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Yaśomatinandana dāsa (Jan Wolter) - Monk's Minimalist Mindset

Inspired by the teachings of His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda



MONK'S MINIMALIST MINDSET

Personal Literatures & Spirituality
Yaśomatinandana Dāsa (Jan Wolter)

*Monk's
Minimalist
Mindset*

Kṛṣṇa Consciousness: A spiritual guide on owning
nothing but bliss.

“A monk's mindset means a state of consciousness
striving for absolute perfection. By minimising sex, drugs
and rock ‘n’ roll & maximising Kṛṣṇa Consciousness one
may achieve this easily.”

Written from the Brahmacharya Ashram, monk's spiritual
shelter, in Paris at the International Society for Kṛṣṇa
Consciousness, Radha-Parisisvara temple.

By Yaśomatīnandana Dāsa (Jan Wolter)
Disciple of His Holiness Kadamba Kanana Swami

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Dedicated to Śrīla Prabhupāda and his
transcendental movement which saved me
from drowning in the ocean of nescience.

Where is the difficulty?

cañcalaṁ hi manaḥ kṛṣṇa
pramāthi balavad dṛḍham
tasyāhaṁ nigrahaṁ manye
vāyor iva su-duṣkaram

“The mind is restless, turbulent, obstinate and very strong, O Kṛṣṇa, and to subdue it, I think, is more difficult than controlling the wind.” (Bhagavad-Gītā 6.34)

Foreword

Kṛṣṇa Consciousness Basics is a series of books written and compiled by Yashomatinandana Dāsa for the pleasure of his spiritual teachers, like Śrīla Prabhupāda. By refreshing the ancient Vedic teachings of Bhakti-Yoga the author aims to build a bridge between ancient wisdom and modern thinkers who are willing to lead a life of spiritual value and extraordinary depth. In the series are books about faith, searching truth & self-realisation through the ancient teachings of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness as spoken by Lord Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, 5000 years ago. Kṛṣṇa Consciousness is the perfect mindset. Anywhere and with everyone one can simply connect through a Kṛṣṇa conscious mindset. It is the most powerful art and thus it needs proper guidance. One needs to have a guide, a person who gives light into the darkness of mind and matter. This guide is not materially oriented but spiritually inclined, being based on Śrīmad Bhāgavatam and the devotional tradition of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.

“The supreme occupation [dharma] for all humanity is that by which men can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent Lord. Such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self.” (Śrīmad Bhagavatam 1.2.6)

In this book a thought-provoking path is presented to 1) establish a spiritual connection with the Absolute Truth, 2) to channel emotions, thoughts and ecstasies through this connection 3) to bring about a revolution in one's boring and stagnant material life and 4) to reawaken spiritual love for God.

In due course of this book we will explore the greatest service to humanity that is described in the scriptures as bhakti-yoga. This ancient science is aimed to establish a mindset of deep thinking and profound spiritual understanding. Simultaneously, one becomes tuned to the greatest ability that is to manage life and death, respectively.

“One who is not disturbed in mind even amidst the threefold miseries or elated when there is happiness, and who is free from attachment, fear and anger, is called a sage of steady mind.” (Bhagavad-Gītā 2.56)

We are aware, that not everyone is yet ready to fully surrender to this practice, however, we are assured that everyone can practice Bhakti-Yoga and establish the principles which have been mindfully cultivated by monks throughout the ages.

The Monk's Mindset will be duly presented so that even a child can understand it. Funny enough, children are happy with little. Minimalism is as natural as being a child. One who buys into the world of goods must be warned and advised to inquire about certain aspects of life:

Does material comfort really guarantee happiness?

Is the house, car and health insurance a reliable resource for overcoming inevitable death?

How can material relationships, goods and accumulations transcend bodily limitations?

The point monks are making is clear: Any comfort in this material world is useless, unless it is used in the greater service to God, which guarantees ultimate happiness.

“The occupational activities a man performs according to his own position are only so much useless labor if they do not provoke attraction for the message of the Personality of Godhead.” (ŚB 1.2.8)

Monks have understood that truly lasting happiness comes irrespective of material goods, comforts and commodities. Eventually, spiritual happiness (ananda) comes from the soul, part and parcel of God.

The mind in this respect is like a wild lion, which is dangerous to encounter. One might be killed and eaten up by the obstinate mind, but there is hope, because the mind can be tamed. This is possible through suitable practice and detachment.

“For him who has conquered the mind, the mind is the best of friends; but for one who has failed to do so, his mind will remain the greatest enemy.” (BG. 6.6)

A personal history

This truth of the souls spiritual happiness dawned on me when I was a twenty-one year old traveler joining the Hare Kṛṣṇa monks (Brahmacharis) in their daily activities. I noticed that my search for happiness was not satisfied in the material activities like sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Beyond all these material complexities came the spiritual happiness from chanting God's names, practicing bhakti and distributing the mercy of the Lord freely.

The Hare Kṛṣṇa monastery is based on five thousand year old scriptures which describe the practice of brahmacharya.

“So a brahmacārī (monk) is trained in such a way that although he has collected everything, but he does not claim anything. He does not keep anything with him. Even though he has to eat in the āśrama, but that he will eat upon the calling by the guru, "My dear such and such, please come and take your prasādam." It is said, if the guru forgets to call him one day, he will not take his food. This is called brahmacārī, means strictly following.”
(Śrīla Prabhupāda)

As I have visited all of the promises fellow ‘wise’ human beings gave, like social conventions, businesses, pursuits of fame, glory and power, educational programs or self-help groups for a happy life, I traversed the world in frustration and unhappiness. This wasn't it. All the

notions of becoming happy by material means were wrong in my eyes and heart. I wasn't alone with that, detaching myself from the ordinary path of 9/5 jobs and mundane striving. I noticed people who were approaching life differently, through living a simple and renounced life, their happiness levels were higher and of greater value.

Living a simple diet from the garden, reading books, and having human connections superseded the artificial happiness that keeps inventing itself. The good old values like honesty and purity attracted me, by the time I was in my mid-twenties, I had joined a spiritual community, lived vegetarian and attended daily spiritual programs for purification and meditation.

