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LIFE OF A SANNYĀSĪ

Srīla Narada Muni

Srī Narada Muni said: A person able to cultivate spiritual knowledge should renounce all material connections, and merely keeping the body inhabitable, he should travel from one place to another, passing only one night in each village. In this way, without dependence in regard to the needs of the body, the *sannyāsī* should travel all over the world. A person in the renounced order of life may try to avoid even cloth to cover himself. If he wears anything at all, it should be only a loincloth, and when there is no necessity, a *sannyāsī* should not even accept a *daṇḍa*. A *sannyāsī* should avoid carrying anything but a *daṇḍa* and *kamaṇḍalu*. The *sannyāsī*, completely satisfied in the self, should live on alms begged from door to door. Not being dependent on any person or any place, he should always be a friendly well-wisher to all living beings and be a peaceful, unalloyed devotee of Narayana. In this way he should move from one place to another.

The *sannyāsī* should always try to see the Supreme pervading everything and see everything, including this universe, resting on the Supreme. During unconsciousness and consciousness, and between the two, he should try to understand the self and be fully situated in the self. In

this way, he should realize that the conditional and liberated stages of life are only illusory and not actually factual. With such a higher understanding, he should see only the Absolute Truth pervading everything.

Since the material body is sure to be vanquished and the duration of one's life is not fixed, neither death nor life is to be praised. Rather, one should observe the eternal time factor, in which the living entity manifests himself and disappears. Literature without spiritual benefit should be rejected. One should not become a professional teacher as a means of earning one's livelihood, nor should one indulge in arguments and counter arguments. Nor should one take shelter of any cause or faction. A *sannyāsī* must not present allurements of material benefits to gather many disciples, nor should he unnecessarily read many books or give discourses as a means of livelihood. He must never attempt to increase his material opulence unnecessarily.

A peaceful, equipoised person who is factually advanced in spiritual consciousness does not need to accept the symbols of a *sannyāsī*, such as the *tridaṇḍa* and *kamaṇḍalu*. According to necessity, he may sometimes accept those symbols and sometimes reject them. Although a saintly person may not reveal himself to the public, by his behavior his purpose is disclosed. To human society he should present himself like

a restless child, and although he is the greatest thoughtful orator, he should present himself like a dumb man.

As a historical example of this, learned sages recite the story of an ancient discussion between Prahlad Maharaja and a great saintly person who was carrying himself like a python. Prahlad Maharaja, the most dear servitor of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, once went out touring the world with some of his confidential associates. His purpose was to study the nature of saintly persons. Thus he arrived at the bank of the Kaveri, where there was a mountain known as Sahya. There he found a great saintly person who was lying on the ground, covered with dirt and dust, but who was deeply spiritually advanced. Neither by that saintly person's activities, by his bodily features, by his words nor by the symptoms of his *varṇāśrama* status could people understand whether he was the same person they had known. The advanced devotee Prahlad Maharaja duly worshiped and offered obeisance to the saintly person who had adopted the means of livelihood of a python. After thus worshiping the saintly person and touching his head to the saint's lotus feet, Prahlad Maharaja, in order to understand him, inquired very submissively as follows.

Seeing the saintly person to be quite fat, Prahlad Maharaja said: My dear sir, you undergo no endeavor to earn your livelihood, but you have a stout body, exactly like that of a materialistic enjoyer. I know that if one is very rich and has nothing to do, he becomes extremely fat by eating and sleeping and performing no work. O *brāhmaṇa*, fully in knowledge of transcendence, you have nothing to do, and therefore you are lying down. It is also understood that you have no facility for sensory enjoyment. How then has your body become so fat? Under the circumstances, if you do not consider my question impudent, kindly explain how this has happened.

Your Honour appears learned, expert and intelligent in every way. You can speak very well, saying things that are pleasing to the heart. You see that people everywhere are busily engaged in fruitive activities, yet you are lying here inactive. This is very puzzling to us. Kindly explain why you behave as such.

