the interesting sites along the way—shopping malls, and places called Lost River Caverns and The World's Only Anchovy Museum.

Which trip would you rather be on, A or B?

B? Good choice. Know why?

B gets there first. Know why?

Since A began to ignore how she was feeling about a hundred miles ago, she failed to notice the engine light on the dashboard, so the car overheated, and now she's sitting by the side of the road, cursing and waiting for Triple A to come rescue her.

This illustrates two options: *a life without pleasure* and *a life that includes pleasure*.

In this lesson we are going to tour the world of pleasure together. We will examine everything that qualifies as part of a pleasurable life. Why? Pleasure gives you clarity, it refreshes and rejuvenates, it keeps you ahead of the curve. Pleasure sends you on wonderful journeys, and you always arrive at your destination ahead of schedule. When you don't prioritize pleasure, you end up arriving in places you never intended to go. So many of us are programmed to choose A in the scenario above that we suffer from the disease called *anhedonia* (literally, "without pleasure"). A leading American manual on mental illness describes it as "a loss of interest or pleasure in all or almost all usual activities and pastimes." People give up on fun. Making time for pleasure seems somehow naughty, self-indulgent, or slightly illicit.

Society conditions us to worship pain. "No pain, no gain." It's everywhere: Jesus nailed to the cross, original sin, the Puritan work ethic. Who goes out for a lunch hour anymore? (We used to.) Who comes home from work at 5 P.M.? (That's only half a day!) Even our pals in Latin America are giving up that centuries-old ritual, the siesta. And we used to laugh at how hard the Japanese work. Now we have surpassed them.

Pleasure is still there. It is simply not a priority. Reveling in it is a lost art. All you have to do is look at a child and you will see the direct access we all have to pleasure. A child moves from one pleasurable thing to another, gets interrupted with a few tears, a distraction, then back to pleasure. Pleasure is more important than food. Pleasure consumes a child's day. Pleasure is not frivolous. It guides, instructs, unfolds creativity, educates. Learning through pleasure, through fun, is a more deeply integrated experience than learning by rote or under pressure.

The idea for Mama Gena's School of Womanly Arts came to me after seeing Jacqueline Bisset in the movie *Dangerous Beauty* utter these words to her daughter, who she was training to be a courtesan: "In order to give pleasure, you have to know pleasure." It was a very beautiful scene, set in sixteenth-century Venice. I was captivated by the idea of a gorgeous, sensual mother sharing the secrets of pleasure and sensuality with her daughter. Why, if that had happened to me, I could have hit the ground running after puberty, rather than spend years mired in confusion and misinformation. Imagine having your mom teach you how to enjoy the touch, taste, and smell of kissing your first boy! Or how peeling an orange or eating an asparagus spear can be a method of seduction. Or how your eyes, the windows of your soul, can be used to ignite a flirtation. Imagine having your mama in your corner as you begin your sensual unfolding. How delicious, and how totally unusual.

I had found my calling. The Pleasure Queen. The epiphany was brought on by a convergence of sorts. I had recently become a mama. My husband, Bruce, and I had been teaching courses together in sensuality, communication, and relationships for about seven years, and I had been feeling lately that there was something I wanted to say to women, in the presence of women only. I had also been studying the ancient Goddess religions as a kind of hobby. I realized the golden thread winding through all of my experience and research at that point was the divine importance of pleasure. Female pleasure. The next thing you know, Mama Gena and her School of Womanly Arts was born.

There was a time, five thousand years ago, and for about thirty to fifty centuries before that, when humanity worshiped a female deity. God was a Goddess. From the scant little we know about those fantas-tically good old days, it seems religious practices were quite a bit different than they are these days. There was dancing, celebration of the seasons, and sensuality, abundant thanks and adoration, ecstatic emotion. Really not at all like what shakes in our shrines nowadays. Now it's all about men—here a rabbi, there a pope, everywhere a monk monk. In the old days there was no sitting still and being quiet and repenting, no guilt about original or unoriginal sins. I was inspired by the idea of a gratitude festival in honor of the gift of life. And that's how the Goddess came to be such a powerful theme in Mama Gena's School of Womanly Arts. I call the participants in the course my Sister Goddesses to remind us that all women on this planet are sisters and all are descendants of Goddess worshipers. In fact, we are Goddesses all. Now that's just Mama's opinion. But think about it: treat a woman like a Goddess, she rises to the occasion. That's a tip that will take men far in the world of women. Worship her, and she will give you the best she's got.

As a Sister Goddess, I have made pleasure the guiding principle in my life and the lives of my family, and in my business. If something does not feel good, we don't do it. If it feels good, we do. And because no action would feel good if it hurt or compromised someone else, pleasure is moral in the highest sense of the word.

