

Pleasures, Habits, Addictions And The 5 “M” of Tantra

A friend writes to me the other day and asks how he can leave behind some worldly habits that prevent him from being able to dedicate himself to meditation. They are common habits that many people enjoy but that serious meditators have left behind. So, if many other people have overcome habits of enjoying alcohol, tobacco, meat, and drugs then it is certainly possible that any other person of similar determination may also transcend these habits. If only we can understand the methods of which these meditators successfully used to leave behind their habits and commit themselves to the practice of meditation then we may detect a pattern that can be taught to others really struggling to break these habits.

I will speak not just from my own experience but from the experience of many friends and students who have become dedicated meditators. Most of us stopped drinking and smoking in the like in a very gradual manner. While at the same time we started practicing a little mediation and yoga. By getting some positive feelings and natural highs we became convinced that it is possible to feel really good and even better than drinking alcohol or smoking something, however the habits were still present. Furthermore, these habits were almost always socially enforced by our friends and family. I always told my students that they never had to break their habits abruptly and that in fact this could have adverse consequences. Stopping a habit requires a lot of repression and this repression may bounce back with a fury that creates so much tension that one decides to leave meditation altogether because it simply creates too much stress. Instead, one should gradually reduce habits. At the same time one becomes just a little more disciplined, one should concurrently gradually reduce the amount or frequency of alcohol, cigarettes, etc. consumed. This approach is called “systematic withdrawal” If one notices that one is just a little less bound to one’s addictions and is also beginning to feel the benefits of meditation, then some confidence is inspired.

Really, what we need is confidence in ourselves, in our will to change. Perhaps, it is lack of confidence and firm determination that one can succeed, cope, or overcome that leads one into addictions to begin with. Sometimes addictions are simple social and personal habits but so often we develop addictive habits so as to cover up some tension, neurosis, or complex. This is another important reason to gradually reduce habits, because we may be opening a Pandora’s box, a door into something unconscious that the ego is not yet ready to see, accept, and integrate. So confidence must develop gradually. It is important to spend time with people who foster this confidence. It gives one an example of successful integration and the good counsel of such teachers helps one onward. If one remains alone with one’s habits trying to overcome them without these examples then the task is so much more difficult.

Once one begins to have confidence and a strong will then one is able to fully leave the habit. With this freedom one feels that your mind belongs to you, that nothing can bind it. However this is where we must be careful because there is

always some other habit, some other hidden tendency waiting to disturb the newly found peace. A tantric meditator should understand this principle, that there is no peace without struggle, and every victory gained should be an accumulation of strength for the next battle. Maybe one has overcome alcohol and meat and the sexual urge is somewhat placated, but what next? Later we move into psychological habits, perhaps mental patterns and defenses for the ego. Now we have to deal with the roots of anger, fear, and insecurity. Now the habits are no longer physical, but psychological. And so the drama continues passing through lower psychological complexes toward resolving more subtle psychological complexes until our meditation leads us into a more spiritual state of existence.

In tantra there is a concept called the 5 M. The “Ms” are sanskrit words that begin with M: Madya, Mamsa, Matsya, Mudra, and Maithuna. The words are for the habits of wine, meat, fish, social company, and sexuality. The idea is that the practitioner may begin practice with these habits but gradually understand the true meaning of why one is attached to such things. There is a crude as well as subtle interpretation of each M. By gradually understanding the subtle longing of a desire one can let go of the crude habit and find what one is truly desiring.

Madya is wine. The spiritual connotation is divine nectar, or amrta. It is easy to understand the desire for alcohol. Alcohol is something that some people enjoy with moderation but at the same time it is a great disease that destroys not just the lives of individuals and their families but entire societies as well. Here in Mexico the vast majority of men are alcoholics. It is amazing for me to consider this and has far reaching disastrous effects into family and cultural life. What one seeks in the bottle is Spirit, and the more one seeks it the less Spirit is actually there. Meditation gives us a true enebriation and we feel that some bio-chemical process is also triggered, however it does not leave us in a state of stupor and a compulsive desire to continue looking for such a passing, destructive pleasure. When the mind becomes purified through yoga and meditation the pineal gland becomes more active and gives one a sweet state of spiritual “intoxication.” This feeling is lasting and does not damage the liver like alcohol. The emotions are not suppressed like in drunkenness where one escapes into a temporary state of pleasure. Instead one begins to see the mind and heart from this sweet state of spiritual intoxication. The complexes and problems of life are accepted and integrated with such clarity and the state of happiness or bliss only continues to increase until it becomes infinite, or “ananda.”