Meditation, especially in the form of chanting a mantra fascinated me, and I joined as a full-time member in a place where monks were accepted as part of the community and mothers were there caring for them. The first lesson I learned as a monk was calling every lady 'mother' irrespective of age and circumstance. Creating a familiar distance by addressing a potential threat to the celibate as a mother unlocked the doors of my spiritual heart. Celibacy came about as a natural process, connecting wisely to the opposite side of the coin, and remaining thereby aloof of attachment, because that is what celibate monks follow; strict renunciation of association with the opposite sex, including thinking about, talking to and having intercourse with. Nonetheless, in the western world, and especially in the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement many ladies are around, and they are very attractive, but calling them

‘mother’ helped, even if the ‘mother’ was my sister, or a girl sitting on the swing. Anyhow, a celibate life has many positive sides which will be explained in this book.

“But without one-pointed determination, has anyone ever achieved anything great? To conquer sex desire is no small achievement. Indeed, it is the greatest accomplishment attainable in the material world.”
(Bhakti Vikaśa Swami, Brahmacharya in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, p. xvi)

Basically, this celibacy comprises a monk's life, in comparison to any other occupation. Of course, monks do not earn by working, only by donation. Naturally, monks study scripture and attend the regular programs in the spiritual community. Surely, there are many services for monks to do, for example being a priest. This is my current service, next to caring about devotees, writing, studying and lecturing. How it came to that, is another question, but essentially, it is just a continuation of my previous lives. Faithfully, I reconnected to that spiritual lineage and regained awareness of my previous spiritual endeavours, by practicing celibacy, a clarity came which led me again on this devotional path and back to my spiritual master. The spiritual master is the essential figure in the life of a celibate student, who gains knowledge by asking questions about the nature of the soul, God and the path of devotional service. The guru, or spiritual teacher, is not a marriage consultant, nor an assistant for dietary

health, he purely transmits the absolute truth by power of the revealed scriptures.

When I met my spiritual teacher, a relief came about. Knowing that my travel guide for the journey back to the spiritual world was in proximity, I could learn to listen, walk and share this path. A certain security came about as the guru conveys a good message of God, and how to love Him. In many ways is the spiritual teacher like a father, an ambassador for God and representation of Truth. I could trust in the teachings from the ancient scriptures, exemplified by the spiritual master, for instance, for hours on end, the spiritual master could serve and lead services that seemed impossible for the ordinary person. A steadiness and persistence, a faithful aura of glory and splendid mind illuminated the darkness that was within my heart, when the spiritual teacher would speak, gesture, walk or chant, the Glory of God descended. No matter, of how low and fallen I felt, humbled by the immeasurable might of the Absolute Truth, the spiritual master always understood compassion and wisely consoled the heart by sharing spiritual values like pridelessness and service attitude.

“Just try to learn the truth by approaching a spiritual master. Inquire from him submissively and render service unto him. The self-realized souls can impart knowledge unto you because they have seen the truth.”
(Bhagavad-Gita 4.34)

A Monk to Be

My spiritual master appeared in his presence in my life, and he told us many stories. In one story he narrated the history of the Hare Kṛṣṇa movement starting from a park in New York City. His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda was there in 1966 playing a small drum and chanting the great Mantra: Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. His chanting attracted hundreds of Hippies on that day, planting a seed for the next fifty years to sprout all over the world. No other religious tradition has unfolded in that way. Remembering that history means re-connecting with the path back to the eternal reality. This is the meaning of religion. A monk lives a religious life following in the footsteps of saints like His Divine Grace who was constantly writing and traveling, always busy in the service of God. On a pilgrimage to that place my spiritual master visited the exact place, standing under the same tree where the movement launched. He wondered about his mission and uttered a prayer to have the strength to share this missionary spirit in the world. When he turned around a young boy was standing next to him, inquiring: “How can I be a monk like you?” The power of a preacher is to attract the hearts of the seekers for truth. He compassionately shared his vision of being of service. This is the mood of a monk. This is the simple and minimalistic mindset to set forth a perfect path of happiness. Simply serving the

divine teachings of the spiritual masters and sharing the invaluable message.

Like a musician sits before a song and sets the mood for the notes, melody, rhythm and arrangement, similarly, every endeavour needs the right mood for its fruition.

Disclaimer:

It is not about being a monk, but following a spiritual mindset that simply directs the personality towards the best.

Walking this path needs guidance and persistence but what we learn on the way is an open secret. Living a simple life means understanding the eternal truth within the heart, and within the heart of everyone. Simplicity also means being honest to oneself and creating no boundary between shame, lust, greed and the actual truth, but connecting them to the actual spiritual truth. This spiritual truth is not just a mere concept, nor a vague idea, but a personality with quality and character. The eternal scriptures of bhakti-yoga make it clear that there is an Absolute Truth which comes in three aspects, namely, as impersonal light, the truth within the heart and the Absolute Person. Mindfully, we can connect all our layers of being, physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual to that Absolute Person. Practically, this means living a life of absolute consciousness, but little possession. It means leaving all other conceptions behind, to direct our mind and

intellect to a supreme truth, that has form, character and pastimes. One who has dedicated his life to the spiritual path doesn't need anything else but the love of the beloved Lord. Thus, the spiritual minimalist is an example for absolute minimalism. His mind fully fixed in the Absolute Truth, his socks are clean and nicely stored in the almirah, his bed sheets folded and floor cleansed after every meal. Even though the monk sits on the floor of the Ashram, spiritual hermitage, he still tastes the foodstuffs like a king, because they have been offered to the Supreme King. Less is more, but what about nothing more than what keeps body and soul together? When the spiritual teacher tells them to fast, the student monks must fast, there's no other way. Before the prayers are finished, one must not sleep, nor eat, the spiritual master might say. This is spiritual military, a warrior ship of absolute necessity.

Countless examples are there in Jesus Christ, the Buddha, or Srīla Prabhupāda who all lived a perfectly minimalistic life, by serving all people to the maximum.