All you have to do is choose to feel good. Pleasure is a choice, just as hatred or unhappiness is a choice. Pleasure is not necessarily in the results, like getting a promotion or the right job; pleasure is not just an aftereffect of getting a raise, so that you are making the same amount of money as the guy in the cubicle next to you. It comes from doing the work you love to do, that you were born to do—or having the freedom to experiment enough to find it. It comes from leaving money second on your priority list, after your gratification, which should always be your first priority. Pleasure is not a matter of getting married or staying single. It exists when you have the courage to establish yourself as a sensually free citizen. For one woman this may mean having many lovers. For another woman it may mean monogamy. For still another, it could be celibacy. You, my darlings, call the shots. Pleasure comes from giving yourself permission to explore your appetites freely, with no guilt.

Pleasure is about right here, right now. It is the spot you choose to be. Auntie Mame said, "Life is a banquet, and most dumb bastards are starving to death." Don't be a dumb bastard. Get thee to the banquet table. Your seat is waiting.

I'm advocating the lifelong investigation of pleasure, and this task requires all of your five senses. This is a new frontier for most people. We're trained to turn away from pleasure, to ignore pleasure, to abandon it, really. When you begin to investigate it, you feel you're being kind of naughty—or heading for trouble, like when you snuck out after curfew in high school. Like, "This feels really good, but it must be wrong, and there might be consequences." We usually need a big excuse to treat ourselves well—like a birthday. Imagine if you paid as much pleasurable attention to yourself every day as you do on your birthday. You might dress in your favorite outfit; give yourself a long, delightful bath; have exactly the food you want to have; go for walk, and shop in a

store; meet up with some friends. What if we created a life where this was the rule, rather than the exception—where every day was about our pleasure, our passion, our fulfillment?

Sounds selfish, no? *No*, it's not. For true generosity does not occur unless you give from your own surplus. In other words, until you have yours, you don't have anything to give others. Some people can experience surplus when they have a dollar in their pocket. Some feel poverty when they have a million dollars. Our exploration of the womanly arts will be about which experiences, which circumstances lead to the creation of a truly fulfilled life.

You'll find that a pleasurable life requires constant vigilance. Stay true to what you want, listen to your instincts. For some of you this means allowing someone to touch you only when you want to be touched, and touching someone only when you want to. Or refusing to involve yourself in that trap of servicing others in the hope that they'll do something nice in return. Embracing pleasure is about looking within, to see what would feel good, and following through on any and all activities that can add to your own gratification. Sometimes your pleasure will come from declining an offer from someone else. Sometimes it comes from doing something simply for the joy of seeing that fulfilled look on another's face.

When a woman really begins to pay attention to her desires—ah, that is when the real pleasure begins! It is so much fun to want something. It is fun to move toward gratifying that want. It is even fun to change your mind. And it is so much fun to have others join you in the pursuit of your desires. It is a pleasure to be a woman enjoying her desires, and a pleasure to be around a woman enjoying her desires. Appetite drives the world. And when a woman feels great about what she wants—great about wanting, and confident that whatever she wants can and will be fulfilled—we all have a really good time.

Good things come to those who feel good. And any woman going for hers inspires us to go for ours. That is Mama's goal for the School of Womanly Arts—for women to inspire one another to move toward their best life by embracing the pursuit of pleasure, rather than the "No pain, no gain" philosophy. I consider my role in relationship to my Sister Goddesses as the fanner of the flames of their desires. We all want new possibilities, more pathways, to realize our dreams. With pleasure by our side and the Goddess at our back, we can create lives that are rewarding and rich on every level.

Real independence, self-knowledge, courage, and determination are required to attain our deep, true craving, since we are the only ones who can identify them and no one else is really much interested in whether they come to fruition or not. It is a solo journey, my beauties! But now Mama is here to help set you on that path to pleasure; and in this culture, where pleasure does not top the priority list, we need all the flame fanning we can get.

The following are some guiding principles of Mama Gena's School of Womanly

Arts. May they lead you to your land of desires, wishes, hopes, and dreams. We will be using them as a basis for all the lessons to come. Take note, darlings, and get ready for more fun and freedom than you might have thought possible.

Decide That Wherever You Are Is the Right Place to Be

A little secret I'm going to share with you here is that getting your bliss starts with finding the bliss WHERE YOU ARE. This is a key step. Many of us have trouble accepting the rightness of ourselves, but that's something that Goddess worshipers practiced for centuries. Only now, in the tiny smattering of time that is the last five thousand years of human existence, that we have grown to disapprove of our bodies, our essential selves.

But thousands upon thousands of people have put self-doubt, judgment, and self-loathing aside and are ready to get on with the business of becoming a Sister Goddess. And a key step in becoming a fullfledged S.G. is to party, rigorously, from where you are.

I had to find my own starting point on the way to Goddessdom. I had to find the perfection where I was—in the spot I had been telling myself for years was all wrong. You will take a monumental step if you can just see that the path to pleasure doesn't begin with a bop on the head from Mama Gena but begins with a decision, a simple decision that each of us must make: we merely must acknowledge that what we have is good now. Not "Life will be good, if only..." Not "Life would have been good, except..." No, my sweethearts, it is good now. You have had the genius to pick up this book, now, haven't you? And I wrote it at exactly the right moment, exactly the right time and place where our paths would cross. I did not write it a hundred years ago, so it would be out of print, or a hundred years from now, when you would be long gone. The time is now. The revolution is that you are my sister and you are a Goddess. I do not care if you clean toilets for a living or your husband beats you or you've never had an orgasm or you are blind or deaf or in a wheelchair. I don't care if you make millions and you hate yourself or you drink too much or you weigh three hundred pounds. You are my sister and you are a Goddess. As such, you have the power to create the existence you want, no matter how bleak a life you are currently living.