A student recently wrote to me to tell me that he now often experiences states of bliss after his meditation that he likens to LSD. He has never even tried LSD but he always imagined such a state as the closest approximation to his current experiences. So many times I have had other students who said they felt like they were on mushrooms, stoned, or enebriated with alcohol. Many of them have tried these substances but after the practice of yoga left them and found higher joys. They used the analogies of tripping or being enebriated because these states are the best way to explain these “altered” states of awareness to those who cannot understand the pure and balanced joys of spiritual ideation.

When one uses an external, or “exogenous” substance to activate one’s inner neurochemistry, one is really only stimulating one’s internal “endogenous” substances like neurotransmitters, neuropeptides, and hormones. Did nature evolve the human brain over billions of years so that people could only discover their internal neurochemical states through psychedelics and alcohol? After so many centuries of materialistic thought it has become so rare that humans naturally discover these states through mysticism, aesthetics and natural, balanced living. Ignorant people argue that one should not worry about spiritual discipline when it is much easier and quicker to use a substance to achieve a mystical state of consciousness. Only superficially does this appear to be true. There are always side effects to quickly attained states of awareness. Instead of gradually fine-tuning the nervous system to cultivate these states as second nature, one instead blasts the mind with an experience that is very much different than one’s normal state of awareness. A yogi slowly accustoms the mind and body to spiritual ecstasy and so therefore maintains this state in balance and experiences it regularly. As such, the mystical state of awareness becomes permanent knowledge instead of a temporary experience. I always hear that one’s first ayahuasca or mushroom experiences are the strongest. Later, one cannot have the same depth of experience even with higher doses.

Although power plants may give one some initial insight into mysticism, these states are simply not sustainable. However, such experiences are far better than using alcohol. One who intoxicates with alcohol is in spiritual darkness. Alcohol is the crudest and most deceptive substance that human beings have discovered.

While there is always a drinker who surprises one with a degree of spiritual insight, however, I believe this speaks more to a strong character resistant to poison. How many such strong souls are there? How many have enough reserve vitality to resist the slow but certain pull into deadened consciousness, damaged organs and ruined families? Having seen so many fall, I suppose my point of view has evolved into something similar to a person who has passed through Alcoholics Anonymous and views the use of alcohol as a personal, social and spiritual disease. And living in Mexico where at least half of the men are alcoholics has only strengthened this view.

Mamsa is meat. The animal mind craves intense sensual pleasure. When we know not of subtle desires then the tongue is also crude and desires flesh. Carnivorous habits keep us bound to other compulsions as well. Vegetarians begin to feel a certain lightness in their existence and can more easily understand spiritual ideas. Mamsa’s subtle interpretation is control of speech. From a calmer and more introverted state of existence one sees more clearly the mental habits and their expressions and is able to regulate their expressions, not just with how one speaks but with how one thinks and feels.

Matsya means fish. Eating fish is the same as eating meat. However, the subtle interpretation of Matsya refers to controlling the Ida and pingula energetic currents through yoga and more specifically pranayama, the control of breath.

The Ida current is the lunar, centripetal, calm and inward current of the mind. Ida controls inner thoughts and feelings. The Pingala is the solar, centrifugal, vigorous and external current of the mind. It is more related to external actions and movements. Ida and Pingala are states for the brain and nervous system. By regulating the inward and outward currents, the vigorous and calm, the introverted and extroverted, one finds stillness. The Ida and Pingala are said to be two subtle energetic currents that twist around the central current of the Shushumna, in the very center of the spinal column. The image of the Caduceus is a western image for the Ida, Pingala, and Shushumna. Pranayama is the yogic breathing practice of alternating the respiration through the left and right nostrils. The right nostril controls the Pingala solar current while the left nostril controls the Ida lunar current. By concentrating the respiration on a point in the center of the spinal column, both Ida and Pingala merge into the central current of the Shushumna. The breathing becomes very slow and steady through Pranayama breath control until eventually it stops. One enters a state of breathlessness where the mind is completely stilled. The body enters a state of stasis with full vitality but the mind stops and one sees Spirit in a pure and calm state, like the reflection of the moon on placid waters.