This leads us to the reason why monks are eligible for a perfect example. Due to the nature of strict discipline and renunciation a certain control is recognisable. The monk is in charge of all energies, physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. This ideal is practiced daily, and no other person has such control, nor spiritual strength, due to the focus and complete surrender. Historically, monks have always been silent leaders of society, oftentimes detached from all social and political affairs,

but due to their honest effort and endeavour, they were consulted by rulers like kings and emperors. Living a renounced life means quenching the thirst for perfection by solving all imperfections. By steadiness and study of scripture all problems of this life, like birth, disease, old age and death are faced and counteracted by a mindful, concentrated effort. Initially, when novice monks come to the monastery, they sit down for meditation. In that meditation the novices are asked to envision themselves in a particular scene; their own funeral. Who will be there, what is the mood and how are the people acting?

Seeing death face-to-face is just one of the definite reminders that celibates use to conquer over the tribulations of this temporary life. In fact, monkhood means a steady fight between mind and matter, on the battlefield of life there are endless fights, but the great war is fought within the heart. A monk mindset helps to conquer over the enemies like lust, greed, anger, pride, madness and illusion. As described in the sacred texts, the solution lays in practice and detachment. What this practice is and how a detached 'minimalist' mindset conquers all troublemakers in life will be described in the following chapters.

Practice & Detachment

“Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa said: O mighty-armed son of Kuntī, it is undoubtedly very difficult to curb the restless mind, but it is possible by suitable practice and by detachment.”
(BG. 6.35)

As with every practice the practitioner has to understand one's position, the path of practice and eventual goal. Too much time is lost not knowing where one will end up, and oftentimes it is unclear how we proceed. Initially, all monks learn the spiritual truth of who we are. Yes, there is an answer for this world, and also one answer for the world beyond. In this temporary life, one might identify as man, woman, rich, poor, from this nation, family, with this name, history, language and so on. This might be sufficient for a job interview in the modern society, but we want a better and precise understanding of who we really are. Thus, we inquire and find answers in the scriptures, transmitted by the masters. No mastery of a practice without a master, so one has to approach a self-realised person to inquire about one's original position. From the Bhagavad-Gītā and teachers like Śrīla Prabhupāda we learn to identify as the eternal spark, the soul, which is ever-existing, full of knowledge and bliss. This is one's spiritual nature. A monk knows to perfectly align to the spiritual truth while executing service in the world. The practice of 'owning nothing but bliss' is actually pretty simple. We have to track the source of bliss and taste it. Everything else, defined by

the nature of taste, is rejected or abandoned. For example, if one's gets a taste for spiritual music, even intricate arrangements like Beethoven and Mozart become boring. When one tastes spiritual food, all other foodstuffs just remain distasteful. If one tastes the eternal philosophy of the soul, all other paths of wisdom become uncovered and exposed. Simply by associating with spiritual practioners one will notice that the level of happiness and dedication are beyond the norm, and thus feel attracted. A certain taste is relished, and certainly one would never go back to the old stale life. This is spiritual reality, where everything is ever-fresh and tasteful. No day is boring, nor repetitive, because one is constantly connected to the source of bliss. This source is the Supreme Person, full of eternity, knowledge and bliss. We call this Person Kṛṣṇa. To connect to Kṛṣṇa means Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. This science of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness was given to us by the masters, who are expert in the scriptures which have always stood the test of time, like Śrīla Prabhupāda. One could say, that he is an expert professor of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, and through him we can make the experiment ourselves. Our mind might be questioning, where is the problem with me? Why do I need consciousness, or better Kṛṣṇa Consciousness?

The fascination of sex becomes controlled. With the practice comes a solution to all problems, like lust, greed, anger, madness and illusion. Currently, every human being is on the battlefield of the mind constantly fighting the duality of happiness and distress, frustration

and aggression, success and failure. Even though one might be aware of them, it is a constant battle with the material energy, the senses and people around us. Fundamentally, everyone tries to be happy, but how can this happiness be achieved in this temporary endeavour where there is birth, disease, old age and death? What is binding one to this material struggle is the desire to enjoy and gratify one's senses. Sex plays a major role in all our lives, but are we aware of it? In the further reading one will explore what desire is, and how the mind can be trained to channel desires towards a higher truth. The practice of yoga helps one to get back control over the mind and senses to choose wisely. The wise human being is not meant to live like cats & dogs, loitering over the streets, sniffing at every corner and having unrestricted intercourse with everyone. The wise human being is meant to live a regulated life of value and soberness. The greatest challenge especially the younger generations face are the temptations of the material world, the opposite sex and peer pressure. Having a celibate, minimalistic and happy life may conquer all temptations and pitfalls, by dint of dedicated practice and detachment. It is so-to-say a school of life, living happy by minimalism and celibacy. This practice is also liked by sportsmen, successful business men, and leaders of all kind, because they have understood how important focus is. Keeping undeviated, serious and concentrated is the sure way to success in everything one aspires.

“Whatever action is performed by a great man, common men follow in his footsteps. And whatever standards he sets by exemplary acts, all the world pursues.”
(Bhagavad-Gītā 3.21)

Let's talk about Sex

“Actual civilisation teaches its members to sublimate their sexual desires for higher, spiritual purposes. Modern civilisation exploits people's sexual cravings, makes a business out of it and sends people to hell by the millions.” (BVKS, Brahmacharya in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, p. 11)

Sex desire is something natural, also in the spiritual sense. The Supreme Person has supreme sex with His supreme consort. That is called *Adi-Rasa*. In the theology of *bhakti-yoga*, the foremost male, Kṛṣṇa, is described as having unlimited sexual affairs with unlimited wives. He doesn't exploit or misuses any of those relationships, because God is all good and merciful. Although, this seems too fantastic for the conditioned human mind, one must conclude that sex is divine, and thus one has to learn to live with it. Monks keep it simple. Just engage in spiritual mellows, and don't even bother with the material energy which is doomed anyway. Keep it minimal means focusing on the spiritual path, and not letting go of the practice. By detachment one is sure to conquer over lust and sex desire. The example of Haridas Thākur proves this case.