It requires the most inspiring kind of courage to accept that what you have is good. S.G. Helen, the daughter of therapist parents, spent her twenties blaming her parents for her lack of success in life, her lack of love, her lack of happiness. None of this blame ever led her to happiness. In fact, it led to more and more unhappiness. She hung out with other miserable people. When I first met her, she had just broken off with her best friend, a drug user to whom she had given thousands of dollars. She dragged her sorry ass to Mama Gena's, and the first thing she heard from us was: Celebrate and enjoy NOW. Don't wait for things to change. Look around for the perfection in your life as it ex-ists, in this moment. See what you see. Of course, we want you to think about what you want, but that will come way quicker if you love now.

So S.G. Helen looked around her. Friendless, careerless, and boyfriendless. Seemed gloomy at first glance. She was not inclined to celebrate. She had no practice in looking for the good. She felt a bit crybabyish and misunderstood about the whole thing. She did not want to look for the good, thank you very much. She was attached to her misery. Then she woke up to something. She had practiced misery for a decade. She saw what it brought her, and was actually bored by it. It was time to try something new, no matter how scary or weird. It had to be better than more of the same old victimhood. So she glanced around with a new perspective.

She realized that she had survived the AIDS epidemic intact; that she had escaped the fate of so many people of her age, who were in the middle of messy divorces or child custody battles. She had no one demanding her time or money. She had her own apartment. She could come and go as she pleased. She was free, healthy, and up for adventure in the greatest city in the world. It was a week later that Helen met the guy who would eventually become her husband. I believe this is a natural consequence of her courageous choice to love herself and love her life. She stopped blaming her parents, herself, her friends. She stopped being a victim, not through endless years of therapy but after deciding to look for the perfection of her circumstance. It seems as though the Goddess is hovering in the periphery of our lives, just waiting for us to make the decision that life is good. As soon as we grab hold, she gives us the most unexpected kick up the ladder to our dreams. You start loving life; she provides the kick.

Love Your Flesh

Whenever I talk about accepting pleasure in your life, I'm reminded of a fabulous scene in Oprah Winfrey's genius movie, *Beloved*. Maybe you saw the movie or read the book by Toni Morrison. An older woman, a grandmother type named Baby Suggs, gathers all the freed slaves together in the beautiful woods. She exhorts the children to laugh, encourages the men to dance, and tells the women to cry. Baby Suggs helps those around her to accept all of themselves, to rediscover the range of emotions and life that they had been taught to repress as slaves. She holds her gnarled hand in the air and says, "Love your flesh!" Toni Morrison knows that freedom begins with the act of self-love, not the thought or the theory but the act.

In many ways, we still live in a culture that teaches us to hate our flesh and to devalue our physical existence. But we can and must teach ourselves to love our flesh. Love is self-protection. Love your flesh and you will take a very important step toward identifying and loving your vision of the world and of life as you want it to be. Until you love yourself you will never be free to love someone or be loved.

How do you start loving yourself silly? You know you have spots of your fine self that you just adore. We all do. Rather than focusing all of your attention on the parts of yourself that you disapprove of, simply find ways to celebrate your goodies. It causes them to multiply.

Sister Goddess G. Adrienne did just this when she came to her school of womanly arts graduation. Adrienne had been a yo-yo dieter her whole life. During her Mama Gena class, she agreed to stop dieting and just enjoy herself in her own skin for the extent of the class. The day before graduation, she took herself lingerie shopping and bought some sexy undies. The night of her graduation she was so carried away by her enjoyment of her own fine self that she flashed a room full of Goddesses her new sexy bra. She didn't realize until the next week that she had lost five pounds. Adrienne's celebration of her body—*not* dieting—had led to her weight loss. Celebrate yourself and revel in the rich and often unexpected rewards that come with that new mind-set!

Sister Goddess Sylvia altered her relationship with her body—and her boyfriend's relationship with her body—simply by changing her mind. After Sylvia moved in with Arthur, she put on a few pounds. Arthur noticed and told her she had a fat ass. At first Sylvia was upset, but after her Womanly Arts class, she returned home with a new attitude. We had her look in the mirror and pose, and appreciate her gorgeous, juicy butt. The very next day Arthur, who is a photographer, stopped her, midday, to ask her if he could photograph her butt in the beautiful afternoon light. Somehow his attitude had undergone a real transformation. She was delighted that her own attitude adjustment had such immediate consequences.

Remember to love your mind as well as your body. Approval makes us independent, strong, and wonderfully willful. For most of us, our margin of self-confidence is often so slim that a drop of anyone else's disapproval sends us into the chute of negativity and self-doubt. Self-criticism keeps us weak and malleable, it allows us to give our power away to others.

