

Advice to Sannyasins–Part 1

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There are various kinds of vrittis¹—some painful, some pleasant. To destroy these vrittis Patanjali Maharshi² suggests abhyasa³ and vairagya,⁴ by which all the vrittis subside and you enter into samadhi.⁵

The same thing is said by the Lord in the Bhagavad Gita also. Arjuna questions the Lord regarding the impetuosity of the mind. Just as it is difficult to catch hold of the wind with a pair of tongs, so also it is difficult to control the mind. Lord Krishna says: “Control this impetuous mind through abhyasa and vairagya.” Vairagya is the most essential factor, indifference to enjoyments herein and hereafter. Through dosha drishti,⁶ you can develop vairagya. The mind is filled with sensual samskaras.⁷ It is very difficult to wean the mind from the objects. The method is to remember the description of the world given by the Lord in the Gita: this, world is impermanent, full of sufferings, the abode of sorrow. All the sensual pleasures appear to be pleasant in the beginning, but in the end they are like poison.

Remember the Vairagya Dindima of Sri Shankaracharya:⁸ “Lust, anger and greed are the thieves lurking in the mind; the jewel of wisdom is plundered by these dacoits.⁹ Therefore, wake up, O man of this samsara!¹⁰ Wake up; life is waning; you are caught up in this wheel of samsara. You are roasted by various kinds of anxieties and expectations. You do not realize, but this life is gradually waning away.” Constantly dwell on these thoughts; you will gradually develop vairagya. Study Bhartrihari’s Vairagya Sataka, and the Divine Life Society publications *How to Get Vairagya*, *Vairagya Mala*, etc., and the Vairagya Prakarana of the Yogavasishtha.

Cultivation of vichara¹¹ for sannyasa

A swan splits a mixture of water and milk and rejects the water and drinks the milk alone. Even so, a paramahansa¹² rejects the sensual objects which give pain, abandons this illusory world of names and forms, identifies himself with the undying atman¹³ and drinks the nectar of immortality.

Mira Bai deserted her husband; Raja Bhartrihari his wife; Vibhishana his brother, Ravana; Bali his guru, Sukracharya; and Prahlada his father, Hiranyakasipu. You can desert anyone who stands in the way of God-realization. But be careful that your aspiration is genuine and firm. If you have an intense spiritual thirst for God, and if you have a passionate wife to pull you down, what is the earthly use of having such a disastrous partner with intellectual, psychological disparity and discord? You cannot sacrifice your noble ideal just for the sake of pleasing someone. Can you?

Is not a kingdom valuable to be owned? Is not a summer-house or a pleasant garden with sweet-smelling flowers pleasant to live in? Is not the company of young maharanis¹⁴ with tender waists and lotus-like eyes dear as life itself, and very pleasing? Yet wise, dispassionate men like Bhartrihari, Buddha, and Gopichand retired into forests abandoning all these things, considering these as worthless as straw, for realizing the Self which alone can confer immortality infinite bliss and eternal peace.

Tell me now friends! What do you find really in this illusory world? Happiness or pain? Joy or sorrow? Have you understood the illusory nature of this mayic creation? This world is a mere appearance. The mind and the senses are deceiving you at every moment. You have mistaken pain for plea-

sure on account of clouded understanding. There is not an iota of happiness in this sense-universe. Abandon this selfish struggle for amassing wealth. March direct to that wire-puller who is moving these toys of flesh—human bodies—who is keeping up this big show, who is behind this show. In Him alone will you find lasting happiness and perennial joy. Merge in Him by practising daily meditation.

During adversities, troubles, extreme difficulties, sickness, etc., a feeling of utter helplessness and of the presence of a mighty mysterious power or hidden governor of this universe, creeps over your being. But such moments do not last for a long time. And they are very few, also. Maya¹⁵ is very powerful. The illusory sensual objects invade the mind and cloud the understanding. But a man of dispassion and discrimination is always vigilant. Maya is afraid to approach him.

Prana¹⁶ or the life-breath is as impermanent as the drop of water on the lotus-leaf which is likely to be thrown by the slightest breeze. It is not certain that the man who is living today will live the next day. Life is as evanescent as a bubble. Try therefore to attain immortality.

There is an internal peace which is not disturbed by external happenings. This is the supreme peace of the soul or atman. He who rests in this peace is able to meet difficulties and troubles with fortitude. He is not upset by adversities, calamities and trying circumstances.

Who is your real father? Search for Him. Who is your real mother? Search for Her. What is death? Why are you attached to the flesh? Be attached to the imperishable atman, the indweller, the immortal friend and well-wisher.