Once in Nadia district, West Bengal, India, there was a renounced monk named Haridās Thakur. He was famous for chanting the Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa for twenty

hours a day, continuously. He wouldn't even eat before he had finished his daily quota of 300.000 Holy Names. For the eye of the Muslim rule he was just another thorn. So, the local rulership ordered a prostitute to seduce the monk and reveal his frivolous behaviour... The ordered prostitute would go to Haridās' hermitage, knock on the door and ask for intercourse. He would reply in a humble manner: 'O, beautiful woman, I would not refuse your desire, but first I have to finish my daily quota of 300.000 Names. Please, be patient and wait until I am finished.' The prostitute sat down, waited and heard Haridās chant. Around four in the morning she fell asleep and left without her mission completed. Haridās received her again the next day and again he asked her to sit and be patient until he was finished.

Continuously Haridās chanted the Maha-Mantra:

Hare Kṛṣṇa
Hare Kṛṣṇa
Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa
Hare Hare

Hare Rāma
Hare Rāma
Rāma Rāma
Hare Hare

After three days no intercourse happened and the prostitute became purified just by hearing this transcendental sound of God.

In a matter of three days, the prostitute would understand her sinful activities of illicit sexuality and give this business up to sit with Haridās and chant the Holy Names. In the process she became a saint herself, just by hearing and chanting the holy names.

One may ask, if sex is divine, why would monks not engage in it? It is simply a matter of taste. Some people just don't have a taste for this sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. They rather read, chant or channel their desire for a higher purpose. One may say, that sex is only for procreation, but why is the whole world engaging in sex for pleasure? Sex is indeed biologically meant for procreation, but the responsibility and burden of family life many people find too much a heavy load. Monks may raise a community of spiritualists, a greater family, without having the physical discrepancies of uniting with a partner. Anyhow, this is only to understand where a monk comes from and how one might reason to be a celibate. Definitely, there are good reasons for the monk to keep the mind free from distractions. No struggle with house, rent, business, crying children, and repairing broken pipes. The monk is detached from all of this by power of will, mindfully cultivated, and happily engaged in service to the Supreme Person who gives unlimited pleasure.

The mind of a monk is resting on the service activity, for the absolute purpose, pleasing the spiritual teacher and spreading value into the world. Lonesome cave-dwellers

received an update, many celibate monks go into the world to teach, lead and raise the human community.

Being a celibate ensures a certain truthfulness and trustfulness. Due to the nature of the mind, one may be putting oneself in the center of activities, but monks are selfless servants who put God, the Absolute Truth, into the center of activity. The mind is greatly influenced by the false identification with 'I & mine', this leads to attachments and attraction towards the other sex, which results in endless frustration due to the temporary nature of this world. This point has already been raised. The monks focus the mind on the spiritual identity, free from false identification, pride and prestige. Thus, one creates awareness about sex and desires arising in the mind. How much time & energy one may save not scrolling in the internet searching for a mate, wandering from shop to shop to find suitable Christmas presents for the so-called loved-one and endlessly working to pay the rent for the oversized house where one day a family could live. All these endeavours are connected to material love which is essentially lust, the trick of material nature to bind us. It acts like a prison until we come to consciousness. In hopeful prayer that the world is waking up, monks are dedicating endless hours approaching people about their lives, educating them on the right performance and path to perfection. Monk's mindset means a state of consciousness striving for absolute perfection. By minimising sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll one may achieve this easily.

“The mode of passion is born of unlimited desires and longings, O son of Kuntī, and because of this the embodied living entity is bound to material fruitive actions.” (Bhagavad-Gītā 14.7)

What about Death?

“As soon as a man is born, he dies at every moment. Thus death is devouring every living entity at every moment, but the last stroke is called death itself. That death is Kṛṣṇa.”

Earlier in the book the example of the monks in the monastery meditating about their own funeral was given. Death is certain, yet uniquely we have to face it. Every individual is on this path from birth to death, but was that it? According to the spiritual science of yoga, there is certainly a continuation of life, as the soul is eternal. Where the soul is going after death is determined by one's desire or free will. With this in mind, the monk learns to read the plan of the soul, understanding the unique desire and free will. By controlling the senses, withdrawing from sex attraction and wealth, the monk has clear sight penetrating the layers of existence. A life is only worth living when one knows what is death. How to die is an art and final test. If we pass, a great promotion awaits us. Preparing for death is the constant reminder to do the best we can. The best is defined by how sincere and eager we serve the world we live in. By renouncing the individual pleasures, a monk has a greater vision of society at large. Monks give an example and live to give, that is the common understanding from the ancient texts. Modern examples, like Śrīla Prabhupāda, show that a life of sacrifice is desirable and eventually the best fulfillment of a wise

human being's duty. When Śrīla Prabhupāda faced death, all he could think of was how to keep his disciples busy in service. Thus, he continued his service translating and explaining the ancient Sanskrit texts, like Bhagavad-Gītā.

The ancient texts give a very precise mindset of how one can overcome death. First of all it is explained that through the science of yoga, devotional service, especially the mind and tongue are restraint, thus one gains control over the life energies and eventually can determine when and how to die. This is exemplified by many yogis, like Bhisma who could determine the exact moment when to leave the body. This, of course, might not be possible for the common man, but what can we do? It is also explained in the ancient wisdom texts that one must regulate one's eating, sleeping, mating and defending. Everyone is fighting with the lower animalistic tendencies and by nature all of us struggle with the restless thoughts. This brings us back to the point of practice and determination. Everything that makes a monk, namely celibacy and determined spiritual endeavour, evokes control over the turbulent mind, controlling the life energy and bringing back awareness about the eternal nature of one's soul. Thus, being fully prepared through a life of practice, one can suitably face the last moments of one's life.

