

## Hinduism on Sexual Intercourse when observing a “FAST”

This is a rather controversial topic with most having their own views on this topic. We shall investigate and entail below what our revered shastras say about this topic. Jai Hind

For us Hindus, the motivation behind fasting is self control. In Sanathan Dharma (hinduism) we devote special attention to the relationship to the body. Fasting is a means of exercising control over one's body. In Hinduism, fasting is a way of attaining a higher level of spirituality that is of "awakening" oneself. It is an initial step in self-discipline. Us Hindus are profoundly religious. The goal of life is self realization or attuning to the Absolute. Fasting controls passion, and checks the emotions and senses as well. Just like gold is purified by fire, so also the mind is slowly purified through repeated fasting. According to our revered shastras, fasting is a great instrument of self discipline which establishes a harmonious relationship between the body and the soul, bringing man to be in synch with the Absolute. The Sanskrit word upvas for fasting, which literally means sitting close (to God), already indicates this movement towards union with the absolute. Fasting, therefore, is the denial of the needs of the body for the spiritual gain. According to our Hindu philosophy, food means gratification of the senses, while on the other hand, to starve the senses is to elevate them to contemplation. By controlling the physical body, the emotions and the mind, one can achieve the final goal of unconditional knowledge, or liberation from the cycle of rebirth, in union with the transcendent, both on the personal as well as the impersonal level. In addition, in Hinduism, a person may fast in order to fulfil a religious vow, vrata. In this sense, fasting and abstinence lead to the attainment of religious merit, and may then be used to obtain the end for which the vow was made.

The word "Fasting" - its meaning per se can be rather variegated. In Sanskrit the word for fasting is called "Vrata" means exerting control on five "cognitive senses" (Gjnaanendriyaas) when one wishes to concentrate at the time of prayers. This is called "Dhaarana" in Yoga terminology. Fasting is observed to exert control over the craving for Rasa (taste) and celibacy (not having sex) is to exert control over the craving for Sparsam (touch) and the neuro-mucular-skin-micro vascular system. "Saadhmiya Indriya Samyogam" is Physiology - Healthy--"Asaadhmiya Samyogam" is Pathology - Detrimental to Health. Craving for sexual pleasure is just a neuro-chemical phenomenon, which one may use frugally. No one prevents one to have Non-Stop 24 hour SEX --- the question is whether one wishes to be frugal or extravagant. Of course periodic 'Fasting' has its own advantages (LDL/VLDL/HDL/TriGlycerides/etc) and indiscriminate SEX has its own disadvantages (Syphilis/Gonorrhoea/HIV/AIDS)... so I guess the CHOICE is upon the individual.

“On Dwadashi the day after Ekadashi vrata, one should give up any sexual activity” - Bhavishya-Uttara Purana.

There is not much information on this topic in our Shastras...

\*\*\* On a personal note if a couple came to me for counselling and this subject was brought up and one of the spouse is having lots of issues because lets face it its natural

“who doesn't like sex”. So if there is going to be issues with each about it then I guess for the sake of the marriage have intercourse. The adage comes in here “break the lower law (or principle) for the higher one”

#### More information on.....Sex, fasting and Hinduism

Food (in Sanskrit, anna) plays a very important role in the social and ritual life of the Hindus. Its importance is illustrated in a regular greeting at the Indian subcontinent: "Have you eaten?" is asked in the same way as people elsewhere might ask, "How are you?" Food is mentioned in our shastras like the Vedas and Upanishads. In the Taittiriya Upanishad it is stated, "Food is life, therefore one should donate food; eating is the supreme sacrifice." Us Hindus have hundreds of traditional health rules, most of them regarding food and the preparation of meals. A traditional Hindu housewife spends a large proportion of her time cooking meals. Also our religious books—such as the Dharmashastras, treat food and all that is related to eating extensively. Caste borders were sharpened by the many rules on eating, or rather not eating, together. One could argue that many of these food taboos were instigated by climatic conditions and by ideas about hygiene. Different groups and castes developed their own food rules, although there were regional differences. The Vaishnava community (which I belong to)classifies food according to the three qualities (guna) of the Samkhya philosophy: sattva food, which is pure; rajas food, which is energetic or exciting; and tamas food, which is impure. Only sattva food is allowed, which is abstinence from meat and fish, onions, garlic, and so forth.

Fasting in the sense of not eating for a specific time (upavasa), or abstaining from specific substances during certain periods, is a well-established part of all Hindu spiritual practices. In the early times it was related to tapas (ascetic practices), and it is still a major aspect of the religious practices of many of the sadhus ("holy men") in India. Also, many ordinary Indians fast on specific days during the year, either by taking no food at all or by restricting their diet. For instance, Vaishnavas fast on the eleventh day of each half of the lunar month (Ekadashi), when no grains are consumed. Before and during rituals, and also before going on a pilgrimage, fasting and abstinence from certain food items are part of the practice of Hindus.

It is all part of the concept of vrata or religious vow. A vrata can be taken during a religious festival, or a pilgrimage, and also in conjunction with pursuing some goal in life, which may include material or spiritual well-being or success in business, love, or a good job. Vratas are applied following ritually significant and meaningful patterns, depending on which deity is addressed or which goal is pursued, or on a person's station in life. Fasting and abstinence lead to the attainment of religious merit, which is then "used" to achieve the desired goal.

