

# Confusing *Sattva* and *Tamas*

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**Sundari:** Hello, Carl. I am sorry to hear that you were you “deceived” and “saddened” by my email to you. What answer did you expect? Drugs and alcohol are forbidden by the *Vedas* because they are contrary to inquiry. Scripture is collective knowledge on a given topic. If it encourages or discourages an action you can rest assured that it is wise.

My reply is straightforward, and I am expressing James’ opinion as well. He read my email before I sent it to you and made some suggestions. As you know, he tried every drug in the book many years ago and speaks from experience. I have tried marijuana a few times too. I have witnessed many people use it and lived with someone for many years who made the same claims you do about its power to produce insights. I saw the negative effects and the distortions he started believing were true after long-term use. I am familiar with your viewpoint and it is a common one that is fervently held by many users of mind-altering substances. The simple fact is that whatever outside means you use to help you gain something you already are will in the long run become an obstacle. There is no chemical solution for inquiry. It is a well-known fact that marijuana, whether used sparingly or repeatedly, makes the mind dull and *tamasic*. It seems to produce *sattva* if your mind is very *rajasic* before you smoke, but it is not true. The *tamas* slows down the mind, and you experience relief and temporary clarity, but it is not *sattva*. Write down your insights when you are stoned and then look at them when you are in a normal state of mind, and they will generally seem ridiculous.

It is true that everyone reacts to it differently and if you use it recreationally and infrequently it is no big deal. But you need to be very honest with yourself because a lot of dope smokers use the supposed “spiritual” insights to justify the use of drugs when the real reasons they are caught up in drugs is to escape from subjective problems. India is full of *sadhus* who shout, “*BOM SHIVA SHANKARA!*,” when they hoist their chillums, and it all looks very romantic and spiritual, but basically they are just pleasure-seeking drop-outs too lazy to do honest spiritual work. It is similar to the *tantric* people who basically want to have sex and cook up a spiritual reason for it.

I am not saying that one can’t gain insights while using mind-altering substances, whatever they are. However, to rely on them is dangerous and builds very strong *vasanas*. It is good that you say you don’t use it often. If you are going to use it for recreation, that’s fine, but don’t imagine that you can use it for inquiry.

James and I both felt that your insight was confused. He has taught me and encourages everyone to use the correct Vedanta terminology when writing, particularly someone like you who faithfully attended the talks in India this year.

Perhaps you could rephrase your insight so that we can understand what you were trying to say. Were you asking for clarity concerning the validity of your insight or were you simply sharing? Either way, we did not get it.

~ Best regards, Sundari