

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Perfect Society: Four Spiritual Classes

This chapter particularly describes the brahmacārī and the person in the vānaprastha stage, and it also gives a general description of the four āśramas — brahmacarya, gr̥hastha, vānaprastha and sannyāsa. In the previous chapter, the great saint Nārada Muni has described the varṇa institution of society, and now, in this chapter, he will describe the stages of spiritual advancement in the four āśramas, which are known as brahmacarya, gr̥hastha, vānaprastha and sannyāsa.

The brahmacārī should live under the care of the true spiritual master, giving him sincere respect and obeisances, acting as his menial servant, and always carrying out his order. The brahmacārī should engage himself in spiritual activities and study the Vedic literature under the direction of the spiritual master. According to the brahmacarya system, he should dress with a belt, deerskin, and matted hair and should bear a daṇḍa, waterpot and sacred thread. He should collect alms daily in the morning, and in the evening whatever alms he has collected he should offer to the spiritual master. A brahmacārī should accept prasāda upon the order of the spiritual master, and if the spiritual master sometimes forgets to order the disciple to eat, the disciple should not take prasāda on his own initiative; rather, he should fast. The brahmacārī should be trained to be satisfied with eating what is absolutely necessary, he should be very expert in executing responsibilities, he should be faithful, and he should control his senses and try to avoid the association of women as far as possible. A brahmacārī should very strictly abstain from living with women and should not meet with gr̥hasthas and those too addicted to women. Nor should a brahmacārī speak in a lonely place with a woman.

After completing one's education as a brahmacārī in this way, one should give dakṣiṇā, an offering of gratitude, to one's guru, and then one may leave for home and accept the next āśrama — the gr̥hastha-āśrama — or else one may continue in the brahmacarya-āśrama without adulteration. The duties for the gr̥hastha-āśrama and brahmacarya-āśrama, as well as the duties for sannyāsīs, are prescribed in the śāstras. A gr̥hastha is not meant to enjoy sex life without restriction. Indeed, the whole purpose of Vedic life is to become free from sexual indulgence. All the āśramas are recognized for spiritual progress, and therefore although the gr̥hastha-

āśrama gives a kind of license for sex life for a certain time, it does not allow unrestricted sex life. Therefore, in gr̥hastha life also, there is no illicit sex. A gr̥hastha should not accept a woman for sexual enjoyment. Wasting semen is also illicit sex.

After the gr̥hastha-āśrama is another āśrama, known as vānaprastha, which is midway between gr̥hastha and sannyāsa. A person in the vānaprastha order is restricted in eating food grains and forbidden to eat fruits that have not ripened on the tree. Nor should he cook food with fire, although he is allowed to eat caru, grains that have been offered in a sacrificial fire. He may also eat fruits and grains that have grown naturally. Living in a thatched cottage, the vānaprastha should endure all kinds of heat and cold. He should not cut his nails or hair, and he should give up cleaning his body and teeth. He should wear tree bark, accept a daṇḍa, and practice life in the forest, taking a vow to live there for twelve years, eight years, four years, two years or at least one year. At last, when because of old age he can no longer perform the activities of a vānaprastha, he should gradually stop everything and in this way give up his body.

Text 1:

Nārada Muni said: A student should practice completely controlling his senses. He should be submissive and should have an attitude of firm friendship for the spiritual master. With a great vow, the brahmacārī should live at the gurukula, only for the benefit of the guru.

Text 2:

At both junctions of day and night, namely, in the early morning and in the evening, he should be fully absorbed in thoughts of the spiritual master, fire, the sun-god and Lord Viṣṇu and by chanting the Gāyatrī mantra he should worship them.

Text 3:

Being called by the spiritual master, the student should study the Vedic mantras regularly. Every day, before beginning his studies and at the end of his studies, the disciple should respectfully offer obeisances unto the spiritual master.

Text 4:

Carrying pure kuśa grass in his hand, the brahmacārī should dress regularly with a belt of straw and with deerskin garments. He should wear matted hair, carry a rod and waterpot and be decorated with a sacred thread, as recommended in the śāstras.

Text 5:

The brahmacārī should go out morning and evening to collect alms, and he should offer all that he collects to the spiritual master. He should eat only if ordered to take food by the spiritual master; otherwise, if the spiritual master does not give this order, he may sometimes have to fast.

Text 6:

A brahmacārī should be quite well-behaved and gentle and should not eat or collect more than necessary. He must always be active and expert, fully believing in the instructions of the spiritual master and the śāstra. Fully controlling his senses, he should associate only as much as necessary with women or those controlled by women.

Text 7:

A brahmacārī, or one who has not accepted the gr̥hastha-āśrama [family life], must rigidly avoid talking with women or about women, for the senses are so powerful that they may agitate even the mind of a sannyāsī, a member of the renounced order of life.

Text 8:

If the wife of the spiritual master is young, a young brahmacārī should not allow her to care for his hair, massage his body with oil, or bathe him with affection like a mother.

Text 9:

Woman is compared to fire, and man is compared to a butter pot. Therefore a man should avoid associating even with his own daughter in a secluded place. Similarly, he should also avoid association with other women. One should associate with women only for important business and not otherwise.

Text 10:

As long as a living entity is not completely self-realized — as long as he is not independent of the misconception of identifying with his body,

which is nothing but a reflection of the original body and senses — he cannot be relieved of the conception of duality, which is epitomized by the duality between man and woman. Thus there is every chance that he will fall down because his intelligence is bewildered.