There is, however, also a spiritual aim: the control of the physical body as well as of emotions and the mind, which may lead eventually to the ultimate goal of unconditioned consciousness or liberation from the cycle of rebirth, in union with the transcendent (either considered personal or impersonal).

Complete fasting, in its most radical form, can be pursued until death, in which case it is called prayopavista ("one who sits down and quietly awaits the approach of death" by not eating). Suicide through starvation has been well documented in Jainism. A

person can fast for a specific period to attain some goal, thereby pressuring family or community members, as exemplified by the fasting of Mahatma Gandhi for political and humanitarian ends.

In the general practice of Hinduism, fasting and abstinence are not clearly distinguishable and are performed under the general concept of vrata or vow. The most common form of abstinence practised by Hindu communities as a whole is vegetarianism. The consumption of substances that entail the killing of a living animal—in principle this also includes eggs — is considered to create a demerit, which has to be avoided at all cost by people belonging to those communities. Many others also practice vegetarianism as a spiritual practice by personal choice, either all the time, or even just for a day or a week.

Certain other substances are also avoided when a person performs a vow, because they are known to stimulate the senses, and therefore are contrary to the goal of control over the body and the senses. In particular, onions and garlic are avoided. For some groups or individuals this restriction is followed all the time. For others these foods are only avoided on certain occasions that call for a stricter diet.

Vrata or a spiritual vow has three main branches.

The first one is called nitya, which means permanent or always. Persons undertaking this type of vow are usually seeking the grace and blessing of a particular divinity toward a particular wish or desire (such as a good job, success at exams or business, or a good marriage). Us Hindus sometimes abstain from certain foods permanently. Or, they fast completely during one day of the week or month.

The second form of vrata is called naimittika, which means occasioned by some particular cause. It pertains to people who experience remorse or repentance in connection with a sin they have committed. They practice a vow in order to be relieved from the karmic consequences of their sin.

The third type of vow is called kamya vrata, which means a vow for what one desires. This form of vow is performed in order to achieve property, popularity, wealth, or health. An example of this kind of vow is called somavrata, which involves complete abstention from food on Mondays.

Vows follow many diverse patterns, depending on which deity is beseeched for blessing, the nature of the objective, or the wish that the devotee wants to see fulfilled. Such vows can require not eating, eating less, eating only certain substances, or avoiding certain substances altogether. The choice of the days on which or the periods during which the vow is performed is regulated by the Vedic calendar.

The days of the week are ruled by the planetary deities and are also indirectly related to the main deities of Hinduism. People may choose to fast, or abstain from certain substances like meat or fish, or also from onions and garlic, on the day dedicated to the deity they are addressing with their vow. Sunday, Ravivar, is ruled by Surya, the sun, and is dedicated to the achievement of victory, as in the case of disputes and court cases, but also when starting Vedic studies or a journey. Monday, Somvar, is dedicated to Chandra, the moon, and to Lord Shiva. Fasting on Monday is directed to all general spiritual purposes. Tuesday, Mangalvar, is dedicated to Mars, and Shree Karttikeya,

Lord Shiva's son and the Deity of war. Fasting on Tuesday is directed toward victory, childbirth, and good health. Wednesday, Budhvar, belongs to Mercury. It is mostly dedicated toward education and success in business. Thursday, Brhaspativar, is dedicated to Jupiter, ruler over education and scholarship. Friday, Shukravara, is ruled by Venus. Fasting on this day is dedicated to prosperity, marriage, and a harmonious family life. Saturday, Shanivar, is ruled by Shanidev or Saturn. Fasting on Saturday will give the blessing of Saturn and longevity.

Another aspect that is important to the Vedic calendar is the phases of the moon. One pattern of fasting and abstinence, which relates to the phases of the moon, starts on new moon day, when the practitioner eats fourteen hands full of food. Then every next day one eats one handful less, until on the day of the full moon one eats nothing at all. During the waning moon one eats again one handful more each day, until the vow is completed on the next new moon day, when again fourteen hands full of food are eaten.

Generally, all kinds of vows of fasting and abstinence are practised on the occasion of the many religious festivals celebrated during the year, and also on the occasion of the Hindu rites, which are related to specific stages in life, such as birth, name-giving, first eating of solid food, puberty, the beginning of Vedic studies, marriage, and cremation.

On the other hand, certain foods are especially dedicated to certain deities. Such foods are regularly prepared at home and offered to the deity as part of certain festivals or during home worship, after which they are enjoyed by those present, and often also sent to relatives and friends. These special foods are also prepared and offered as part of the daily temple worship. After being offered to the deity, they are distributed as prashad or sanctified food among the worshippers and visitors.

One other place where fasting is given great importance within the many traditions and practices of Hinduism is in Ayurveda and Siddha medicine. According to these traditional healing methods, fasting is considered one of the great medicines. Both apply fasting for the cleansing and balancing of the physical body, as well as for the emotions and the mind. Here three kinds of fasting are distinguished: purification fasts to clean the system; healing fasts to overcome a specific disorder; and austerity fasts, which are undertaken to deny the bodily urges on the way toward liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

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