

# The Craving Is the Problem, Not Sex

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**Dane:** I was talking with a friend of mine about sex, ejaculation, sublimation and the *yoga* attitude towards it. And I found this from your e-*satsang*:

## Inquiry into the Sex Vasana

“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 *yoga* tends to legitimize it as a path to enlightenment, which creates another problem that makes attachment to it harder to break.”

You are critical of *tantra yoga*, it seems. Could you tell more about what you mean about “Turning sex into *yoga* tends to legitimize it as a path to enlightenment, which creates another problem that makes attachment to it harder to break”?

**Sundari:** We do not advocate *tantra*, you are right. What I meant by the statement, “Turning sex into *yoga* tends to legitimize it as a path to enlightenment, which creates another problem that makes attachment to it harder to break,” is that sex *yoga* or *tantra* is not only not a legitimate path to enlightenment, it is also not conducive to self-inquiry. Although many who teach *tantra* claim otherwise, *tantra* does build *vasanas* and can also be a way to spiritualise them, making them harder to break. As James calls it, the “f--k your way to God” mentality. We also definitely do not advocate visiting prostitutes, but for this particular inquirer, it was not *adharmic* – although obviously not ideal. His basic problem was that he did not love himself. For him, having sex with prostitutes was more honest than having sex with someone he did not know how to love and would be using to have sex. He had a sex *vasana* and a lot of work to do on his qualifications, but then many inquirers do. The point I am making is that sex is only a hindrance to self-inquiry if it is *adharmic* to yourself or others or builds binding *vasanas*. Making a big story out of sex by turning it into a spiritual practice creates attachment to it, reinforcing the idea that there is something you can “do” about sex to transform it, and in doing so turning into an “evolved” spiritual practice. There is nothing inherently elevating or demeaning about sex. Sex is not the problem; the craving and the doer is the problem.

Our position on sex is this: non-binding sex with love is beautiful and natural. It’s not a big deal and not an obstacle to self-inquiry or *moksa*. Whether one is having sex with prostitutes, random consenting strangers or your partner, binding sex without love is ugly, unnatural and does become a big deal; it is an obstacle to self-inquiry and *moksa*. Sex can even become a problem in a marriage or committed relationship with someone you love if it is a binding *vasana*. The main issue is the motivation, as it is with the desire for any object. Krishna says: “I am the desire that is not opposed to *dharma*.”

**Dane:** I have also given Ted Schmidt questions of these below. Some interesting questions that I also guess James and you would like to talk more about if you have

the time to do that. Obviously, visiting prostitutes is not conducive to self-inquiry, but neither is it *adharmic* if it is an honest transaction between two consenting adults.

Sivananda wrote this on this page ([link](#)):

“If the sexual energy is transmuted into *Ojas* or spiritual energy by pure thoughts, it is called sex-sublimation in Western psychology. Just as metals and chemicals are purified by heating, so also the sexual energy is purified and changed into divine energy by spiritual *Sadhana*, by entertaining sublime, soul-elevating thoughts of the Self or *Atman*. In *Yoga*, he is called an *Oordhvareta* in whom the seminal energy has flown upwards into the brain as *Ojas Shakti*. There is no possibility of the semen going downward through sexual excitement.

“The process of sex-sublimation is very difficult and yet it is most necessary for the aspirant in the path of spirituality. It is the most important qualification for the aspirant, either in the path of *Karma Yoga*, *Upasana*, *Raja Yoga* or *Vedanta*. You must achieve this at any cost. You will surely attempt this in some future birth. But why not now?”

**Sundari:** Sex sublimation is not a necessary precondition or qualification for self-inquiry or *moksa* unless sex is a binding *vasana*. However, sublimation can and is used effectively as a way to render any binding *vasana* non-binding. As inquirers, whenever we have a desire for an object that is contrary to *dharma*, we neutralise the desire by sublimating it to a higher idea – freedom from bondage to the desire. This is taking a stand in awareness as awareness and applying the opposite thought.