In regards to how monks leave the body, I would like to tell about the departure of my spiritual master, His Holiness Kadamba Kanana Swami, who was well aware

about his mission and 'change of service'. Even years before his death, acknowledging terminal cancer, he transparently revealed his last will and invited everyone to take part in his 'goodbye'. He would openly explain, that in a spiritual sense, due to the eternal nature of the soul, this death is just a change of service, nothing more, nothing less. He returned back to his spiritual home, Vrindavana and executed his last duties, furthermore, he invited all his many hundred disciples to take part in final pilgrimages. We would go to many ancient sites and holy temples to see the spiritual heritage of the motherland of spirituality. Even one month before his final breath, we would walk around a sacred lake and hear him lecture, sing and instruct us what to do after his departure. When the body got weaker and weaker, he started fasting and concentrating on having a pure consciousness. Focusing his mind in meditation, he would be fixed in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, chanting the Holy Name and hearing about the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa. Eventually, all his disciples, friends and well-wishers celebrated his departure by chanting and praying. When his soul departed the body, many could witness how it traveled back to the spiritual world. This happened in the sacred village of Vrindāvana, where death has been embraced and honoured as something divine. Monks learn this art of focusing the mind and remembering Kṛṣṇa, who thus insures the devotee that one will attain the spiritual reality where there is no fear, death, nor suffering. This mindset is unique, and perhaps esoteric to the common understanding of the modern man who lives by

rationality, not by faith. However, we see what is described in the Vedic texts practically working. By creating this faith the mind is transcended and one can live beyond duality realising the spiritual nature of Kṛṣṇa, who boldly proclaims in the Song of God, Bhagavad-Gītā:

“And whoever, at the end of his life, quits his body remembering Me alone at once attains My nature. Of this there is no doubt.”

“I am all-devouring death, and I am the generating principle of all that is yet to be. Among women I am fame, fortune, fine speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and patience.” (Śrī Kṛṣṇa speaks in Bhagavad-Gītā 8.5 & 10.34)

What about Women, Fame & Fortune?

“Still, everybody is doing it. The president of America is doing it, the bums on the street are doing it, the cats & dogs are doing it. Only a few great souls are attempting to conquer over it.” (BVKS, Brahmacharya in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, p. 7)

To be rich, famous, wedded with one or many beautiful women, that might be the dream of common man. We are sorry to crush the false hope, or dreams about this fantasy. Please excuse, if one may gets frustrated about this world, but we are actually just stating facts based on time-less writings, that outdate every other science.

The science of yoga first and foremost propagates the moral conduct including non-violence, cleanliness and celibacy or Brahmacharya. It is clearly defined what this practice of celibacy means. One should not have more contact than necessary with the opposite sex and thus reduce sex-indulgence, to use all one's time and energy for spiritual pursuits. This comprises the basic understanding of a monk, but what can one learn from this? To minimise one's attraction to the sense objects and maximise one's focus on the work one is doing. Certainly, everyone is pleasure seeking, but how can temporary sense gratifiers like sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll make one eternally blissful? How many women can one have, for how long? How much sex is possible for a person? Same with food and drugs, recognising that there is a limit to our sense enjoyment, we may question

what is eternal happiness, or bliss? Only eternal things make eternal happiness. What is that eternal thing? Kṛṣṇa. In Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, one can directly connect to the eternal source of bliss, by chanting the Mantra Hare Kṛṣṇa Hare Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Kṛṣṇa Hare Hare Hare Rāma Hare Rāma Rāma Rāma Hare Hare. This connection to the eternal pleasure potency (Hare) links one with the Supreme Person (Kṛṣṇa) who is the spiritual bearer of spiritual bliss (Rāma). This practice is the wealth of a Hare Kṛṣṇa monk, and it has been so since time immemorial. We hear for example about the great sage Narada Muni, who happened to be a boy of a maidservant. His mother was serving in a place where often pilgrims would come, and some these pilgrims were elevated spiritualists who left some food remnants on their plate. Kindly, the little boy Narada would help his mother and sometimes ask for some of the leftovers. When sanctified food of saintly person is taken, one becomes purified and thus elevated. Soon, the boy would witness the death of his mother and go to the forest for meditation preparing for his next life. By concentrating on the Lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa, he attained the position of a great sage, after the dissolution of the universe and was then known as Narada Muni. He still travels around the universe to chant the glories of Kṛṣṇa. Once he came to a friendly devoted king named Ambarish who was complaining about his brother and how sinful he was. Paparaja, the brother of Ambarish, was full of sin, women hunting, intoxication and illicit affairs. When Narada Muni heard Ambarish complain, he agreed to visit his brother. Arriving at the court of

Paparaja, Narada Muni received nothing but blasphemy and empty bottles of wine. His intoxicated state was unbearable, and Narada Muni went outside the door swearing: "Whenever you face death, remember this one question: What can just a moment's association with a saintly person do?". Paparaja wondered and continued his business until he died. At the gates he faced the secretary of the Lord of death, he was confronted with a lot of sinful activities. The secretary counted so many sins that Paparaja was judged to go into hell, afraid, Paparaja repeated the question: 'What can just a moment's association with a saintly person do?'

The Lord of Death was speechless and sent Paparaja to the abode Śiva, who is responsible for the destruction of this universe. Here, again Paparaja posed the same question. Lord Śiva send Paparaja to his father, the creator of this universe, Brahmā, who upon hearing the same question, sent Paparaja to the spiritual sky, where Vishnu resides. 'What a moment's association with a saintly person can do? See where you are.', said Lord Vishnu receiving Paparaja, the sinful person, who had just a moment of company with a pure devotee, and who was now in the topmost kingdom of God.

This story illustrates that all wealth, fame and fortune are temporary assets if they are not connected to the Supreme Person. Paparaja had everything desirable, but he wasted his precious life with it. Afraid of hellish reactions of his sinful behaviour, he was blessed by the great sage Narada Muni. This is the greatest wealth of a

monk, his associates, friends and well-wishers. By practice of meditation the monk has an internal wealth of realisation. This realisation is the sublime character trait of a monk who continuously strives for Self-realisation. The best means to achieve this is tangible and practical service. For example can one transmit this realisation to others and act as a teacher.

