

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Perfect Society: Four Social Classes

This chapter describes the general principles by following which a human being, and specifically one who is interested in advancing in spiritual life, can become perfect.

By hearing about the characteristics of Prahlāda Mahārāja, Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira became extremely pleased. Now he inquired from Nārada Muni about the actual religion of a human being and about special characteristics of varṇāśrama-dharma, which marks the highest status of human civilization. When Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira asked Nārada Muni about these matters, Nārada Muni stopped giving his own statements and quoted statements by Lord Nārāyaṇa, for He is the supreme authority for giving religious codes (dharmaṁ tu sākṣād bhagavat-praṇītam). Every human being is expected to acquire thirty qualities, such as truthfulness, mercy and austerity. The process of following the principles of religion is known as sanātana-dharma, the eternal religious system.

The varṇāśrama system delineates the divisions of brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya and śūdra. It also sets forth the system of saṁskāras. The garbhādhāna saṁskāra, the ceremony for begetting a child, must be observed by the higher section of people, namely the dvijas. One who follows the garbhādhāna saṁskāra system is actually twice-born, but those who do not, who deviate from the principles of varṇāśrama-dharma, are called dvija-bandhus. The principal occupations for a brāhmaṇa are worshiping the Deity, teaching others how to worship the Deity, studying the Vedic literatures, teaching the Vedic literatures, accepting charity from others and again giving charity to others. A brāhmaṇa should make his livelihood from these six occupational duties. The duty of a kṣatriya is to give protection to the citizens and levy taxes upon them, but he is forbidden to tax the brāhmaṇas. The members of the Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement should therefore be exempt from government taxation. Kṣatriyas may tax everyone but the brāhmaṇas. Vaiśyas should cultivate the land, produce food grains and protect the cows, whereas the śūdras, who by quality never become brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas or vaiśyas, should serve the three higher classes and be satisfied. Other means of livelihood are also prescribed for the brāhmaṇas, and these are four — śālīna,

yāyāvāra, śīla, and uñchana. Each of these occupational duties is successively better.

One who is in a lower grade of social life cannot accept the profession of a higher class unless necessary. In times of emergency, all the classes but the kṣatriyas may accept professional duties of others. The means of livelihood known as ṛta (śīloñchana), amṛta (ayācita), mṛta (yācñā), pramṛta (karṣaṇa), and satyānṛta (vāñijya) may be accepted by everyone but the kṣatriyas. For a brāhmaṇa or a kṣatriya, engaging in the service of the vaiśyas or śūdras is considered the profession of dogs.

Nārada Muni also described that the symptom of a brāhmaṇa is controlled senses, the symptoms of a kṣatriya are power and fame, the symptom of a vaiśya is service to the brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas, and the symptom of a śūdra is service to the three higher classes. The qualification for a woman is to be a very faithful and chaste wife. In this way, Nārada Muni described the characteristics of higher and lower grades of people and recommended that one follow the principles of his caste or his hereditary occupation. One cannot suddenly give up a profession to which he is accustomed, and therefore it is recommended that one gradually be awakened. The symptoms of brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas, vaiśyas, and śūdras are very important, and therefore one should be designated only by these symptoms, and not by birth. Designation by birth is strictly forbidden by Nārada Muni and all great personalities.

Text 1:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued: After hearing about the activities and character of Prahlāda Mahārāja, which are adored and discussed among great personalities like Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva, Yudhiṣṭhira Mahārāja, the most respectful king among exalted personalities, again inquired from the great saint Nārada Muni in a mood of great pleasure.

Text 2:

Mahārāja Yudhiṣṭhira said: My dear lord, I wish to hear from you about the principles of religion by which one can attain the ultimate goal of life — devotional service. I wish to hear about the general occupational duties of human society and the system of social and spiritual advancement known as varṇāśrama-dharma.

