

52. The course of life of a forest dweller

After being a householder —experiencing the sorrow, happiness, and joy and learning the true significance of all these— one has to retire into the forest at the age of 45 or 50, leaving the house one built and the place where one lived. If his wife is alive, he has to get her consent and entrust her to the care of the son or her parents or take her with him and treat her like a brother, himself being immersed in celibacy (*brahma-charya*).

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 isn't possible to arrange a diet on these lines, he can visit the nearby village 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 dependents the same food that he takes, for they can't prepare food they prefer or get it supplied. If they don't relish it, they have to be content with only milk and fruits, for he must not change his routine to satisfy others. However troublesome it may be, the discipline should not be modified or given up.

This is to be specially noted: the forest dweller cannot have any worship, alms-giving, or any such duties. Even if he gives food or articles to others, it cannot be regarded as alms (*dana*). Also, he cannot receive anything from others as alms. He must have the same pure love toward all in equal measure. Discarding old clothes once a year, he must don new clothes during September-October (the month of *Aswija*).

The vows of penance during the waxing and waning of the moon (*chandrayana-vratha*) is the most important of the forest-dweller's vows. For the first fifteen days of this month, he must eat a morsel less every day, and for the remaining fifteen, a morsel more. On the new and full moon days, he has to take only rice gruel (*kanjee*). In the rainy season, he must do ascetic practice (*tapas*) standing in the rain; in winter, he must wear wet clothes while engaged in ascetic practices. Performing such asceticism systematically, he has to bathe three times a day. The various *Upanishadic* statements are to be studied and their meanings understood and experienced. If such a forest-dweller falls victim to any disease, the diet routine has to be canceled and he has to live on air and water. He shall walk on and on in the northeastern direction until he dies. On the other hand, if he has no bodily disease and is hale and hearty, after adopting the above disciplines, he will experience the spontaneous dawn of true knowledge. By means of this knowledge, he will attain liberation (*moksha*).