A sannyasin's analysis of life

Discrimination will tell us that this is a strange world that we live in. This is a very big museum or wonderful show. The flowers and the Himalayan scenery, the Niagara Falls, the sea, the sky are beautiful and charming. But the earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, lightnings, thunderstorms, landslides, cyclones, epidemics of influenza and plague are awful and threatening. A beautiful wife is very charming; she is very sweet when she is young, when she smiles, when, she puts on a beautiful dress, when she sings, when she plays on the piano or violin, when she dances in the ballroom. But she looks

horrible when she loses her temper, when she quarrels with her husband for getting silken clothes and golden necklace, when she suffers from a chronic disease, and when she becomes old.

That which is nothing in the beginning and is so also in the end, necessarily does not exist in the present. Objects are like ordinary illusions though regarded as real. Do vichara. This world is verily like a resting tree for birds. One evening birds meet together on a tree for a night's stay and the next morning they leave the tree and part from one another and go their way. Even so do men meet for a time as relatives, parents, sons and friends and then disperse. Birth leads to death and death to birth. Thus without rest man wanders forever.

This mysterious world with its charming scenery is very beautiful to look at but it is very dirty to mingle with. All are deceived by Mayic charm. But the sage, the devotee, the yogi and the viveki are not affected.

This very big world is a mere drop or an atom when compared to the infinite Brahman.[17](#) Just as a straw is floating in the ocean, so also this world is floating in a corner of Brahman, as it were. The mind and the lenses of the eye are deceiving you. They reveal to you an exaggerated picture, just as the microphone exaggerates the sound of a pin-drop into a mighty thunder. This is a kind of jugglery which is understood by people who possess dispassion and discrimination, but not by the worldly-minded.

The kings and lords will pass away. This world will pass away with all its occupants. The sun, moon, and stars will pass away. All joys and sorrows will pass away. The five elements will pass away. Days and nights, months and years and centuries will pass away. Verily the Akshara[18](#) or the Imperishable Sat-Chit-Ananda Brahman or the Eternal alone will endure forever. Realize this Brahman, thine innermost Self through constant and profound meditation, and become immortal.

The glory of the worldly life passes away quickly. Name and fame are vibrations in the ether. How many doctors, lawyers, judges, collectors and ministers have come and gone! No one speaks of them now.

Ah! how quickly does the glory of the world pass away! Where are the mighty potentates who once wielded their sceptres With vain pomp and

glory? Where are those erudite professors, pandits¹⁹ and vidvans²⁰ who once passed for great men in society? Tell me now, where are all those scholars, multimillionaires, who posed themselves much for their erudition and wealth? Do people talk of them now?

The egoistic man of vanities has grown very old. His body is bent now and he walks with a stick, and yet his anger has not disappeared now. His body is emaciated. The limbs are in a wasted condition. The senses are cold, and yet his egoism has not vanished. His moustache has become grey, and yet the desires have not left him!

A frog which is in the mouth of a serpent and which is about to be devoured, attempts to get hold of nearby insects for its enjoyment. Even so man who is in the jaws of the serpent of time, tries in vain to obtain objects of sense-enjoyments like the frog, and forgets thereby his goal of life and his essential divine nature. How deluded he is!

The pleasure that one derives from the sense objects, is temporary. This temporary pleasure is followed by a painful reaction. That is the reason why vivekins who are endowed with discrimination between the real and the unreal, do not hanker after sensual pleasures. They shun them ruthlessly through dosha-drishti. The pleasure that you get from sensual objects is tantamount to the size of a grain of barley while the pain that you experience in this world, is of the size of a mountain. Life is a lightning-flash of breath. Time is but a thunderclap of death. Live in the atman. You will attain immortality. Go beyond time. You will attain eternity.

Advantages of sannyasa

All sorts of inspired social service must be rendered to the world. It is our duty to join together and work for the solidarity of the world in all directions, educational, physical, mental, cultural, and do more good and bring more peace to the world. Let everybody become a sannyasin at heart, and work for the world. Sannyasa is a mental state, a state of indifference to sensual enjoyments of this world, a state wherein man is trying to melt his mind in its source, the Satchidananda²¹ Parabrahman.²² Mental sannyasin is equally good as the sannyasins who live in Uttar Khand,²³ wearing the orange robe.

But some people who have not the necessary qualifications for sannyasa say that they will give mental gerua, that will color their minds with gerua. But it must be remembered that though there have been cases of people like Gandhi and Malavyaji who were equal to sannyasins of sannyasa order, a sannyasin alone can cut himself off completely from the world

Even today there are many people whose mode of life is comparable to that of sannyasin. There is an old man in Kodakanellur. He gets up at 3 o'clock, goes to Tamraparni for bath, studies Bhagavata, meditates, and he has not seen the sun for several years. Such people lead the life of sannyasins. It is not necessary for them to renounce the world and come to Rishikesh. They can devote their life to study of books and contemplation. But only a sannyasin can cut off all moha²⁴ for the world. A man in the world will have a touch of moha. To destroy moha completely, one should take sannyasa. Otherwise what is the use of the sannyasa order? Why did this order come into existence? Why did Sri Shankaracharya take sannyasa? There is a purpose. There is a benefit. Sannyasa completely destroys moha. You may have heard about Narayanaswami. He has related his experiences. He says, "I practiced devotion. I attained a certain stage in bhakti, but for completing my evolution, I had to renounce. I found that I could not make any further progress while at home." This is his experience, and this will be the experience of many others also.