Text 3:

O best of the brāhmaṇas, you are directly the son of Prajāpati [Lord Brahmā]. Because of your austerities, mystic yoga and trance, you are considered the best of all of Lord Brahmā's sons.

Text 4:

No one is superior to you in peaceful life and mercy, and no one knows better than you how to execute devotional service or how to become the best of the brāhmaṇas. Therefore, you know all the principles of confidential religious life, and no one knows them better than you.

Text 5:

Śrī Nārada Muni said: After first offering my obeisances unto Lord Kṛṣṇa, the protector of the religious principles of all living entities, let me explain the principles of the eternal religious system, of which I have heard from the mouth of Nārāyaṇa.

Text 6:

Lord Nārāyaṇa, along with His partial manifestation Nara, appeared in this world through the daughter of Dakṣa Mahārāja known as Mūrti. He was begotten by Dharma Mahārāja for the benefit of all living entities. Even now, He is still engaged in executing great austerities near the place known as Badarikāśrama.

Text 7:

The Supreme Being, the Personality of Godhead, is the essence of all Vedic knowledge, the root of all religious principles, and the memory of great authorities. O King Yudhiṣṭhira, this principle of religion is to be understood as evidence. On the basis of this religious principle, everything is satisfied, including one's mind, soul and even one's body.

Texts 8-12:

These are the general principles to be followed by all human beings: truthfulness, mercy, austerity (observing fasts on certain days of the month), bathing twice a day, tolerance, discrimination between right and wrong, control of the mind, control of the senses, nonviolence, celibacy, charity, reading of scripture, simplicity, satisfaction, rendering service to saintly persons, gradually taking leave of unnecessary engagements, observing the futility of the unnecessary activities of human society,

remaining silent and grave and avoiding unnecessary talk, considering whether one is the body or the soul, distributing food equally to all living entities (both men and animals), seeing every soul (especially in the human form) as a part of the Supreme Lord, hearing about the activities and instructions given by the Supreme Personality of Godhead (who is the shelter of the saintly persons), chanting about these activities and instructions, always remembering these activities and instructions, trying to render service, performing worship, offering obeisances, becoming a servant, becoming a friend, and surrendering one's whole self. O King Yudhiṣṭhira, these thirty qualifications must be acquired in the human form of life. Simply by acquiring these qualifications, one can satisfy the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Text 13:

Those who have been reformed by the garbhādhāna ceremony and other prescribed reformatory methods, performed with Vedic mantras and without interruption, and who have been approved by Lord Brahmā, are dvijas, or twice-born. Such brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas and vaiśyas, purified by their family traditions and by their behavior, should worship the Lord, study the Vedas and give charity. In this system, they should follow the principles of the four āśramas [brahmacarya, gṛhastha, vānaprastha and sannyāsa].

Text 14:

For a brāhmaṇa there are six occupational duties. A kṣatriya should not accept charity, but he may perform the other five of these duties. A king or kṣatriya is not allowed to levy taxes on brāhmaṇas, but he may make his livelihood by levying minimal taxes, customs duties, and penalty fines upon his other subjects.

Text 15:

The mercantile community should always follow the directions of the brāhmaṇas and engage in such occupational duties as agriculture, trade, and protection of cows. For the śūdras the only duty is to accept a master from a higher social order and engage in his service.

Text 16:

As an alternative, a brāhmaṇa may also take to the vaiśya's occupational duty of agriculture, cow protection, or trade. He may depend on that which

he has received without begging, he may beg in the paddy field every day, he may collect paddy left in a field by its proprietor, or he may collect food grains left here and there in the shops of grain dealers. These are four means of livelihood that may also be adopted by brāhmaṇas. Among these four, each of them in succession is better than the one preceding it.

Text 17:

Except in a time of emergency, lower persons should not accept the occupational duties of those who are higher. When there is such an emergency, of course, everyone but the kṣatriya may accept the means of livelihood of others.