Our spiritual teacher instructs in Nectar of Instruction, Verse 2:

“The wealth of the world should be used for the welfare of all living entities, for that is the plan of Mother Nature. Everyone has the right to live by utilizing the wealth of the Lord. When people learn the art of scientifically utilizing the Lord’s property, they will no longer encroach upon one another’s rights. Then an ideal society can be formed. The basic principle for such a spiritual society is stated in the first mantra of Śrī Īsopaniṣad:

*īśāvāsyam idaṁ sarvaṁ
yat kiñca jagatyāṁ jagat
tena tyaktena bhujīthā
mā grdhaḥ kasya svid dhanam*

“Everything animate or inanimate that is within the universe is controlled and owned by the Lord. One should therefore accept only those things necessary for himself, which are set aside as his quota, and should not accept other things, knowing well to whom they belong.”

A Daily Life of a Minimalistic Monk

Monks rise early, always. Rising early is very conducive to spiritual life, but how do we train the mind? There are two ways, namely creating the habit of sleeping early, or having regulated sleep over the day. Some choose the first option and develop the tendency to head to bed early to catch enough sleep for the early morning hours. In the services as a Hare Kṛṣṇa priest, I regularly choose that option to fully regenerate and rejuvenate for the early rising. When getting up at 3am I feel light and happy. One more keypoint is not in-taking any solid food after lunch. Fruits, teas and milk are ok, but pasta, pizza and cheese make a full belly and heavy morning. After getting up in the morning one should brush teeth, bathe and dress in clean cloth. Chanting and meditating in the early morning hours are the daily bread for the aspiring spiritualist. The earlier we rise, the better. Especially around 4:30am there is an auspicious time called the Brahma Muhurta where all energies align with the divine. Practicing yoga, or connecting with the Supreme Person, is fully efficient around this time. By setting a clear intention, the monk always endeavours for pure devotional service to his spiritual master. By prayer and meditation the mind becomes fixed and steady, the practice solidified and focus sharpened. Every endeavour needs a certain amount of energy, time and awareness. All these resources are managed from within, so does the monk know his inner world entirely. By hearing and chanting divine mantras like the Hare

Kṛṣṇa Mantra, one can simply focus the mind and gain awareness and confidence. Mantra means 'that which liberates the mind'. Liberate from what? By the sacred sounds the mind is delivered from the onslaught of the dualistic world of good & evil, warm and cold, happiness and distress. By chanting the Mantra one can taste transcendence, this means one is sufficiently charged with spiritual energies so that one may feel empowered to go beyond the limitations of the mind. Eventually, everyone has to eat, so also a monk takes food at certain times, if one is not fasting. Eating and fasting must be reasonable, and according to the instructions of the teachers and scriptures. Eating should be sufficient to keep 'body & soul' together. That can be little for most, but taste should be there. The food should be wholesome, strengthening, juicy and pleasing to the heart. Good foodstuffs are milk, grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, natural oil, clarified butter, and all ecologically well-sourced ingredients. According to one's need, one should eat, remembering: This food comprises the fuel for this body. Monks learn to identify with the spiritual body, but living alone of air and love? Fasting is a common discipline amongst renunciants and it can be a great reward. Understanding that this bodily machine only needs so much, one should regularly fast to give the body some time for maintenance and rejuvenation. The eleventh day of the rising and waxing moon is said to be auspicious for fasting. This fasting is called Ekadashi. Fasting should not be whimsical or sporadic, but regulated and well-done.

After taking food a monk would rest, walk or begin services. The spiritual teacher usually plans the day with his disciples and gives out services to do. The service attitude is what one wants to cultivate in the monastery. We don't want human machines, or workers that have no life, but wise human beings that excel in every aspect of life. Thus, knowledge and education come into play. Usually, monks are meant to study for a good few hours every day, that includes writing, learning verses, preparing classes, hearing lectures, practicing instruments and of course reading. If one's life is based in a spiritual community, there is always something to do, or someone to do it with. In the following parts, I'll be giving inspiration to the practical aspect of a monk's mindset, because just theory doesn't help anyone. We need practical service for all.

Here in our Hare Kṛṣṇa community, we have daily preaching programs in front of us. That means that the learning, reading and practicing comes to shine in public. We would leave after breakfast and head to a busy place, like a market and distribute spiritual literature and sound vibration on-mass. By chanting on the streets, the minds of the passengers are attracted, and one of the book distributors can capture the interest by presenting books that explain the solution to the people's problems. The wonderful process of offering spiritual literature is fascinating due to the nature of spiritual knowledge which acts like a medicinal tonic tending to the disease of that particular individual. One

may have had just lost a loved-one and then encounters a monk who presents a book about the eternal nature of the soul. The person might feel relieved and intrigued: "Why did I just meet a monk? Maybe God wants to show me a way..." Those instances happen and bring joy to the heart, because people are positively surprised about the books, leave a donation and take it home.

This simple process of devotional service makes everything easy. Sleep for Kṛṣṇa, wake for Kṛṣṇa, eat for Kṛṣṇa, chant for Kṛṣṇa and serve for Kṛṣṇa, life is simple and sublime, connected to the most sublime person, the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

"All glories unto You! O Kṛṣṇa, You can deliver all suffering conditioned souls from the clutches of maya [illusion]. O Kṛṣṇa, we fervently pray that You do so. As the personifications of Vedic knowledge, we always try to help the conditioned souls understand You" (Bhag. 10.87.14).

A monk's Tips & Tricks

Why do we even need such tips and tricks?

Even in the ancient Bhagavad-Gītā it is clearly stated that the main problem of our lives is the mind, and only by practice and detachment can one conquer it.

Living a detached and simple life is actually very easy, but why does one make it so difficult? How many pairs of shoes do you need? What about gadgets, credit cards, and life insurances? A house, a car and a wife? All this sounds like a 'normal' life, but it is actually insane. Accepting temporary goods and relationships that will decay anytime as the all-in-all pleasure and happiness is an illusion blinded by the ideal of a materialistic society. No one will ever be happy with temporary things and relationships. Only through the matter of spiritual relationships one may experience transcendental bliss. This is the great impediment of modern 'wise' men. Blinded and illusioned, one has forgotten the real thing, love.