If one's children are fixed up in life, and his daughters are married, and if he has no dependents, and if he has discharged his duties, it is a great mistake for him to remain in the house. To remain in the house is adharm²⁵ for him. This is what the shastras²⁶ say. He may argue that he has become a mental sannyasin. But it is better if he takes up formal sannyasa. His daughters are married, his sons are fixed up in life, and on account of vasanas²⁷ and moha he does not use this freedom for devotion and meditation and sannyasa, and thinks that he is a mental sannyasin. It is purely because of his vasanas and his moha. So, let us become true sannyasins. Let us develop the true spirit of sannyasa and devote ourselves to study, meditation and selfless service and shine as Shankara, Hastamalaka, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana, Sanatkumara, and attain self-realization and divine wisdom and radiate peace and wisdom to all people who come in contact with us.

Need for the Nachiketas²⁸ element

Every one of you should have strength of mind and will through discrimination. He who treats all the objects of this world as straw—that person is the greatest hero. The world is in need of such Nachiketas. The Nachiketas spirit is wanted. Such a man can move the whole world. He is the support for us all; he is the guide; and he can give you solace. Nachiketas had no bank-balance. He was a boy of five years. Lord Yama²⁹ tempted him, promised him dominions and celestial cars, innumerable years of life; but he was a wise boy, though he was young. The world is in need of such boys of Nachiketas' type. He shunned everything; "O Lord Yama! Keep these things for yourself. Give me immortality. They will only wear out our energies and the senses will become old. Keep the dance and the cars for yourself; give me immortality. Give me the knowledge of the sreya-marga,³⁰ not the preyo-marga³¹—the sreya-marga that leads to immortality, eternal bliss eternal sunshine. Show me that path." Yama found that the little boy was not an ordinary boy. Then he began to teach him the immortality of the soul, the nature of the soul beyond cause and effect, beyond good and evil, beyond time, space and causation. He found Nachiketas as the proper student, who did not want the earthly objects.

The Maitreyi element for women

We want not only Nachiketas; we want the Maitreyi element in women also. The world is in need of ladies endowed with the Maitreyi element. There was a great jnani³² in Janaka's court called Yajnavalkya. He had numberless cows and great wealth. When he wanted to enjoy the state of liberation while yet living, the jivanmukti-sukha,³³ he was already a jnani, yet he wanted to retire to the forest. He called his two wives, Katyayani and Maitreyi, and wanted to divide his property between them. Katyayani was a wonderful woman; she was a righteous housewife. By being a righteous housewife, too, you can realize the Self. But Maitreyi was a Bhramavadini.³⁴ She was endowed with viveka.³⁵ She was a kevala adwaitin.³⁶ She asked: "My revered Lord! Even if you give me the wealth of the fourteen worlds can I attain immortality?" That is the real thing! You will have to put that question always, and not be carried away by these little things. She wanted immortality, God-realization. "If all the wealth of the three worlds cannot give me immortality, I do not want them," she said. We want not only Nachiketases, but Maitreyis, too. Only then the world can be redeemed. We

want Gargis, Sulabhas, who had experience of the Self—aparoksha anubhuti. [37](#) That is the goal of your life.

Do selfless service. Always recite the Lord's Names as continuously as oil when it is poured from one vessel to another. You may forget it. Again start the practice. Try to realize, wherever you see, it is the atman that you see; understand the vibhuti[38](#) yoga. Study. Purify your heart. Forget not the goal; attain it right now, this very second.

It is like walking on the razor's edge; but for an aspirant who is endowed with aspiration, it is very smooth. Approach your elders. Try to find out where there is real happiness. Enquire, "Who am I?" Negate these five sheaths—annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha, manomaya kosha, vijnanamaya kosha, anandamaya kosha.[39](#) These have all a beginning and an end. The atman transcends all the five koshas. That is your real nature. Realize it, through renunciation—sannyasa.

Real sannyasa

Sannyasa is real internal transformation. It is not mere "taking gerua[40](#) cloth from somebody." It is not shaving the head, wearing orange-colored robe, bearing kamandalu.[41](#) Mere taking of sannyasa is no sannyasa: there must be complete transformation in the mind.

