

JOY: The Journal of Yoga

Winter 2005, Volume 4, Number 1

Celibacy is Not About Denying Our Sexuality

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Of the many teachings and practices that Yoga puts forth, none seems to cause more confusion than the idea of celibacy.

Sex and sexual intimacy and the various thoughts, feelings, desires and emotional states that arise from sex seem to cause or have caused in all people's lives some confusion, pain and guilt at one time or another.

It is quite common to see or witness violent outbursts and even death because of matters relating to sex, if not in our own lives, then through the daily news in all parts of the world.

Sex is something that can bring us great personal pleasure, joy and an upliftment of our emotional and spiritual being or can also make us jealous, resentful, confused, unhappy and angry.

To throw in the idea, concept and practice of celibacy just seems to make things harder to comprehend and deal with as regards sex and sexual and sensual intimacy.

The idea of celibacy in the practice of Yoga and as a necessary practice in order to make real progress in Yoga has also been explained in different ways and to varying degrees.

Some characterize it as meaning no thoughts, feelings, words and actions as regards sex and sexuality.

Others talk of it as meaning no sex outside of the bonds of marriage.

And still others will characterize it as a process of gradually understanding, managing and acting on our sexual feelings, desires and impulses with greater insight and wisdom.

It does not mean that we do not see and understand ourselves as being beings with sexual desires and needs or denying our sexuality.

If we remember the guidelines for a happy life and living as put forth in the teachings of Yoga, we see that Yoga divides life into four stages and that it is one of those stages that man and women are advised to live the life of a householder, engage in the pleasurable relations that man and women can engage in, and raise a family.

This stage of life generally lasts according to these teachings from the age of 25 to the age of 50.

At the age of 50, with our experience in life and living, we gradually come to a more spiritual state of living and the desire for sex is gradually weakened, based on factors such as the changing nature of our mind and body, and our understanding that sex does not bring a permanent or lasting joy and can be an unnecessary depletion of our energy, time and resources.

In the west and modern secular societies throughout the world, there is more emphasis on comfort and pleasure through the senses as being the primary source of happiness.

This is consciously and unconsciously put across to us in various messages and advertisements each day and we are bombarded by them to the point that we lose our own mindfulness about our inherent strengths and energies that can also bring us balance and joy.

We get involved in sexual activities before we are emotionally able to understand them, get involved with the wrong people for the wrong reasons, have too many sexual partners, use drugs and stimulants to heighten sexual pleasure, look to sex as an escape from mental pain and anxieties, are bombarded with subtle and overt sexual images that are easily accessible and available and engage in sexual activities that are demeaning to the mind, body, soul and consciousness of both ourselves and others.

Our lust and desire for sexual and sensual pleasure can lead to emotional and physical ailments and even death.

It can cause long-term obsessions and confusion, pain and guilt.

It can make us love those who are not worthy of our love while forgetting those who do know how to love us in a sincere, respectful and constructive way.

If we make some effort to understand what celibacy and the Yoga approach to life teaches us, we may find that we get more satisfaction and fulfillment out of sex, while gradually becoming more mindful about our attitudes to it.

We may find that there is something in the idea and practice of celibacy that we can learn from or work towards, with the idea of managing our sexual impulses, desires and feelings better or gradually withdrawing from the sexual and sensual world and experiencing the growth and spiritual evolution that comes from that.

Certainly, many of us will not evolve to such a state, but it does not mean that it is not a useful state to understand, experience and learn and grow with and from.

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