The most practical thing that monks learn is sharing love unconditionally. By rendering loving devotional service a self-less and altruistic way of thinking is established. This whole process puts the Supreme Person into the centre. One is just a servant, that is it. Realising this eternal constitutional position, one embraces a pure way of life. This purity is the force to control the mind, senses, intelligence and ego. The monk who is engaged

in unmotivated and uninterrupted service to the Supreme Person, surely attains a higher consciousness by which the soul is satisfied. The soul nature is the home for all spiritual beings. This soul nature is ever existent, full of knowledge and bliss. Unfortunately, one has forgotten about this nature due to the darkness of materialistic living. Following practical tips will get one out of this darkness of ignorance and transport one to the bright side of spiritual life.

Just follow this list and tick off the points that you have implemented.

- Start a journal about spiritual life, and your aspirations, e.g. What do I want to achieve in X amount of days?
- Join a spiritual community, for example attending a 'Be a monk' challenge which will be presented further down.
- Start a day early and sit for meditation. Simply by rising early and chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa (even for just 10 minutes) one can derive great benefit.
- Make an attempt in devotional service, how little it may be, e.g. offering a little flower to a picture of your spiritual teacher, or worshipping deity.
- Create a living space of minimalism and purity, in order to free the mind and unclutter the thoughts. Ask "What do I truly need?"
- Invite your friends and family to join, e.g. by giving books, spiritual food or anything related.

- Go on pilgrimage and make space for asking spiritual questions, like what is the soul nature & true happiness

Monks constantly ask important questions, but it is about priority also in spiritual pursuits. This means that the questions raised concern the hard topics like death, living in fulfillment and conquering over the mind. The life of many Monks concerns traveling, sharing wisdom and writing. It is a life detached from family and close relationships but a life of compassion by sharing wisdom with the whole world. Travel can be a key to unlock the doors of open-mindedness and curiosity. It enhances the view and broadens the horizon. Travel sharpens the focus and fulfills the heart. Yet, it is a great austerity. Eating, sleeping and all other mundane activities may come short due to circumstantial environments ever changing and moving.

This can be the fast way to make great experience, but also staying at home, studying and working tirelessly is a way to serve. Even though the monk has little possession, one might still think big, hosting a heart of gratitude and compassion. This is the path of liberation. Knowing that all worldly good will not lead to ultimate happiness, the spiritualist searches for this eternal happiness within the compassionate and caring heart. The nature of the soulful heart is connection and compassion. It wants sweet exchanges and loving relationships, but in this world all endeavours are timely over, and thus one must look beyond the horizon and leave everything behind to fully find the personal path of truth. Interestingly, all this is well known and written

down in the scriptures. Just by eagerly hearing and studying the spiritual books like the Bhagavad-Gītā one can gain the greatest realisation, no matter if one is in the prison or at home, or traveling around the world. Making time for spiritual life is so important and especially hearing deserves a slot of one's 24 hours. Half of the day is spent in wakefulness, but what are we cultivating and how much effort goes into temporary affairs? Why are we not cultivating lasting happiness through spiritual practices? Every spiritual practice begins with hearing. Listening to senior spiritual teachers like Śrīla Prabhupāda will greatly enhance the quality of one's life and insight comes naturally. Śrīla Prabhupāda is a pure Via-Medium who has wisdom of the time-tested texts, furthermore, he is absolutely humorous and sweet. His personality is incomparable and his lectures and words of wisdom are like nectar that in the beginning might taste a little bitter, but eventually sweetness comes and enhances our life wholly. Acting like a medicine spiritual wisdom can be connected to all parts of our lives. It can be applied through the course of our existence and help one beyond the mere stigmas of all-you-can, drink and possess. Spiritual wisdom given by the spiritual teachers, like Śrīla Prabhupāda, gives one the greatest wealth, namely self-realisation. This path of self-realisation is called sadhana. Every spiritual aspirant develops a sadhana by regular application of hearing and chanting. Sadhana leads to self-realisation, but what does that practically mean?

Self-realisation is a state of pure consciousness freed from material conditioning in which the individual understands his real identity, the identity of the Supreme Lord, and engages in selfless, loving service to the Supreme.

Śrīla Prabhupāda would clarify his purpose: “This very important Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is meant to save human society from spiritual death. At present human society is being misled by leaders who are blind, for they do not know the aim and objective of human life, which is self-realization and the reestablishment of our lost relationship with the Supreme Personality of Godhead. That is the missing point. The Kṛṣṇa consciousness movement is trying to enlighten human society in this important matter.”

Join the 'Be a Monk Challenge'!

The Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is a cultural and educational endeavour to bring the best into people's life and bring out the absolute best from within. By chanting, dancing and feasting on Kṛṣṇa Prasadam, one can relish a transformational journey from ignorance to bliss. It's wonderful how even a street dog can take part in this movement, what to speak of educated class of people who are willing to accept a better, spiritual, life. Why is spiritual best, one might ask? Spiritual means eternal life. Endless bliss and satisfaction happens in this deeply connected way of living with God and His devotees. We are proud to say that, repeating Śrīla Prabhupāda's words; We have the best food (Prasadam), music (Kirtan), philosophy (Acintya-bhedabheda-Tattva) and society (the International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness) with gorgeous temples and beautiful Deities of Radha-Kṛṣṇa, Jagannatha-Baladeva-Subhadra & Gaura Nitai.

Certainly, in course of writing this book, the author lived as a monk himself, because how can one transmit real knowledge without practicing it oneself? A teacher who teaches about healthy living and goes out after the class to smoke a cigarette is rascal number one. Thus, the reality of being a monk is certainly open for everyone, because we can live and share this lifestyle practically to everyone. The wonderful thing is that being a monk doesn't need to happen inside a monastery but can be

practiced at home, at the individual's pace, rhythm and time. Simply by applying this 'monk mindset' or Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, one can straightforwardly and happily practice eternal blissful life. The international society of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness is based on monastic principles found in the Vedic scriptures from over 5000 years ago, which are surprisingly relevant and timeless. Especially in this modern age the participants can learn about cleanliness, discipline, spiritual values and community life first-hand. The Hare Kṛṣṇa movement has open communities for everyone to join a weekend, seven day, monthly or three months program. As a world traveling monk, the author is happy to link up interested one's with communities close-by.

