

Neutralizing *Vasanas* Requires Honest Assessment

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Charlie: Hi, Ted.

Just a quick question: Are *vasanas* still binding if I know them to be *vasanas* and I know that I am awareness? They still get acted out, but the knowledge “I am awareness” means I see them for what they are and I am not affected by them.

Thanks in advance.

~ Charlie

Ted: Hi, Charlie.

A *vasana* is binding to whatever degree you feel your happiness, security, sense of well-being, peace of mind, call it what you will, is dependent on the object of the *vasana*. That is, to whatever degree you feel you need to possess or dispose of the item or enjoy or avoid the experience in order to be happy or feel worthwhile is the degree to which you are bound to it.

There are two fundamental ways to gauge your attachment to any object, circumstance or experience: your emotional response to the presence or absence of the object and what actions you are willing to take to obtain, avoid or eliminate the object.

Bearing this in mind, you may very well know that a given *vasana* is a *vasana* and that your true nature is pure awareness, but still remain bound to the desire for the object of the *vasana*. Neutralizing a *vasana* (i.e. rendering it non-binding) takes more than an intellectual understanding of its nature. Such an understanding of course is the necessary starting point in the process of neutralizing the *vasana*, but only when the understanding has been fully assimilated will the *vasana* be truly rendered non-binding.

Through *nididhyasana*, which consists of continuous meditation on and application of the wisdom revealed through self-inquiry, one eventually reaches a point at which the desire for objects is weakened to such a degree that one no longer experiences mental agitation as a consequence of their presence in one’s mind. In some cases, a particular *vasana* may even drop away altogether, never to rear its once-so-attractive head again.

In this regard, Vedanta does not advocate severe asceticism. Neither self-denial through the tyrannical exertion of willpower nor avoidance by ignoring the desire and hoping it will go away effectively solves the problem. As long as the object is still desired, it will linger in the causal body, waiting for the first lapse in one’s discipline to spring into action.

For this reason, Vedanta advocates the moderate but conscious indulgence of existent *vasanas*, followed by the contemplation of the object’s limitations and inherent incapacity to provide lasting satisfaction, fulfillment, peace and happiness. As opposed to the mindless and wanton indulgence formerly afforded the *vasana*, this more mindful approach enables one to consciously

monitor the degree of immediate satisfaction and inevitable suffering that results from having erroneously superimposed a value on an object that the object does not possess (i.e. that the object is the source of the happiness one seeks, that a limited object can be the means to what is essentially a limitless end).

As a consequence of repeatedly experiencing the inevitable disappointment or dissatisfaction that characterizes object-oriented enjoyment and continually contemplating the logic that reveals its inherently defective nature, one's obsessive desire for and attachment to any given object gradually weakens until at last it withers away to such a degree that it ceases to exert any pressure on one's mind and is incapable of compelling one to act at its behest.

In regard to your question then, only you know for sure whether a *vasana* is binding.

If you feel you need the object in order to be okay, then it is binding. If you are willing to transgress *dharma*, or ethical norms – in other words, break the rules, lie, cheat, steal, betray someone's trust, backstab, seek revenge, sabotage another's efforts, etc. – in order to get what you want, then whatever it is you want is exerting a binding influence on your thoughts, words and deeds.

If, on the other hand, the desire is merely a preference and whether it is fulfilled has no impact on your essential sense of well-being, then you are free.

As long as one's *prarabdha karma* holds out, one will continue to have desires. Once one has assimilated self-knowledge, however, none of these desires will be binding. That is, one will know oneself as the source of joy, and thereafter will be freely enjoy objects but will not seek to get joy from them.

In some cases, a person with self-knowledge may even execute actions that might be considered *adharmic* due to the continued influence of deeply ingrained habitual tendencies. But in fairly short order all such actions will abate. There is no hard and fast rule concerning the behavioral norms of a *jnani* (i.e. one with self-knowledge), but at the same time the *jnani* will recognize the non-dual nature of reality and know the self to be the true source of peace and happiness. Thus he or she will have no reason to violate the fundamental laws that govern the operation of the grand machine of the manifest universe, maintain its overall harmony and balance, and thereby serve the best interests of the total. In this regard, an intellectual understanding of the apparent nature of *vasanas* should not be used as an excuse to avoid the unpleasant work of neutralizing their effects.

While actions are not necessarily indicative of whether a *vasana* is binding, they are symptoms that should be consciously monitored and candidly assessed. In this regard, the price of freedom is constant vigilance and an unflinching commitment to truth.

Please know that I am not insinuating that you are not being honest with yourself concerning the degree to which any particular *vasanas* may or may not be impacting your sense of inner peace, for only you can determine that. I'm simply saying that you take a fearless look for yourself and deal with any lingering *vasanas* as you see fit.

~ All the best, Ted