So fling open your door to acknowledgment and approval and self-celebration. Blast S.G. Aretha Franklin singing "Natural Woman" or Helen Reddy singing "I Am Woman." Whoever your internal Diva is, let her remind you who you are. Even if all you did today was think about how you might spoil yourself, that is a step. Celebrate any clever thought that presents itself to you.

When Auntie Beth, my protégée, first came to work with Bruce and me, it took some work to get her into the mind-set. Every few days she would descend into a pit of self-disapproval. To counter her negativity, we would send her into our empty course room and have her dance naked and sing to some sexy, empowering tunes. After about twenty minutes of being outrageous, she would emerge, eyes sparkling, ready to party again. Do anything and everything you can think of to celebrate your unique beauty and increase your joy.

Pleasure is love. Love of yourself first, foremost, and always. This takes some discipline and work, but the rewards are ample. If you respond to the true call of self-love, you begin to live a life that gratifies you. You begin to live your life as you define it. And that, my darlings, is the first step in creating healthy, fun partnerships with people.

Take Your Daily Dose of Fun

Not long ago, I found myself in the doldrums. I had been working nonstop for two weeks and enjoying every second of it. But then came the day when the thought of sitting in my chair and working made my head explode. My husband, Bruce, suggested I go for a facial. I didn't want to, but I did. As soon as I was out of the house and heading to the salon, I felt better. By the end of the facial I felt fantastic. I was refreshed and ready for more fun, more work, more whatever. Bruce helped me get on the right track. I recommend having a fun partner who can help fill your days with such excellent energy, but if you don't, you have to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, gals, and go for fun!

If you're being a good girl, working hard, and living up to your obligations, but clean living is just not making you happy—change and do something else. You are in a rut, a rut that's not for you, and you're wasting your time. If you are not having fun, you simply won't have enough energy to shift direction in life. The last thing in the world you will feel like doing when you are not having fun is... having fun. So don't let yourself sink so desperately low.

A woman in pursuit of a pleasurable life will maintain her sense of humor at all costs. Even Mother Nature has a killer sense of humor. A kangaroo is a hilarious invention. A penguin? Too hysterical. Each of us can add a little fun to our lives, even in small ways, and the result can be a hugely entertaining life. You can make the decision to take control of something awful and turn it into something funny.

S.G. Jill was riding in a car with her husband, David, on the New Jersey Turnpike, near New York City. Their children, Samantha and Thomas, were in the backseat. The traffic was bumper-to-bumper, moving just enough to be excruciating, and David was honking and cursing as a result. Temperatures were rising. At one point the average speed on the turnpike rose to about forty miles per hour, and a little distance grew between their car and the one in front of them. Looking to gain any bit of momentum, a van swerved in front of this Sister Goddess and her family's car, almost hitting them. Without thinking, S.G. Jill followed the first impulse she had: she sat up in her seat, pulled up her shirt, and flashed her breasts to the driver. The move was just the thing to break the tension in the car. Everyone in the car started laughing. S.G. Jill asked David if he felt better, and he did, delighted with his wife's outrageousness. Her spontaneous move changed the whole tenor of the day.

Maybe you would say S.G. Jill's actions and words were shocking. But be honest—how many times have you squelched the thought of doing something because you thought it was too outrageous? It's happened to us all. Well, it's time to let that restraint go. The wildness, the spontaneity that is you delights the universe. Release and you will be rewarded with your wishes, just like Aladdin with his lamp. But your wishes aren't limited to three—you get as many as you can dream!

The pursuit of pleasure should be exhilarating. And while it takes absolutely no

effort to have a miserable life, building a glorious life is another matter. You have to reach for it. Sneaking in a little fun for yourself can be life altering and awe inspiring. I love to see the excitement and energy that emanates from Sister Goddesses in training when they truly let their desires loose. It is so invigorating to see them rediscover their desires and change not only their experience of life but the way all those around them experience the world.

Expose What You Truly Feel

Most of us have been taught to keep our truths to ourselves and to tell people what we think they want to hear, or what we think we *should* be feeling. We feel awkward about what we really want. Exposing what we want requires truth telling, even when it makes us feel uncomfortable. When you can share your desires with those around you, you are being truly yourself and you will find that you connect with the people you know and meet in a much stronger way. Sister Goddess Jenny was one of my pupils who discovered just how powerful telling the whole truth can be.

S.G. Jenny had a guy, Ron, in her life who was always trying to flirt with her and get close to her. So naturally she avoided Ron constantly. Finally Jenny got up the nerve to tell Ron she liked him as a friend but wasn't attracted to him. As it turns out, Ron was totally fine with that. Then guess what happened? Jenny actually began to like Ron more, and actually became attracted to him—which surprised and delighted them both. After a few months of being just friends, Jenny and Ron talked honestly again about what was going on between them and agreed to move their relationship into the romantic realm and start dating. You never can tell what will happen when you trust that truth you feel and let its power lead you.