Spiritual Places & Retreats

Let us now look at some of the programs and their respective places:

Simhachalam Lions Temple in Germany is a farm community with cows, temple and spiritual school. The heart piece is a shrine of Lord Narasimhadev, a unique form of Kṛṣṇa. Here one can join a seven day introduction program into monastic life. The 'Be a Monk' challenge is taking place throughout the year and helps participants to make friends and experience for a lifetime. More infos via www.simhachalam.de

Radhadesh in Belgium is hosting several programs that train and educate curious seekers and spiritually inclined souls. Nestled in beautiful mountainous surroundings with a farm and cows, the community is based amidst an aristocratic heritage Château with a Radha-Kṛṣṇa temple. Either a day introduction or four month scriptural study course, the variety is inviting to spiritually grow and stay. More infos at www.radhadesh.com

Bhaktivedanta Manor and the London Soho Street temple are good addresses in the UK to dive into the practice of bhakti-yoga. The Manor is a renowned and well established institution training monks for many decades. The facility and gardens are beautiful. There is

a certain strictness in the Ashram, but everyone is eager to learn and make the best of this human form of life. The Manor was donated by George Harrison who was friends with Śrīla Prabhupāda. The Soho Temple is respectively in the middle of the UK's capital and a fun place to learn about the science of Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. More infos at <https://www.krishnatemple.com/beamonk/>

In America's major cities there are also temples, for example in New York where new monks are trained. New York was the first ground where Śrīla Prabhupāda spread the movement on Western grounds in the 1960's. From here the ISKCON, worldwide Hare Kṛṣṇa movement, took off. It's a great opportunity for all spiritual seekers to experience the urban monk life with daily outings and lots of spiritual music, dance and feasting. More infos at <https://iskconnyc.com/>

Even in Latin America and Australia are many centres, farm communities and spiritual oasis' for the hungry soul. With every spiritual community comes service, a well-rounded program, interesting characters and festivals. Worldwide there are beautiful festivals like Ratha Yatra and Holi hosted by the international Hare Kṛṣṇa movement. Also, one can volunteer as a cowherd in a Goshala, or Cow sanctuary, as for example in New Govardhana, Australia. It's a beautiful place for learning, and it even has a primary Hare Kṛṣṇa school. Monks

stay in beautiful quarters close to nature. Learn more:
<https://www.krishnafarm.net/>

Especially in India, the Hare Kṛṣṇa roots here and has many centres all over the subcontinent where new monks are joining a wonderful life of spiritual community and transcendental bliss. However challenging life may be, through practice, determination and will, young spiritualists find happiness that lasts in Kṛṣṇa Consciousness. The foremost community is in Māyāpur, West Bengal, where a monumental temple is erected to facilitate the growing movement. Find more information about Māyāpur:

<https://mayapur.in/en/brahmachari-ashram/>

The Hare Kṛṣṇa movement is a worldwide organisation of monks, families with spiritual values and members of all ages, backgrounds and languages. It's a wonderful opportunity to grow as a person. Personal growth is one of the biggest niches in the business world, but all these attempts are useless without proper association, scriptural evidence and prospected service to live a meaningful life in. Personal growth can only happen based on timeless wisdom, so does the Bhagavad-Gītā help us to grow as a person giving a perfect mindset to overcome any burden. Personal growth can only happen when one has an association with a friendly, devoted & knowledgeable guide that leads one on the journey. Personal growth can only last in a service that is greater as oneself. Service is the premise of the mindset of monks. It is what every monk is cultivating,

by sustainable practice, monks want to be of service,
ultimately, for the service of God.

Afterword

In due course of writing this book, the author made first serious steps towards the life of a renunciate. Primarily, this book is intended for self purification and compassionate dissemination of spiritual wisdom.

Finding a spiritual haven is necessary to conquer the calamities of life, but how can one constantly stay protected by spiritual efforts?

By the mercy of the spiritual master and the lineage of luminaries, every living being can understand the depth of this life and the inner life. Externally, everyone is going about a certain business, but internally everyone is actually looking for pleasure. Monks have renounced all external affairs to seek true happiness within. This quest inwards is the greatest adventure possible. It is so wonderful that we might forget all external circumstances and endeavours. This travel within needs a proper mindset, like one needs good shoes for a hike, which can be attained through practice and determination. 'For one who has conquered the mind the Supersoul is already reached' states the Bhagavad-Gītā, which gives a systematic process called bhakti-yoga to conquer and control the mind fully. This monk's mindset is called Kṛṣṇa Consciousness.

Everything else material becomes minimised, but the spiritual experience of the transcendental truth becomes

maximised. This great vision is given by the spiritual teachers like Śrīla Prabhupāda. All glories.

Further reading:

Śrīla Prabhupāda's books: www.vedabase.io
Bhakti Vikaśa Swami: Brahmacharya in Kṛṣṇa
Consciousness

About the Author

Yashomatinandana Dāsa is an initiated disciple of His Holiness Kadamba Kanana Swami in the discipline of bhakti-yoga. In the Brahma Madhva Sampradaya, by the mercy of Śrīla Prabhupāda's books, the author found a great treasure of spiritual wisdom. Searching for a meaningful life after school, the path led unto undiscovered horizons to test and experiment the best of this life, eventually landing in the monk's school, the Hare Kṛṣṇa ashram. After many years of learning and serving in several ashrams around the world, associating with monks and reading sacred texts, the path was clear and prosperous. As eight years of training in the monk school have passed, the author was trained as a priest and served in Paris for the Radha Parisisvara Mandir. By writing these books the author shares his compassion and experience transforming from a clueless youth to a happy and healthy spiritualist. By early rising, chanting mantras and practicing meditation, a life of growth of character took place which is accessible for everyone. This book is written during the authors time in Paris inside the Brahmachary Ashram, where a mindset of sincerity, cleanliness and celibacy is required to attain higher consciousness and wisdom.