When the saintly person was thus questioned by the King of the *Daityas*, Prahlad Maharaja, he was captivated by this shower of nectarine words, and he replied to the inquisitiveness of Prahlad Maharaja with a smiling face. The saintly *brāhmaṇa* said: O best of the *asuras*, who are recognized by advanced and civilized men, my dear Prahlad Maharaja, you are aware of the different stages of life because of your inherent transcendental eyes, with which you can see a man's character and thus know clearly the results of his acceptance and rejection of things as they are. Narayana, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, who is endowed with all plenitudes, presides within the core of your heart because of your being a pure devotee. He always dispels all darkness of ignorance, as the sun drives away the darkness of the universe.

My dear King, although you know everything, you have posed some questions, which I shall try to answer according to what I have learned by hearing from authorities. I cannot remain silent in this regard, for a personality like you is just fit to be spoken to by one who desires self-purification. My history is that because of insatiable desires, I was being carried away by the waves of material nature, and thus I was engaging in different activities, struggling for existence in various forms of life. In the course of the progressive transmigratory process through the various species, which is caused by fruitive activities meant for lowly material sense gratification, I have now received this human form of life, which can lead to the heavenly planets, to liberation, to the lower species, or to rebirth among human beings.

In this human form of life, men and women unite for the sensual pleasure of sexual intercourse, but by actual experience we have observed that none of them are happy. Therefore, seeing the contrary results, I have stopped taking part in materialistic activities. The true mode of living for we living entities is one of spiritual happiness, which is real happiness. This happiness can only be achieved when one stops all materialistic activities. Material sense enjoyment is simply an illusion imagined within the mind. Therefore, after sufficient contemplation on this subject matter, I have voluntarily ceased from all material activities and am lying down here.



The conditioned soul living within the body forgets his self interest because he identifies himself with the body. Due to the body which is material, his natural tendency is to be attracted by the varieties of objects in the material world. Thus the living entity suffers the miseries of material existence like desire and hatred. Just as a deer, because of ignorance, cannot see the water within a well-covered by grass, but runs after water elsewhere, the living entity covered by the material body does not see the happiness within himself, but runs after happiness in the external world. The living entity tries to achieve happiness and rid himself of the causes of distress, but because the various bodies of the living entities are under the full control of material nature, all his plans, formed in different bodies, are ultimately baffled, one after another. Materialistic activities are always mixed with three kinds of miserable conditions known as *ādhyātmika*, *ādhidaiivika* and *ādhibhautika*. Therefore, even if one achieves some success by performing such activities, what is the benefit of this success? One is still subjected to birth, death, old age, disease and the reactions of his fruitive activities.

The prostrated *brāhmaṇa* continued: I am actually seeing how a rich man, a victim of his powerful senses, is very greedy to accumulate wealth, and therefore suffers from insomnia due to fear from all sides, despite his wealth and opulence. Those who are considered materially powerful and rich are always full of anxiety because of governmental laws, thieves and rogues, enemies, family members, animals, birds, persons seeking charity, the inevitable time factor and even their own selves. Thus they are invariably afraid.

Those in human society who are actually intelligent should give up the original cause of lamentation, illusion, fear, anger, attachment, poverty and pointless labour. The original cause of all of these is the desire for valueless prestige and money. The bee and the python are two excellent teachers who give us exemplary instructions regarding how to be satisfied by collecting only a little and how to stay in one place and not move. From the bumblebee I have learned to be unattached to accumulating money, for although

money is as good as honey, anyone can kill its owner and take it away. I do not endeavor to get anything but am satisfied with whatever is achieved in its own way. If I do not get anything, I am patient and unagitated like a python and lie down in this way for many days.