Mudra means posture. In this context of the 5 Ms it refers to social company. One may remain in the company of people who enforce worldly habits or one may seek spiritual company. I have received tremendous help from the company of spiritual people. Not only does one see an example of spirituality and ask questions and receive counsel but there is also a subtle energy emanated into the environment where spiritual people gather. Regular, collective meditation helps generate such a mind field and really helps people to concentrate. For a beginner this is very important because it is so difficult to concentrate. It is as if each individual mind gets focused and together each mind is a ray of a laser that helps to break through mental barriers.

Maithuna means sexual intercourse. One does not have to renounce sexuality in order to meditate. However, the more energy that is used in sexuality the less energy one has for meditation. Therefore one should gradually reduce sexual intercourse so as to have more stamina for meditation. The so called "tantric sex" practices really do not help people with this. In most cases it is just kinkiness and wild novelty that makes people even more sexually compulsive. Meditation is about finding inner love and sexuality is deepened by meditation. Instead of desperately seeking pleasure through compulsive sexuality, one enjoys deeper, more loving experiences with sexual intercourse and simply does not have to go at it all of the time in desperate efforts for love, happiness, and meaning. When one becomes truly in love with Spirit one may even transcend sexuality. Entering into union with Spirit is spiritual intercourse and is the greatest form of ecstasy that a human being may experience.

Love is something that unites us and makes two different people feel the same, to see things with equal understanding, and even procreate a new being made in their image. If that is not mysticism, I do not know what it is. It is natural mysticism, human mysticism, the mysticism of nature (Shakti) and its creative

expressions. Perhaps it is expressed in the relative plane but the love that expresses itself here on earth comes from the same source as the love that attracts us to the absolute mysticism of the infinite consciousness, Shiva. In this relative world everything is distinct and diverse and human or natural mysticism unites everything that is separated by time, space, and person. There is more variety in this mysticism. However, in the end I find it difficult to say that it is something other than transcendental mysticism because finally it is the same source of love that pulls everyone and everything towards Itself. Human mysticism is a shared spirituality. Instead of a solitary mind seeking eternal refuge in its own solitary process, one seeks eternal union while being unified with others, and not necessarily through romantic love but with love for friends, animals, and nature.

While it is possible to express pure love and reach mystical states through maithuna, or spiritual sexuality, the most free form of maithuna union is through pure mysticism. A developed yogi expresses sexuality for producing very spiritual children or out of the most sacred connection with one's soul mate. After the evolution and full experience of this process one may become a celibate. This is quite a different process than a forced vow of celibacy. Instead of renouncing sexuality through spiritual discipline one traverses through the whole gamut of sexual evolution from physical, to emotional, to spiritual forms of union with one's sacred partner until one's only desire is to merge with pure Spirit.

Conserving the semen and seminal fluid redirects the tremendous vitality that normally goes into the biological activity of reproduction toward spiritual reproduction. Instead of being wasted through excessive sexuality the vitality nourishes the nervous and endocrine systems. A strong nervous system with all of the proper nutrients to produce adequate hormones makes the will firm. Furthermore, there is a subtle alchemical process of converting the reproductive intelligence of the organism into spiritual reproduction. The brain that is fully functional actually transmutes physical energy from the material, biological level into mental energy. In other words, the spiritual mind and brain actually has the capacity to transmute energy from one plane to another. In ayurveda and yoga this refined, transmuted energy is called "ojas." Cosmologically, this is a conversion of energy from the solid, or material, factor into the liquid, or bio-energetic, factor. "Liquid" energy is not liquid in the physical sense, but a finer form of matter similar to the concept of "chi" or "qui" in Chinese medicine. Liquid energy is a step above the physical material level as an intelligent flow of information that organizes matter into meaningful activity. With more liquid ojas one's bio-energetic field, or aura, begins to magnify. One begins to feel subtle energies more within one's body as well as perceive this energy in others and in nature.

The more one is given over to the expression of energy into the physical, sensual plane of reality, the less this conversion takes place. Therefore, excessive sexuality is dangerous in that it locks the mind into the error of seeing only the physical world and the pleasures of the physical body. The higher levels of energy are not perceivable for the sensualist and the process of physical-mental-spiritual

evolution is hampered. There are so many levels of matter beyond even the "liquid." In yoga, there are 5 levels of matter. Beyond matter is the mind and beyond mind is the spirit. The materialist and sensualist lives in the greatest illusion in that they really only perceive the "solid" material of reality without even understanding the "liquid" and other levels of subtle matter, not to mention understanding the pure mind and Spirit.

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