Sister Goddess Krisztina had a similar experience with truth-telling. She came to New York, with her boyfriend, from Budapest. After a few months here, he went home; she decided to stay. S.G. Krisztina wanted what she wanted, and that was a life here, in this country. Being on her own in this new land was not what she had planned, but this Sister Goddess was not deterred. She stuck with her desire in spite of the unexpected obstacles she faced.

This outlook served S.G. Krisztina very well. She got a job, then met a new guy, another expatriate named Steve. They had this hot, fabulous affair for a few months. Somewhere in there, Steve had to move, and Krisztina invited him to move in with her. There was no formal agreement—it just kind of happened even though Steve felt he was too young for a steady girlfriend. Then things got serious: as neither one of them was a legal resident, they entered the green card lottery. They said they would get married if either of them won, in order to give the other a green card. This would be just a business transaction. When Steve won the green card lottery, however, he was reluctant to go through with it. Krisztina wanted him to buy her a ring and pressed him to marry her. This didn't make either of them feel good. She didn't feel wanted, and he felt pressured. Their relationship was a time bomb, ready to explode. When Krisztina popped into the

school of Womanly Arts, Steve had left her and moved to Florida that morning.

Krisztina was desolate. She knew Steve loved her, too, but the more she tried to keep him, the faster he moved away from her. That was the key—Krisztina was spending her life trying to please Steve to gain his love or acceptance, which only backfired.

Mama put Krisztina in pleasure boot camp. She had to take candlelight baths, pamper herself, go out with her girlfriends (which she hadn't done in years!), and flirt with other guys. There is no quicker way than flirting for a woman to remember who she truly is. Suddenly, Krisztina's power came flooding back to her. She realized she was more than a hausfrau—she was a bright, beautiful, sexy young woman. She had been keeping a lid on her own fun for far too long, and blaming Steve for it. Krisztina actually felt grateful to Steve for leaving her—if he hadn't, she never would have signed up for the School of Womanly Arts and never found her way home.

Shortly after this epiphany, Krisztina and Steve talked. Krisztina told him she wanted him back. She said this straightforwardly, she didn't whine or complain. She called him as she soaked in her tub filled with bubbles and candles, and told him how much fun she was having. Krisztina's voice had a delicious, sexy, inviting quality that Steve hadn't heard before. He really wanted to be part of this world she was creating for herself.

Well, soon that boy became intoxicated. He began to call Krisztina every day, curious to hear the next installment of her whirlwind life. Six weeks later Steve was back in New York, and more in love with Krisztina than ever. He continues to call her every day when they are at their jobs, and they are having the most wonderful time of their lives.

S.G. Krisztina ended up getting the life *and* the man she wanted the most effective way possible—by making her very own path of pure pleasure toward them both. If you choose the pleasure path, as Krisztina did, you will soon discover that the universe and other people start responding to you in a very positive way. Your sparkling energy draws those things you desire toward you, and there is really nothing at all to push them away. Is it hard to understand why this approach is so effective? Wouldn't we all choose to spend our time with fulfilled, gratified, fun-loving people rather than with a bunch of whiners and complainers? When you accept the power of yourself and your pleasure, you will find that the habits of moaning and lamenting will fall away. They have no place in the life of a truly pleased woman.

Be Responsible, Fulfill Your Desires

Living a glorious life is an option for those of us fortunate enough to live in America. You have the freedom to make your own life exactly the way you'd like it. Now go out and make it.

Arrange your career to suit your pleasure. Let S.G. Alessandra's actions inspire you. After months of endless pressure at a job in which she was asked to take on more responsibility and longer hours for no more pay, she got fed up. One day, Alessandra walked right into her boss's office and said, "If I don't have time to have sex with my boyfriend, eat dinner with my boyfriend, or go to the gym, I am not working here!" Instead of letting Alessandra go, her boss talked her into staying by meeting her desires with a raise and shorter hours. I wasn't surprised when I heard the news, but Alessandra sure was. Her boss's response to her requests was such a surprise, it changed her whole perspective on how she could live and what she could achieve. Next time, Alessandra says, she'll speak up for what she wants before things get ugly.

Alessandra's revelation can be a lesson for all women. The responsibility is ours to create a new playing field. But this is trickier than it seems. For just as we have been taught to exterminate our joy, we have to be taught to revive it. Like Alessandra, we must all have the guts to make that first move, to pick up the ball—and then we have to run with it. That's where I'm hoping this book is going to come in handy for you. When you are tentatively stepping out there to create your desired lifestyle, this can be your handbook of advice, inspiration, and ideas. It can bolster your courage and give you a variety of options and examples to follow as you plot your own path to eternal pleasure.

S.G. Alessandra could never have fixed her work situation if she hadn't been focused on her desire. It was Alessandra's unbridled lust that captured her boss's attention. This Sister Goddess would never have gotten the same response from him if she had played the part of the shy, retiring, hopeful subordinate. No, it was Alessandra's bold-ness, her courage to voice her desires fully and strongly, that got her what she wanted.