Sometimes I eat a very small quantity and sometimes a great quantity. Sometimes the food is very palatable, and sometimes it is stale. Sometimes sanctified foodstuff (*Prasād*) is offered with great respect, and sometimes ordinary food is neglectfully given. Sometimes I eat during the day and sometimes at night. Thus I eat what is easily available.

To cover my body I use whatever is available according to my destiny, whether it be linen, silk, cotton, bark or deerskin, and I am fully satisfied and unagitated. Sometimes I lie on the bare earth, sometimes on leaves, grass or stone, sometimes on a pile of ashes, or sometimes, by the will of others, in a palace on a first-class bed with pillows.

O my lord, sometimes I bathe myself thoroughly, apply sandalwood pulp all over my body, put on a flower garland, and dress in fine garments and ornaments. Then I travel like a king on the back of an elephant or on a chariot or horse. Sometimes, however, I travel naked, like a person haunted by a ghost. Different people are of different mentalities. Therefore it is not my business either to praise them or to blame them. I only desire their welfare, hoping that they will agree to become one in purpose with the Supersoul, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Krishna.

The mental concoction of discrimination between good and bad should be accepted as one unit and then invested in the mind, which should then be invested in the false ego. The false ego should be invested in the total material energy. This is the process of fighting false discrimination. A learned, thoughtful person must realize that material existence is illusion. This is possible only by self-realization. A self-realized person, who has actually seen the truth, should retire from all material activities, being situated in self-realization. Prahlad Maharaja, you are certainly a self-realized soul and a devotee of the Supreme Lord. You do not care for public opinion or the so-called scriptures offering ma-



terial rewards. For this reason I have described to you without hesitation the history of my self-realization.

After Prahlad Maharaja, the King of the demons, heard these instructions from the saint, he understood the occupational duties of a perfect person [*paramahansa*]. Thus he duly worshiped the saint, took his permission and then left to return to his home.

— *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (Bhāgavata Purāṇa) » Canto 7: The Science of God » Chapter Thirteen » Verse: 1-16.*

FOUR STAGES OF THE RENOUNCED ORDER OF LIFE

His Divine Grace

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

There are four stages of the renounced order of life—*kuṭīcaka*, *bahūdaka*, *parivrājakācārya* and *paramahansa*. Herein, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* considers the *paramahansa* among the *sannyāsī*. The *Mayavadi* impersonalist *sannyāsī* cannot attain the *paramahansa* stage. This is because of their impersonal conception of the Absolute Truth. *Brahmeti paramātmēti bhagavān iti śabdīyate* [*Bhāg* 1.2.11]. The Absolute Truth is perceived in three stages, of which *bhagavān*, or realization of the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is meant for the *paramahansa*. Indeed, *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* itself is meant for the *paramahansa* (*paramo nirmatsarāṇām* [*Bhāg* 1.1.2]). Unless one is in the *paramahansi-*

sa stage, he is not eligible to understand the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. For *paramahansa*, or *sannyāsī* in the Vaisnava order, preaching is the first duty. To preach, such *sannyāsī* may sometimes accept the symbols of *sannyāsa*, such as the *daṇḍa* and *kamaṇḍalu*, or sometimes they may not. Generally the *Vaiṣṇava-sannyāsī*, being *paramahansa*, are automatically called *bābājīs*, and they do not carry a *kamaṇḍalu* or *daṇḍa*. Such a *sannyāsī* is free to accept or reject the marks of *sannyāsa*. His only thought is "Where is there an opportunity to spread Krishna consciousness?" Sometimes the Krishna consciousness movement sends its representative *sannyāsī* to foreign countries where the *daṇḍa* and *kamaṇḍalu* are not appreciated. We therefore send our preachers out to introduce our books and philosophy in ordinary dress. Our sole aim is to attract people to Krishna consciousness. We may do this in the dress of *sannyāsī* or in the regular dress of gentlemen. Our only concern is to spread interest in Krishna consciousness.