What is important to remember is that Sivananda was an Indian *sannyasi* who had taken a vow of celibacy; he was not a householder. For him the statement above is correct. But there are different levels of *sannyas*. You can be a *sannyasi* but not take the vow of celibacy, such as James and me. If one has taken the vow of celibacy you need a *sadhana* to help you sublimate the sexual urge because it does not just go away at will. It is one of the most powerful urges in the creation given to us by *Isvara*. What is also very important to note is that Sivananda was a *yogi*, not a *jnani*. He did not teach self-knowledge, and it is not known whether he attained *moksa*. Whether you are a householder or not, sex may or may not be an impediment to self-inquiry. As I said above, it all depends on the motivation for having it.

The craving for sex is the desire for human contact, which is what is craved, not sex. The craving itself is the issue, as craving anything – from food to the company of others – is only present when our true nature is not understood and valued. The actual source of the craving is the desire for wholeness. In other words, it is a psychological problem which can only have a spiritual solution, meaning self-inquiry. Denying or indulging the craving for (sex or anything else) never solves the craving but exacerbates it. As an inquirer and householder or worldly person, it might be necessary to sublimate the sex *vasana* to render it non-binding; this kind of renunciation is to be advised if *moksa* is the aim and sex is a powerfully binding *vasana*. But this kind of renunciation is not denial. It is the understanding that nothing is to be gained by indulging this *vasana*, so one makes a different choice every time the craving arises, by sublimating the desire with the opposite thought. Sex is a natural urge, it goes with the territory of being human. It is a source of much pleasure, which when associated with a sense of low self-esteem or incompleteness may become perverted and cause terrible suffering.

**Dane:** My questions are:

1. What is the Vedanta *sampradaya* attitude towards ejaculation and is it wise to have ejaculation sometimes (one or two) every month?

**Sundari:** If as a *sannyasi* you have taken the vow of celibacy, sex is forbidden, full stop. *Sannyasis* sublimate the sexual energy into love of the self, which over time with dedicated practice automatically disperses or elevates the craving. If you are a householder-*sannyasi* (like James and me), ejaculation is not injurious or wrong, providing sex is non-binding and *dharmic*. There is no mention of or advice for or against any sexual practice in Vedanta other than for those who have taken the vow of celibacy. For worldly inquirers, self-inquiry is for mature people who have worked out their psychological issues. For self-knowledge to work to remove ignorance, we have negated the doer, put an end to all self-insulting and injurious actions and rendered binding *vasanas* non-binding. This does not mean that we have to give up sex or ejaculation. As a husband/partner in a committed relationship, it is part of your *dharma* to pleasure your wife/partner through satisfying sex.

Sivananda seems to be suggesting that nobody can achieve *moksa* unless you “do” something about sex – which is nonsense. This doing is either renunciation or turning the act into a complicated act of purification. There is nothing wrong with bodily pleasure as long as it does not contravene *dharma* – and there is a great deal of it locked in the human body – whether through food, sex or anything else. It is a dangerous energy because it feels so good and it can be a slippery slope to bondage. *Isvara* makes pleasure possible, but it comes at a price when self-ignorance rules the mind. The other side of Sivananda’s abstemious recommendations is Eastern spiritual traditions that promote sex and the sexual organs as one of the most common symbols of the bliss of the self. They assume a mythic status and functions as metaphors for the creation and enlightenment. The misuse and abuse of sexual energy, however, is one of the primary causes of suffering, engendering self-abasement and abuse.

**Dane:** 2. I have read several books, by *yoga* teachers especially, that say sex sublimation is important in spiritual development. Is it important?