Text 11:

All the rules and regulations apply equally to the householder and the sannyāsī, the member of the renounced order of life. The gr̥hastha, however, is given permission by the spiritual master to indulge in sex during the period favorable for procreation.

Text 12:

Brahmacārīs or gr̥hasthas who have taken the vow of celibacy as described above should not indulge in the following: applying powder or ointment to the eyes, massaging the head with oil, massaging the body with the hands, seeing a woman or painting a woman's picture, eating meat, drinking wine, decorating the body with flower garlands, smearing scented ointment on the body, or decorating the body with ornaments. These they should give up.

Texts 13-14:

According to the rules and regulations mentioned above, one who is twice-born, namely a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya or vaiśya, should reside in the gurukula under the care of the spiritual master. There he should study and learn all the Vedic literatures along with their supplements and the Upaniṣads, according to his ability and power to study. If possible, the student or disciple should reward the spiritual master with the remuneration the spiritual master requests, and then, following the master's order, the disciple should leave and accept one of the other āśramas, namely the gr̥hastha-āśrama, vānaprastha-āśrama or sannyāsa-āśrama, as he desires.

Text 15:

One should realize that in the fire, in the spiritual master, in one's self and in all living entities — in all circumstances and conditions — the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Viṣṇu, has simultaneously entered and not entered. He is situated externally and internally as the full controller of everything.

Text 16:

By practicing in this way, whether one be in the brahmacārī-āśrama, gr̥hastha-āśrama, vānaprastha-āśrama or sannyāsa-āśrama, one must always realize the all-pervading presence of the Supreme Lord, for in this way it is possible to understand the Absolute Truth.

Text 17:

O King, I shall now describe the qualifications for a vānaprastha, one who has retired from family life. By rigidly following the rules and regulations for the vānaprastha, one can easily be elevated to the upper planetary system known as Maharloka.

Text 18:

A person in vānaprastha life should not eat grains grown by tilling of the fields. He should also not eat grains that have grown without tilling of the field but are not fully ripe. Nor should a vānaprastha eat grains cooked in fire. Indeed, he should eat only fruit ripened by the sunshine.

Text 19:

A vānaprastha should prepare cakes to be offered in sacrifice from fruits and grains grown naturally in the forest. When he obtains some new grains, he should give up his old stock of grains.

Text 20:

A vānaprastha should prepare a thatched cottage or take shelter of a cave in a mountain only to keep the sacred fire, but he should personally practice enduring snowfall, wind, fire, rain and the shining of the sun.

Text 21:

The vānaprastha should wear matted locks of hair on his head and let his body hair, nails and moustache grow. He should not cleanse his body of dirt. He should keep a waterpot, deerskin and rod, wear the bark of a tree as a covering, and use garments colored like fire.

Text 22:

Being very thoughtful, a vānaprastha should remain in the forest for twelve years, eight years, four years, two years or at least one year. He should behave in such a way that he will not be disturbed or troubled by too much austerity.

Text 23:

When because of disease or old age one is unable to perform his prescribed duties for advancement in spiritual consciousness or study of the Vedas, he should practice fasting, not taking any food.

Text 24:

He should properly place the fire element in his own self and in this way give up bodily affinity, by which one thinks the body to be one's self or one's own. One should gradually merge the material body into the five elements [earth, water, fire, air and sky].

Text 25:

A sober, self-realized person who has full knowledge should merge the various parts of the body in their original sources. The holes in the body are caused by the sky, the process of breathing is caused by the air, the heat of the body is caused by fire, and semen, blood and mucus are caused by water. The hard substances, like skin, muscle and bone, are caused by earth. In this way all the constituents of the body are caused by various elements, and they should be merged again into those elements.

Texts 26-28:

Thereafter, the object of speech, along with the sense of speech [the tongue], should be bestowed upon fire. Craftsmanship and the two hands should be given to the demigod Indra. The power of movement and the legs should be given to Lord Viṣṇu. Sensual pleasure, along with the genitals, should be bestowed upon Prajāpati. The rectum, with the power of evacuation, should be bestowed, in its proper place, unto Mṛtyu. The aural instrument, along with sound vibration, should be given to the deities presiding over the directions. The instrument of touch, along with the sense objects of touch, should be given to Vāyu. Form, with the power of sight, should be bestowed upon the sun. The tongue, along with the demigod Varuṇa, should be bestowed upon water, and the power of smell, along with the two Aśvinī-kumāra demigods, should be bestowed upon the earth.

Texts 29-30:

The mind, along with all material desires, should be merged in the moon demigod. All the subject matters of intelligence, along with the intelligence

itself, should be placed in Lord Brahmā. False ego, which is under the influence of the material modes of nature and which induces one to think, “I am this body, and everything connected with this body is mine,” should be merged, along with material activities, in Rudra, the predominating deity of false ego. Material consciousness, along with the goal of thought, should be merged in the individual living being, and the demigods acting under the modes of material nature should be merged, along with the perverted living being, into the Supreme Being. The earth should be merged in water, water in the brightness of the sun, this brightness into the air, the air into the sky, the sky into the false ego, the false ego into the total material energy, the total material energy into the unmanifested ingredients [the *pradhāna* feature of the material energy], and at last the ingredient feature of material manifestation into the Supersoul.

Text 31:

When all the material designations have thus merged into their respective material elements, the living beings, who are all ultimately completely spiritual, being one in quality with the Supreme Being, should cease from material existence, as flames cease when the wood in which they are burning is consumed. When the material body is returned to its various material elements, only the spiritual being remains. This spiritual being is Brahman and is equal in quality with Parabrahman.