— *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (Bhāgavata Purāṇa) » Canto 7: The Science of God » Chapter Thirteen » Verse: 9, Purport.*

A REAL SANNYĀSĪ

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura

Dressing like a *sannyāsī* and becoming a real *sannyāsī* are not the same thing. We have to 'take *sannyāsa*' from material enjoyment and



the desire for liberation. One who has made Krishna's devotional service the essence of life by giving up desire for religiosity, economic development, sense gratification, and liberation is the real *sannyāsī*.

To truly become a *sannyāsī* means to follow in the footsteps of the *mahājanas* and to become attached to the transcendental Lord. In addition, dressing like a *sannyāsī* is nothing but imitation, pretense. Sri Mahāprabhu states: *parātma-niṣṭhā-mātra veṣa-dhāraṇa, mukunda-sevāya haya saṁsāra-tāraṇa*: "The real purpose of accepting *sannyāsa* is to dedicate oneself to the service of Mukunda. By serving Mukunda, one can actually be liberated from the bondage of material existence." (*Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya* 3.8)

If after accepting *sannyāsa* one lovingly serves Krishna with body, mind, speech, wealth, knowledge, intelligence, and his possessions, he can both become liberated from material existence and become a *bhakta*. It is impossible to attain any benefit without rendering service to the Supreme Lord. Whether one lives at home or in the *Matha*, one must engage in the Lord's service as his life and soul. Then only can he please the Lord. He must give up miserliness and the propensity to cheat. If he can make the Lord's service the goal of life, he can attain His mercy in this lifetime.

— *Amṛta vāṇī: Nectar of Instructions of Immortality*» His Divine Grace *Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakura Prabhupāda* » Adapted and Published by *Isvāradaśa, Touchstone Media*.

SANNYĀSA NOT AS IMPORTANT AS DEVOTION

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura

*mana, tumi sannyasi sajite keno cao?
bahirer saja jata, antarete phanki tata,
dambha puji' sarira nacao*

My dear mind, why do you want to disguise yourself as a *sannyāsī*? As much as you decorate yourself externally with their garb, to that same extent you deceive yourself internally with this fraud. Worshiping your own false pride, you simply make a show of your material body by artificially accepting the dress of the renounced order.

*amar bacana dharo, antara bisuddha koro,
kṛsnamṛta sada koro pana
jivana sahaje jay, bhakti-badha nahi pay,
tadupaya koroho sandhana*

Now please try to understand my advice on how to become a true *sannyāsī*. Just make your heart completely pure, and constantly drink the nectar of Krishna consciousness. Situate yourself in that life style in which your spiritual life can be



executed easily and spontaneously, free from distractions to pure devotion.

*anayase jaha pao, tahe tusta hoye jao,
adambare na koro prayas
purna-bastra jadi nai, kaupina paro he
bhai,
sita-bastra kantha bahirbas*

Just be satisfied with whatever you get easily, and never endeavor for any type of artificial pomp and grandeur. Even if you do not have proper clothes to wear, just wear a loin-cloth, dear brother! And in cold weather you can simply wear an old torn quilt.

*aguru candana nai, mrttika-tilaka bhai,
harer badale dharo mala
ei-rupe asa-pas, sukhadir kubilas,
kharbi chado samsarer jvala*

There is no need for fancy sandalwood pulp scented with perfume, my dear brother. You can use some ordinary earth or clay to mark your forehead with *tilaka*. Your fancy necklaces can be exchanged for a pure necklace of holy basil (tulasi-mala). Living like this in such a simple state of mind, all your nonsensical arrangements for so-called happiness will naturally dwindle, and you will thus be able to escape from the burning fever of materialistic existence.

*sannyāsa-bairagya-bidhi, sei asramer nidhi,
tahe kabhu na koro' adar
se-saba adare bhai, samsare nistar nai,
dambhiker linga nirantar*

In reality, it is complete renunciation that is the wealth of the *sannyāsa-āśrama*. By following this rule, one would certainly never look forward to receiving respect from others. Beware, my dear brother! Deliverance from this material world is not possible for one who desires to gain respect by taking *sannyāsa*. Instead, he becomes ensnared in mundane existence due to constantly maintaining the conceited pride of desire for subtle profit, adoration and distinction.