Follow Your Divine Intuition

We really are Sister Goddesses. Most people find the appellation "S.G." amusing and fun. It is. It is also the truth. But it also reminds us of an essential truth—as women, we all have a divine spark within us. It's our duty to respect that divinity, to follow our instincts and our feminine intuition.

If you learn to move from your enthusiasm or your lust, you will be doing so much for yourself. For example, if you kiss a guy only when you really want to, rather than when you feel you have to, you would really enjoy it. Or if you eat only what you really want, prepared exactly as you want it, in the most celebratory way, you would ultimately make the best choices. Glorifying the Goddess in you is all about paying true attention to what you desire each and every moment of the day, just as you would if you were the caretaker of a beautiful shrine. Treat yourself as the beautiful shrine that you are—whenever you get the chance, toss rose petals at your feet!

The more goddessly you become, the more offers of all kinds will come your way. Your only obligation is to use your instinct as your guide. It is OK to decline an offer,

even if it is something wonderful, if you have had enough wonderful for the day.

Yesterday my husband, Bruce, sent me for a facial and bought me a new wallet and two beautiful pairs of earrings. We also took our daughter, Maggie, to an art opening. Bruce was enjoying all the fun we were having and was reveling in his generosity. He wanted to take us all out to dinner. I got caught up in the spirit of the day and agreed—even though I was getting a strong sense that I was too full from the richness of my day to be able to eat at my favorite restaurant that night. If I had listened to my intuition, which was whispering that she wanted to go home, I would have been on the right track. When we got to the restaurant, it turned out that there was an hour's wait for a table, and we ended up heading home. My intuition had told me an hour before that dinner wasn't going to be a go, but I did not speak her truth, so we all made an unnecessary trip. I know this is a small detail in life—getting a table—but I offer up this example just to illustrate how important and helpful it can be to stay tuned in to your inner truth and her wisdom at all times. I'm telling you, gals, she won't let you down!

Don't bother to deconstruct your intuition. Asking why is like trying to figure out a very complex puzzle, and its solution, if you happen upon it, is not always very interesting. My advice is that you take a pleasure reading of yourself (have you had enough fun today? this minute?) often and, based on what you find, just take appropriate action. Most of us get really hung up on the long, crooked, ungratifying trip into Why Things Are the Way They Are. This trip is usually a big maze with no cheese at the end. The problem with looking for the *why* of it all is that you never really, truly find it. And if you do, it doesn't necessarily make your life any better.

Sister Goddess Stacey was one who needed to forget about why. She had such intimacy issues that, as one of her former boyfriends said, she would have been best off dating an astronaut. By the time she came to Mama, it had been years since Stacey had had a relationship. In that time, she had become used to feeling guilty and wrong about her resistance to getting close with guys. After learning a few womanly arts, S.G. Stacey decided to do something different. Instead of wasting a lot of time trying to understand the psychological reason for her behavior, S.G. Stacey decided to just enjoy the time she spent with a new guy who had entered her life, and also to enjoy the time they were apart. Well, lo and behold, Stacey found that she enjoyed living her life much more than examining her intimacy issues. S.G. Stacey realized that, over time, she became more and more willing to accept her new man's attention. Then, one night, he gave Stacey the keys to his apartment. The old Stacey would have recoiled in fear at the intimacy of this key sharing, but the new S.G. Stacey was thrilled and excited by the progress they were making together.

All of us, even when we are doing exactly what we love, can momentarily focus too much attention on accomplishing the goal and forget to pay attention to our pleasure. That is the precise moment to take a break. Stress and burnout occur if you don't. Ecstasy returns to you if you do!



In order to inspire you to take the path of pleasure, I want to fill your head and your heart with tales of some women who are already on the path. Most of the old gals we've been brought up to emulate are gonna have to put on their walking shoes. They won't serve us now. Yes, the time has come to bury Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and the Little Mermaid. It's time to rid yourself and your world of that passel of subservient, paralyzed, codependent, weak, passive, self-sacrificing, powerless role models. It's time to think Pippi Longstocking style. Your brave new world is the world in which you make the rules, based on your pleasure. In this new world there are no limits to your power. I know this is a big new reality to embrace. Sometimes to start living this new way you have to act as if this is how you've always done things. Do whatever it takes to take that first step, and then all you'll have to do is keep the momentum going.

Some of the most empowered women I know are your Sister Goddesses. They may not be mythic yet, but they're legends in the making. These ladies have begun paving their own way to pleasure, first by embracing the sublime pleasure of the ridiculous. Consider following in their footsteps.

In one bragging session recently, a roomful of Goddesses and I listened to the typically private and retiring S.G. Hiroko recount an adventure. She went to visit some girlfriends in Rhode Island. She had just started her class and wanted to bring a little wildness to her chums. She talked them into skinny-dipping at midnight in a neighbor's pool, and they ended up having the kind of laugh these gals hadn't had in ages.

In another example of Sister Goddess silliness, S.G. Brenda, age fifty-six, single, dateless for years, decided to fire up her motor. She had an appointment for a haircut with her sexy hairdresser. She bought some new red satin undies and decided to wear them to the haircut. This was her little secret. The hairdresser went mysteriously wild over her, flirting and fussing for hours. S.G. Brenda began to feel the power of her panties, the power of her giving herself permission to flirt.

