

Am I Gay or Not?

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Joseph: Hi, James, I hope you're well. I continue to listen every day to the Vedanta full set. I'm in San Francisco now, staying with my father. He's also hooked on you now! He's been on the spiritual path most of his adult life and I think that hearing your introduction to *Vivekachoodamani* has rekindled a flame...

I am struggling with your admonition to avoid men. I guess the nub of it is this: in my late teens, as I was getting to a point at which I was beginning to be conscious that the dominant attraction was to guys, I was also getting involved, eventually even to the point of monasticism, with a spiritual teacher who said that homosexuality was a bar to meditative and spiritual growth, even a road to rebirth in hell. This conflict of desires between wanting to do the "right" thing as defined by someone I respected and desire for meditative progress, led to repression and problems both during monastic training and afterwards. Now that I have left my wife, I had planned to experiment by allowing myself to have sex with and hang around gay guys to see if that really is where my sexual orientation lies.

Your advice, with the added "I'm watching you" has brought this whole conflict to the fore again! It's quite funny, but not really!

I'm struggling. I know that my nature is awareness, which isn't defined or limited by sexuality, conflicted desires or guilt. I keep going back to who I actually am but the desire keeps arising. I guess I believe I can only resolve this particular conflict by indulging the desire to see if that really is what has been bugging me all these years. I guess I want to be convinced that your advice is the right advice before I even try it!

I'm trying to understand the logic behind your advice. Is it that by setting up fresh *karma* by such actions all that will happen is an increased tendency to crave sex and relationships, with no resolution of the fundamental existential crisis, only more complications, more desires? You said that homosexuals were very messed up and confused about identity and I should not hang out with them. Is that without exception? Does that mean having sex with guys prevents a clear understanding of who I am? If that is truly what you meant, that doesn't completely make sense to me.

I'll drive up to Reno, so I'll see you there. I'm truly grateful for the Vedanta teachings, for the tools you share and I'm really applying it as best I can. It's already bearing fruit. I want to do whatever it takes to be absolutely unshaken in this knowledge and to be free and happy, but I also don't want to fall into just doing what I'm told without questioning it, which is what seems to have got me in such a pickle all these years. I would appreciate your further help in this matter.

~ With love, Joseph

James: Hi Joseph. Lovely to hear from you. You answered your own question: sex – regardless of its orientation – is one of the most binding *vasanas* for anyone, but particularly for someone with low self-esteem. It does not resolve the underlying issue, which is self-love. If sex is not

about procreation, it is a proxy for other issues. Homosexuality is fine spiritually as long as sex is treated purely as an action, but when it is associated with one's identity, it is a big problem spiritually. Gayness is an identity that just happens to have sexuality as its primary focus. It is a problem spiritually. Who am I, a slave to my body's cravings or the ever-free, non-dual, always-full awareness?

As long as you pursue physical and emotional sensations, your mind will not be peaceful. The whole point of the spiritual life is to produce a clear, peaceful mind so that it can discriminate the self from the objects that present themselves to it. Hell is just this conflict between one's pursuit of solutions in *samsara* and one's desire to be free of *samsara*. I don't know because I don't know you very well, but I suspect that you are not a homosexual. If you were, there would be no conflict. I am not a heterosexual, meaning that the idea of my sexual orientation never arises in my mind. It is just the default setting so there is no reason to think about it.

But many people chose the gay lifestyle for other than sexual reasons, often just to belong to a group that seems to be liberated with reference to pleasure. I can't see that you can progress spiritually until you resolve this issue, Joseph. By this I mean until you get clear what you really want in life.

Think of this as tough love. I also can't see that trying to figure out your sexual orientation is a particularly noble goal. Even if you do figure it out, what have you actually gained spiritually? Presumably you will then pursue sex according to your orientation. In my experience, I don't find that most people can divorce sex from love. In fact, I believe that sex is really a proxy for love. Even it is isn't, the real issue is whether or not the pursuit of any *samsaric* object – in this case, sex – leads to freedom or to bondage. I think the answer is obvious. You are never really on the spiritual path until you understand that the pursuit of anything in *samsara* is a zero-sum game.

Everything here – sex included, sadly – has a built-in limitation. We pursue what we pursue for the freedom it purports to supply but end up suffering owing to the inherent limitation of every *samsaric* pursuit. You are no spring chicken, Joseph. Well, maybe you are a fifty-something spring chicken, but it is time to grow up if you want my unvarnished opinion. Yes, I know maturity is not something that you do, but I think you know what I mean.

Sex is kid stuff. It is nice alright but not noticeably nicer than other pleasurable pursuits, particularly if it comes with a lot of guilt. The highest pursuit known to man is the gaining of a pure mind, which in time leads to complete freedom. Fuck what you want but get serious about your spiritual *vasana*. Follow the *dharma* of a seeker. Work out this conflict in a reasonable way or let it go altogether if you can. If you can't, then just wallow in your misery until your dick no longer gets hard and the lights go on. You can't have your cake and eat it too if you want to succeed spiritually. It seems you have a very strong spiritual *vasana* if your history is any indication, so do the actions that strengthen it. Come to Reno and listen to the teachings.

Joseph: Okay. That has actually helped. I do see what you mean. Even if it were to “clear up” (whatever that means) this one issue, solving doubts about sexual orientation is not going to solve anything fundamentally, I suppose, and I can see how it could get to be all about “me and my new sexual identity.” Better that I knuckle down to the serious stuff and let life do what it will than get exercised about “my issues”... and to be honest, you are right, much of the motivation was for sex without strings attached. Thank you. Back on track. Back to it! Look forward to seeing you soon.

~ Love, Joseph

James: Cool, Joe! Seems you've see the light.