*tumi to' caitanya-das, hari-bhakti taba as,
asramer linge kiba phal?*

*pratista koro ho dura, basa taba santipura,
sadhu krpa tomar sambal*

You are actually an eternal servant of Lord Chaitanya, and your real interest is devotion to Sri Hari. What other wonderful thing could you achieve from the external form of the *sannyāsa-āśrama*? Casting all false prestige to a far distant place, make your residence in the transcendently peaceful realm, far beyond the *varṇāśrama-dharma* system, and subsist on the mercy of the Rupanuga Vaisnavas as your only invigorator.

*vaisnavar paricoy, abasyaka nahi hoy,
adambare kabhu nahi jao
binoder nibedana, radha-kṛṣṇa-guṇa-gana,
phukari' phukari' sada gao*

In fact, it is not necessary to even introduce oneself as a Vaisnava. One should never try to make a show of pomp and grandeur. Bhaktivinoda's humble request is that you should constantly sing hymns about the glorious qualities of Radha and Krishna at the top of your lungs.

— Kalyana Kalpataru of Srila Bhakti Vinoda Thakur— Translated by Dasaratha-suta dasa.

THE TENDENCY OF TRIDAṆḌĪ Srila Vrindavan Das Thakura

*nityānanda bale,—“bhāṅgiyāchi vāṁśa-khāna
nā pāra kṣamite kara ye śāsti pramaṅcā”*

Nityananda replied, “I broke only a piece of bamboo. If You cannot forgive Me, then punish Me appropriately.”

The *daṇḍa* is carried by a *sannyāsī* who has not yet attained the platform of *paramahansa*. Therefore everyone can understand that a *sannyāsī* without a *daṇḍa* has attained the final stage of spiritual life. Varieties of worldly opulence cannot agitate the mind such a person. However, since the highly elevated *paramahansa* do not accept this symbol of renunciation, ordinary people cannot understand their exalted position. That is why foolish people consider the topmost *paramahansa* Vaisnavas to be inferior to themselves. Sri Nityananda Prabhu broke the bamboo



danḍa of *svayaṁ-rūpa* Vrajendra-nandana, Sri Chaitanya, so that people would not mistakenly consider Him who simply carries a *danḍa* made of bamboo to be situated below the topmost *paramahansa* platform. Nityananda Prabhu realized that people would invite inauspiciousness by developing the offensive mentality that Lord Chaitanya was simply an ordinary *sannyāsī* or considering that He was obligated to accept such symbols. Thus they would thereby meet with obstacles in understanding that He is the Supreme Personality of Godhead. For these reasons, Nityananda broke the one *danḍa* into three *danḍas*.

This pastime of Sri Nityananda was meant to reveal that those who uphold the principles of *tridanḍa*, entailing control of the body, mind, and speech, are to be respected by those whose senses are not controlled; that *ekadanḍa* is the combined form of the *tridanḍa*; and that it is the duty of *paramahansa* to renounce the *danḍa*. The tendency of *tridanḍī* is to neither aspire for anyone's blessing nor to award anyone worldly blessings. Those who are bound by mundane conceptions have little interest in pursuing genuine spiritual life. If such people relegate

Sri Gaurasundara to relative roles like *danḍe-na-danḍī*, or an ordinary *sannyāsī* because of His carrying a *danḍa*, they will invite inauspiciousness upon themselves.

— Śrī Caitanya Bhāgavata, Antya-khaṇḍa 2.224, Translated by Bhumi-pati Dāsa Edited and Published by Puṇḍarīka Vidyānidhi dāsa.

!! Sri Sri Nitai Gaurchandra Jayati !!

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