Texts 18-20:

In time of emergency, one may accept any of the various types of professions known as ṛta, amṛta, mṛta, pramṛta and satyānṛta, but one should not at any time accept the profession of a dog. The profession of uñchaśila, collecting grains from the field, is called ṛta. Collecting without begging is called amṛta, begging grains is called mṛta, tilling the ground is called pramṛta, and trade is called satyānṛta. Engaging in the service of low-grade persons, however, is called śva-vṛtti, the profession of the dogs. Specifically, brāhmaṇas and kṣatriyas should not engage in the low and abominable service of śūdras. Brāhmaṇas should be well acquainted with all the Vedic knowledge, and kṣatriyas should be well acquainted with the worship of demigods.

Text 21:

The symptoms of a brāhmaṇa are control of the mind, control of the senses, austerity and penance, cleanliness, satisfaction, forgiveness, simplicity, knowledge, mercy, truthfulness, and complete surrender to the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

Text 22:

To be influential in battle, unconquerable, patient, challenging and charitable, to control the bodily necessities, to be forgiving, to be attached to the brahminical nature and to be always jolly and truthful — these are the symptoms of the kṣatriya.

Text 23:

Being always devoted to the demigods, the spiritual master and the Supreme Lord, Viṣṇu; endeavoring for advancement in religious principles, economic development and sense gratification [dharma, artha and kāma]; believing in the words of the spiritual master and scripture; and always endeavoring with expertise in earning money — these are the symptoms of the vaiśya.

Text 24:

Offering obeisances to the higher sections of society [the brāhmaṇas, kṣatriyas and vaiśyas], being always very clean, being free from duplicity, serving one's master, performing sacrifices without uttering mantras, not stealing, always speaking the truth and giving all protection to the cows and brāhmaṇas — these are the symptoms of the śūdra.

Text 25:

To render service to the husband, to be always favorably disposed toward the husband, to be equally well disposed toward the husband's relatives and friends, and to follow the vows of the husband — these are the four principles to be followed by women described as chaste.

Texts 26-27:

A chaste woman must dress nicely and decorate herself with golden ornaments for the pleasure of her husband. Always wearing clean and attractive garments, she should sweep and clean the household with water and other liquids so that the entire house is always pure and clean. She should collect the household paraphernalia and keep the house always aromatic with incense and flowers and must be ready to execute the desires of her husband. Being modest and truthful, controlling her senses, and speaking in sweet words, a chaste woman should engage in the service of her husband with love, according to time and circumstances.

Text 28:

A chaste woman should not be greedy, but satisfied in all circumstances. She must be very expert in handling household affairs and should be fully conversant with religious principles. She should speak pleasingly and truthfully and should be very careful and always clean and pure. Thus a chaste woman should engage with affection in the service of a husband who is not fallen.

Text 29:

The woman who engages in the service of her husband, following strictly in the footsteps of the goddess of fortune, surely returns home, back to Godhead, with her devotee husband, and lives very happily in the Vaikuṇṭha planets.

Text 30:

Among the mixed classes known as saṅkara, those who are not thieves are known as antevasāyī or caṇḍālas [dog-eaters], and they also have their hereditary customs.

Text 31:

My dear King, brāhmaṇas well conversant in Vedic knowledge have given their verdict that in every age [yuga] the conduct of different sections of people according to their material modes of nature is auspicious both in this life and after death.

Text 32:

If one acts in his profession according to his position in the modes of nature and gradually gives up these activities, he attains the niṣkāma stage.

Texts 33-34:

My dear King, if an agricultural field is cultivated again and again, the power of its production decreases, and whatever seeds are sown there are lost. Just as drops of ghee on a fire never extinguish the fire but a flood of ghee will, similarly, overindulgence in lusty desires mitigates such desires entirely.

Text 35:

If one shows the symptoms of being a brāhmaṇa, kṣatriya, vaiśya or śūdra, as described above, even if he has appeared in a different class, he should be accepted according to those symptoms of classification.