

# Dealing with a Strong Sex Vasana

Ram (James Swartz)

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**Seeker:** Dear Sundari and Ram, I am 37 years old, and for 10 years have seriously followed the path to truth. Four years ago I woke up, had a strong three-day spiritual experience and a view into non-dual vision. After that I spent time with a spiritual master going through investigations, which helped the intellect to understand what was happening.

Anyway, I have suffered for 15 years now under a strong sex *vasana*. That means that I visit prostitutes on a regular basis and seemingly don't have the power to "stand as awareness" in these moments when the sex *vasana* gets illuminated by awareness.

I read your book, which was amazingly helpful for me. It just clicked a lot and I could see that although I understand everything you are saying and although I recognize myself, actually every day several times, the *vasanas* still are not balanced.

Reading your book, I could see that I had tried all those years to reach a "cheap" enlightenment following the Neo-Advaita teaching but not managing first my likes and dislikes and my passions.

For four years I have not been in a relationship and don't feel compelled to get into one at all. Being free is without doubt my main concern at the moment. My question is: How can I use the *karma yoga* attitude when the strong sex desire/sex addiction arises again in the subtle body? Sometimes I can let it pass but pretty often I just get overwhelmed.

It's such a confusion seeing on the one hand that I am free and acting, on the other hand, like a victim.

Thanks.

**James:** The *karma yoga* attitude is an attitude of gratitude. So when you visit the prostitute you should see her as the self and do the appropriate action and take the result in an attitude of gratitude. But this is at best a temporary measure because *karma yoga* does not actually apply in this situation for this reason: *karma yoga* means that you dedicate your actions to the self before you do them. Having sex with a prostitute is not an appropriate action for a spiritual seeker. There is no way that it leads to self-knowledge, which is your stated goal. It leads to attachment to an object, as you well know. It may be *dharmic* for a worldly person as long as there is no coercion or exploitation involved. If she willingly provides a service for which you willingly pay, what is wrong with it? The self is not concerned with flesh rubbing on flesh. It happens all the time in various ways, when two people shake hands, for instance. But it is *adharmic* for you because you are committed to liberation and it produces a result that binds rather than frees you. The practice of *karma yoga* requires *sattvic* actions, and sex is not a *sattvic* action; although it produces temporary short-term *sattva*, the long-term effect is *tamasic*. At the same time it is good that you are visiting prostitutes and not doing "*tantra yoga*." Turning sex into a *yoga* tends to legitimize it as a path to enlightenment, which creates another

problem that makes attachment to it harder to break.

At the same time you need to analyze the situation. This action is obviously not working for you because the downside – the attachment – is painful. So you get the pleasure – thank God – and you get the pain – thank God. Why thank God for the pain? Because this action – which is a violation of a seeker's *dharma* – is calling attention to a deeper problem, one that is standing in the way of your happiness.

When we have a problem, the problem is never the object, in this case, the action itself. Attachment to sex, not sex itself – is the problem. So the question is “What do I really want?” If you were clear about that then you would be committed to actions that produce peace. Unless sex is an expression of love it is a *rajasic* action. *Rajas* produces agitation and dullness, *tamas*. So you need to pay attention to what actually happens when you visit the prostitute and look beyond the obvious result to see if you aren't actually there for another reason. I don't know you, so I can't say that this is true but usually men associate sex with love. If this is true, then it is human contact you crave, not sex. Even if you were not visiting prostitutes you could easily get a sex addiction with a wife or a girlfriend.

But even if the reason is human contact, craving anything from food to the company of others is the issue. So the craving is the issue. What is the actual source of the craving? It is the craving for wholeness.

Yes, you recognize yourself many times a day, but what good does it do if it does not have an impact on your *vasanas*? If you knew that you were the self and knew what it means to be the self it would give you the strength to stand up to this *vasana* and break your attachment to it. Why? Because the bliss you seek in the sex act is actually the bliss of the self, which is with you all the time. I don't think you understood the first chapter of my book which deals with the psychology of the pursuit of objects, in this case, pleasure. The problem is that your attachment to the *vasana* is stronger than your attachment to self-knowledge. Attachment to the self means a firm conviction that you are whole and complete as you are. It means that you know that you do not need any special feeling to make you complete. There must be some part of you that believes that sex can complete you, which is obviously not the case. It makes you feel more incomplete in fact.

It may be that self-knowledge is not enough to break the hold of this *vasana*, so the next line of defense is to seek help for your addiction. The 12-step programs are very effective for this kind of problem. There are also other programs that put your relationship to this *vasana* in proper perspective.

The other solution is to “man up” and use a bit of will power. I wouldn't try to stop it all at once but I would “sin intelligently,” as my *guru* used to say. I would go less frequently and at the same time find some other activities that give you pleasure. That energy can be sublimated into sports or art or music or any number of activities appropriate for someone on the path to liberation. I wish you all the best in your struggle with this *vasana*.