Are you noticing the trend? Pleasure definitely requires choosing fun over others' expectations, over obligations. When women realize that they don't have to be ashamed of their desires, you'd be amazed at how they can have their way. Follow your appetite, your desires, your secret wants. Do so, and your life will change for the better.

S.G. Sydney is an accomplished doctor with a naughty secret. She developed a flirtation with a male nurse at the hospital, and now discreetly sees him outside work. This adds a bit of swing to her step and enlivens her routine at work. Some people may not approve of Sydney's actions, but she and the boy toy feel great and always look forward to spending time at the hospital. I say that all signs indicate Sydney is making the right decision for herself—she feels great! Who cares what anybody else has to say about her extracurricular activities?

Now, people always talk about how you have to pay the piper. For every great experience, there's a disappointment. When you break up with someone, for instance, you have to go through that bottoming-out, mourning period, right? Wrong! Following your desires can make the good times better and minimize the bad times. S.G. Abby

broke up with her boyfriend of many years and went on five dates during the following week. Two of her dates were with a songwriter she really likes, her idea of fun is to have him write songs about her. For Abby, partying is an alternative to months of grieving and recuperating over her ex.

S.G. Bette added a dose of fun to her life during a recent squabble with her husband. She and her husband are usually kind of quarrelsome, but this time, when Bette and her man started bickering, she refused to slide into the familiar ugly mood that usually overtook her. Instead, when emotions boiled over a bit, she put herself on a sensual diet: she took herself out for a Burberry plaid pedicure, did a little self-pleasuring and had sex with her husband five times in the same week. Every time they began to lock horns, she locked him in the bedroom. They had the best week of their lives.

Remember how I was saying that if you change your outlook and relationship to pleasure, you'll change the world for those around you? Well, from what I've witnessed, the first thing a rockin' and rollin' Sister Goddess wants to do is invite her pals along for some fun. For example, S.G. Maura took a trip to Saint Bart's and really cut loose—she sunbathed topless and dated all the cute waiters at the hotel. She'd never considered such a thing before. But now she realized she could have way more fun than she had ever thought, and the fact that she had all kinds of guys offering to buy her champagne and dinner was an added bonus. One man was so entranced by Maura and her pursuit of pleasure that he invited her to quit her job and sail to Spain with him. Maura didn't take Mr. Spain up on his offer, but she was delighted to receive it.

This was the best vacation S.G. Maura had ever had. But her favorite part of the trip was teaching her friend Nancy the knack of having fun, too. Now, Nancy was a generous gal who was always paying for herself and others. Maura showed her how irresistible a woman can be when she's enjoying herself—in her case it made every man in a one-mile radius want to offer her champagne. On the last night of their island getaway, Nancy came running over ecstatically to tell Maura that a guy bought her, not a glass, but a bottle of champagne. It looks to me as if after one short vacation, Maura is making a Sister Goddess out of Nancy. Sharing the fun seems to be the name of the game!

The pursuit of pleasure requires a willingness to reach for the good, no matter what the circumstance. It's only when you reach for it that you find it. You can even fake it till you make it. S.G. Meg was on a flight to Paris. The plane was stuck on the runway for three hours, then she was told it would not be taking off at all. She was furious. But it was week two of womanly arts training, and suddenly she thought, that she had learned "What would Mama say? She'd say that the fact this is happening to me is perfect, somehow, someday." Just as she uttered those words, she glanced up and noticed a really cute guy. They ended up having a drink together, then dinner, as they waited for a new flight. Meg had not been dating for a while (she was a bit gun-shy after a nasty breakup) and here she was being forced, against her will, to hang out with this adorable man for hours upon hours in an airport. They ended up being put on the same plane for the flight back to New York, and stayed up half the night talking. They exchanged numbers as they landed, and Meg was so thrilled. She decided the entire

experience was a little gift for her, a reward for her willingness to accept the rightness of her situation.



This is my idea of a pleasurable life: Being with friends, sharing my life, enriching my child's life with influences beyond what my husband and I can provide—living in the company of other kids and adults. Living in the city and near the ocean. In a truly pleasurable life, I am contributing the parts that I enjoy doing, and other people cover the parts that I don't—like laundry, cleaning, cooking. Creating my business, with my husband partnering me in my vision, is pleasurable.

I have been in the process of inventing and reinventing my life, creating and recreating my vision, for my whole life. In my experience, dedicating yourself to pleasure does not cause a bolt of lightning to change you overnight. It gradually aligns your thoughts and actions with what you desire. It is a journey that requires paying attention to what you want, and making mistakes that you learn from. If you find your path, as I found mine, you will learn what to hold on to and what to discard as time goes by. Pleasure encourages you to notice what lights you up—and what doesn't. Building your life around personal fulfillment requires that you choose what lights you up again and again, each and every day.

