

Vaanaprastha

After being a householder and experiencing the sorrow, happiness and joy and learning the true significance of all these, man has to retire into the forest, when he reaches the age of 45 or 50, leaving the house he has built and the place where he lived. If his wife is alive then, he has to take her consent and entrust her to the care of the son or her parents or take her also with him and treat her like a brother, himself being immersed in *Brahmacharya*. There is a great change even in diet. He has to eat roots and fruits and drink only milk. Things should not be baked full but only up to a third. Rice should not be used much. If it is not possible to arrange diet for oneself on these lines, he can visit the village near by and collect food by begging. But he has to bring the food into the forest and eat it there, in his own habitation. He has to give to his dependants the same food that he takes, for they

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cannot prepare food they prefer, or get it supplied. If they do not relish it, they have to be content with milk and fruits only, for he must not change his routine for satisfying others. However troublesome it may be, the discipline should not be modified, or given up. This is to be specially noted. He cannot have any worship, or alms giving or any such duties. Even if he gives food or articles to others, it cannot be regarded as alms or Dana. He cannot also receive as Dana anything from others. He must have the same pure Love towards all in equal measure. Discarding old clothes once a year, he must don new clothes, in the Aswija month. The *Chandrayanavrath* is the most important of the Vanaprastha vrathas (vows). During that month, he must eat for the first fifteen days, every day a morsel less and for the remaining fifteen, a morsel more every day. He has to take only conjee on the New and Full Moon days. In the rainy season, he must do Thapas standing in the rain. In winter, he must wear wet clothes while engaged in Thapas. Performing such asceticism systematically, he has to bathe three times a day. The various Upanishadic statements are to be studied, their meanings understood and experienced. If such a Vanaprastha falls victim to any disease, the diet routine has to be cancelled and he has to live on air and water. He shall walk on and on, in the north-eastern direction until he dies. On the other hand, if he has no bodily disease and if he is hale and hearty, he will experience, after he has adopted the above disciplines, the spontaneous Dawn of True Knowledge. By means of this Knowledge, he will attain *Moksha* (liberation).

Many argue how can this discipline result in the Dawn of Knowledge? Are these not mere bodily limitations, they ask. Knowledge can arise only by the realisation of the Principle. How can something that does not contain the Principle which guarantees self-realisation be called Knowledge, they argue. But this is based on a big mistake. Through these physical regulations, Vasanas or traits are destroyed and concentration is established. The Upanishadic statements serve to foster and strengthen this one-pointedness, step by step, the experience of the Upanishadic *vakyas* (word) alone will bring about the Dawn of Knowledge. Are not Upanishads the very Knowledge itself? With that *Jnanaswarupa* (Embodiment of wisdom) as companion, realising It in one's own experience, what need is there to search for Knowledge elsewhere? To establish Jnana firmly in the heart, one-pointedness is essential, and this can easily be gained by the above-mentioned bodily disciplines and Thapas. External control helps internal control in many ways. To succeed in external controls is by comparison more difficult than to achieve success in controlling the internal! A turn of the steering wheel in one's hand in any direction makes the wheels of the car, which are not in one's hand, move in the same direction. The wheels will not turn in another direction, when the steering is turned in one. The introspective wheels are based on the extrospective steering itself!

It is the natural basis. Sometimes, when the steering is turned one way, the wheels may drag another way, but this

is due to the giving up of the natural characteristic. The internal wheels, if they have no air, which is the true essence, may behave as if there is no relationship with the steering. But they cannot go beyond the bounds of steering. The steering in the hand is related to the wheels below. If there is no such relation, the journey becomes impossible. The connection is inevitable. Therefore, for him who has struggled with the external tendencies and conquered them, the internal tendencies become easily controllable. The external tendencies have name and form and are attracted by becoming objects of experience. So, to overcome them is a matter of some difficulty. But internal tendencies have no form, though they may be endowed with name. They are also experienced as Ananda; and so, they can be overcome more easily. They can be tamed with greater ease. The bother is more for external conduct and behaviour. These are associated with taste, form and heaviness. The internal tendencies have no form, taste or weight. Pure water has no form or taste or heaviness. Impure water is different in all these respects. So, to purify impure water is indeed difficult; but pure water can be given any form required, with very great ease.

Similarly, the difficulty is all about purifying the mental behaviour, which is spoiled by the delusions of the world. There is no need to set right the mental behaviour which is free from such delusions. Delusionless behaviour is necessarily pure. It is without any trace of defect and doubt. Why should such be set right? Therefore, if men first control

and conquer the external delusion, as much as possible, the internal tendencies will easily move in the direction of *Atmananda*. Yoga and thapas are only others names for the path of the control and conquest of these external tendencies and delusions. The rules of Vaanaprastha are but methods to succeed in this Yoga or thapas. When man subdues delusion of all types in the Vaanaprastha stage, the journey ends in Moksha. But we cannot say that Moksha has only this one path. Through whatever path Grace is obtained, that Path may be chosen. Liberation is achieved by these rules and observances of Vaanaprastha and it can be secured by following this Path. It also makes a man delusion free. It gives him one-pointedness.

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