**Sundari:** See above. Most *yoga* teachers teach only *yoga*, Dane. They do not teach *moksa*. *Yoga* is an aid to self-inquiry, as its practices help to purify the mind, but it does not replace self-inquiry. Most *yoga* teachers believe that there is a doer who has to do something to achieve a certain “state” called enlightenment. Purification of the *jiva* entails making them “more spiritual” instead of breaking the identification with the doer. Certainly purification of the mind is absolutely necessary for self-inquiry. But Vedanta says you cannot gain something you already have; you can only have your ignorance of who you are removed by self-knowledge. *Moksa* is not a state and cannot be achieved other than by negating the one who thinks he/she is a doer – the one who renounces.

Both powers, renunciation and action, exist in everyone. Individuals constantly act, and they constantly let go of things they no longer value or desire. The only issue is the nature of that which is to be renounced. If an individual wants freedom, which Vedanta defines as freedom from dependence on objects, renunciation becomes a

problem, because individuals value things that conflict with the desire for freedom. And liberation requires a very subtle renunciation: renunciation of the renouncer, the one seeking freedom.

**Dane:** 3. Sivananda said, "You must achieve this at any cost." It sounds to me it is exaggerated – is it exaggerated or is he right?

**Sundari:** See above. Use your common sense. Consider the context in which the statement was made: India in the last 70 years had become a highly repressed and prudish society due to the influence of the English Victorian rulers. Lots of taboos and negative attitudes towards sex developed because the society was against it other than for procreation. When one has to work so hard to deny something so natural and inbuilt, it becomes like a formidable foe one has to fight at every turn. It is understandable that *yogis* like Sivananda developed a contemptuous attitude to sex. You know the saying – what you resist persists!

**Dane:** 4. This topic is very sensitive for a man of course, and a person who is married or has a relationship with a woman will have some ejaculation naturally, and it sounds strange that this will destroy his chances of *moksa*, or self-realization/self-actualization. Am I correct? Is celibacy necessary for *moksa*?

**Sundari:** Unless you want to want to take the vow of celibacy, celibacy is NOT necessary for *moksa*. How can it be? "I am whole and complete, non-dual, actionless, ever-present, unconcerned and unchanging awareness, with or without sex. Practised in a loving and committed relationship, non-binding sex is an expression of and for the love that I AM. I see the ejaculation, my partner and the sex act as God, as *Isvara*, as me – the self.

**Dane:** 5. Too much overindulgence is of course an issue and also creating extra sex *vasanas* if it is about over-indulgence of sex or ejaculation, etc.

The golden Middle Way of Buddhism could be a nice attitude of how to deal with sex issues, including finding our own rhythm and listening to your mind and body – not over-indulgence. Is it a good attitude towards these issues?

**Sundari:** Yes, indeed. Is that not just common-sense logic? If you have to "sin," sin intelligently. Don't make life difficult for yourself. Life is to be lived and enjoyed without fear and without attachment.

**David:** Thanks for the answers. 😊 I guess my "yoga friend" will not be so happy with the answers. 😊

**Sundari:** No, very likely not! Most *yogi* types are really good people who live pure lives, and many do have some self-knowledge or at least know about the self. The problem is that for the most part they believe that Vedanta is part of *yoga*, not the other way around. They don't fully understand its value and are hooked into the idea of improving the *jiva* instead of understanding it in the light of self-knowledge and

dis-identifying with it. The doer is doing *yoga* and awareness is something “other than,” something to be “attained” through *yoga*. This is why many mediators get stuck. They don’t see that they need to negate the one who meditates and that *yoga* is an aid to purify the mind but does not and cannot replace *jnana*.

Sivanananda exhorting his followers to abstain from sex or transform the sex act by whatever means focuses on the body and the doer instead of negating it. Of course there is a particular *dharma* for an inquirer which includes a holy (whole) attitude to the body and its needs – food, sex, etc. As I said, pleasure (*tamas*) can pose a dangerous slide into bondage and suffering because it builds entrenched *vasanas* so quickly. If *moksa* is the aim your life has to conform to a pure lifestyle or self-knowledge will not stick. But there is nothing wrong with the body and the way it is made. It belongs to *Isvara*, not to the *jiva*.

~ Love, Sundari