In real life, I don't live on the beach, nor do I live in a house full of friends. Someday I may. But while I do have bigger goals and aspirations that I am moving toward, I also have to acknowledge that what I do have is incredibly wonderful. I live in a big rented brownstone in New York. I have phenomenal next-door neighbors, whose kids are in and out of my house all the time. I work with Beth, my dear friend, and my beloved husband, Bruce, in our third-floor offices. I have fantastic, funny, creative friends who inspire me continually. I love the gang of rotating Goddesses who work with us, stay for dinner, gossip, and play with Maggie. In addition to the gaggle of Goddesses that wander in and out of the brownstone, there are others who come and go. My best friends from California come to stay and work with us for at least a month each year. I have the most adorable, funny, loving housekeeper, named Carmen, and the beautiful Marti, who takes exquisite care of my daughter. The most important element in my current life is the spirit of work and love and play and company that is present constantly. I love the people who surround me in my home.

So now we are going to shift the focus to *your* dreams and goals and wishes. Hopefully we have stimulated your imaginative juices to the degree that some deep desires are ready to surface. So, come on, gals, step up and be your full, free, fabulous selves! Consider this your formal invitation. Of course, it takes practice and some courage and eternal vigilance to embrace a great life. But there's no reason to hesitate a moment longer. Get the fun started with these exercises I've designed to help you flex your freedom muscles. Make the fun workout part of your daily schedule.

We are about to move into the how-to section of this lesson. You may wonder

why. The reason, oh my divine darlings, is that y'all have such bad habits. Mama wants a shot at retooling. These exercises don't require a lot of preparation or material. They are activities that will help you to get in touch with your self and your appetites. The fastest way to Sister Goddessdom is to do all the exercises—the women in my courses who do every drop of homework have the most glorious re-sults. Even if they are uncomfortable with the exercises, even if they are skeptical, magnificent results happen anyway. You may resist these exercises. Some of them may even seem silly to you, or maybe you think you don't need the practice. But in my experience, we can all use the practice.

Exercise 1: The Forecast

Most of us don't notice how we disapprove of ourselves constantly. We run this continuous doubt tape in our heads, which says, "This is wrong," "That's the wrong thing to say," "This could be better," "That's too much food," "That's too much money," "That's not a good job," and so on. It's good to add on some approval, some positive reinforcement. Decide that you are always, on some level, responding exactly the right way to whatever is happening. Notice your genius and approve of it.

Check in with yourself regularly, perhaps every hour for an entire day. Identify exactly how you feel in that moment—happy, sad, frustrated, envious, exhausted, sullen, whatever. Write it down. Each time you do, say the following phrase: "I'm _____ and that is a right way to feel." Fill in the blank. Celebrate whatever is happening, even a change in weather, and how you feel about it.

Exercise 2: Thank-You Notes

Being grateful is healthy for many reasons. First and foremost, it feels wonderful. Second, when you begin to notice the good you have in your life, you open yourself up to more good. You create space. Third, when you concentrate on being thankful, you begin to notice how many of your desires have actually come true.

Put together a "grateful" list: what are you grateful for? This practice will help you make a habit of the positive, deliberate act of thankfulness.

Exercise 3: The Ties That Bind

Make a list of all your beliefs, all of your cultural conditioning, all your unwritten rules about how women should behave. Take stock of how you're *supposed* to behave at work, among your peers, in a relationship. Your list might include things such as "I'm not supposed to sleep with someone on the first date," or "I shouldn't take a day off from work unless I'm sick," or "If I'm over thirty I should be married."

When listing your beliefs, you shed light on your long-held assumptions. What

you see may surprise you. Notice how we just presume that God is male, or that someday our prince will come, or that we have to work to exhaustion to get what we want. Do you assume that to be married you have to choose between money and doing what you love, or that you have to be a Stepford wife? Do you feel you will never be rich? Or never find a life partner? Do you feel other people always get the breaks, and not you? Does motherhood mean slavery? Make this list and put it in a drawer. Pull it out a month or two after you finish this book. See if any of your past beliefs have fallen by the wayside.

I used to think that someday my prince would come. What I found out was that I could find a perfectly reasonable guy and turn him into my prince by communicating my desires to him, and appreciating him. Had I not recognized my belief and then changed it to suit my pleasure, I surely would not have the great partner and father of my little girl that I do today.

Exercise 4: The Womantra

A womantra is your statement about who you are, as a free woman on the planet, having your way. Here are some great examples of womantras that I love:

*I am beautiful,
I am rich, and
I have everything I want.
Thank you, Goddess.*

*The earth is mine for the taking.
No more cooking, cleaning, or baking
Unless I want to, unless I want to.
Sex is for my satisfaction.
Give me a guy who can give me some action.
I always want to, unless I don't want to.*

*Freedom is new. Freedom is mine.
Freedom is absolutely divine.
Freedom is here. Freedom is now.
Freedom is the cat's meow.*

Create your own womantra, your own personal statement of yourself as a woman. The benefits come not from dwelling on inequality but, instead, from fully experiencing your freedom. Just take your pen to paper and see what flows. Womantras don't have to rhyme. They don't have to make sense. They are for yourself just to entertain you and inspire you.