Such a transformed mind is wholly free from lust, desires and egoism, raga-dwesa,[42](#) jealousy and vanity; it is free from outgoing tendencies. It has no attraction for sense objects; it is free from ambitions and planning.

Such a mind which makes for real sannyasa, is always filled with sattwic[43](#) qualities; it is free from kartri-bhoktri-bhavas. It always moves inwards—it is antarmukha[44](#) vritti. It has renounced all work with desire; it has relinquished the fruits of all actions; it rests in its own Satchidananda swarupa.[45](#) This is real sannyasa.

Secret of sannyasa

Immortal divine life cannot be attained without renunciation of the petty sensual life. The secret of renunciation is the renunciation of egoism and desires. Some think that renouncing the family and the material world alone

is the real renunciation. But it is not actually so. One should not neglect his own swadharma⁴⁶ and responsibility in the name of renunciation. What is wanted is the renunciation of egoism, lust, anger, greed, petty-mindedness, and such other negative qualities that stand in the way of one's perfection and self-evolution.

To want nothing is indeed the most efficacious way to attain the highest good. If you crave for a thing, you may not get it, and consequently be unhappy. Therefore, renounce the craving for objects.

Renounce the evil vrittis of the mind through regular introspection and by cultivating the opposite positive qualities. You will attain God-realization. Renunciation alone can make you fearless and happy. It is the bestower of eternal peace and immortality.

Who is a sannyasin–I

The life of Jesus shows how a real sannyasin will behave. A sannyasin is a very good and extremely virtuous man. He has no attachment to the world. He may live in the forest or in the city. He will always be thinking of God and of the welfare of other people. He will keep his mind and heart quite pure. He is without anger, without hatred, is truthful and kind. He wants no luxuries but just enough food to keep him alive. He wears very simple dress, He has no family and children and property. Yet he is extremely happy.

He is wise and virtuous. He possesses divine qualities such as mercy, universal love, truthfulness, purity. He has control over his mind and senses.

He is free from anger, lust, greed, pride, jealousy. He loves all. He always prays and meditates. He never does any harm to anybody. People respect and adore him.

Who is a sannyasin–II

A sannyasin has a different angle of vision. He has different eyes. He looks upon everything from an absolutely different point of view. Just as the man who wears green spectacles sees green objects everywhere, so also a jnani sees the atman everywhere through his new eye of wisdom. There is absolutely no personal element in him. He has not a bit of selfish interest. The

lower self is completely annihilated. He lives for serving all. He feels the world as his own self. He actually feels that all is himself only. There is not a single thought or feeling for his personal little self. He has cosmic vision and cosmic feeling. Just as the river has joined the ocean, he has joined the ocean of bliss, knowledge and consciousness. He thinks and feels and works for others.

A sannyasin is absolutely free from worries, difficulties, troubles, tribulations, sorrow and anxieties under any circumstance or condition. He is always cheerful and happy. He is not a slave or victim of different moods. He is not moved a bit by sorrow, grief or persecution.

A sannyasin has got all-round development. He has spotless or unblemished character. All sattwic virtues shine in him. He is an embodiment of mercy, sympathy, love, patience, serenity, etc. He has high qualities. The whole nature has been perfectly unfolded. All divine attributes are fully awakened in him.

Qualifications for sannyasa

Do not take sannyasa without the proper qualification and even if you do so without necessary qualification, you should stick to sannyasa and make fresh efforts to make yourself qualified. To revert back to household life after renunciation is deplorable. It is like eating the vomited food or crow's refuse.

If you make use of the orange robe for leading a comfortable life without exertion, you are the worst sinner. You can have no progress in the spiritual path.

Strive ceaselessly to live in God through japa,[47](#) kirtan,[48](#) service of the needy and meditation. Then alone you will be able to conquer time and death.

Become a hero. Conquer the formidable foe, the turbulent mind. Self-conquest is more than many a martyrdom. The inner war against the evil thoughts, evil vasanas, cravings and evil samskaras or impressions is more formidable than the external world war. War against the mind and the senses is indeed more terrible than this outer warfare.

Realize your unity with the human beings, animals, plants and rocks, with all Nature. Mix with all. Unite with all. Cultivate equal vision and universal brotherhood. You will soon attain the *summum bonum* of life.

Taste the immortal sweetness of the beautiful life in the self within by annihilating the mind. Live in the atman and attain the blessed immortal state. Meditate and reach the deeper depths of eternal life, and eventually attain the full glory of union with the Supreme Self.

The touchstone of sannyasa

Only a sannyasin really knows how to perform selfless actions. Only a sannyasin can do perfect nishkama seva.[49](#) While remaining as a grihastha, [50](#) you can attain a very high degree of selflessness; but perfection can be attained only when you renounce everything and become completely desireless and motiveless. The test of renunciation is selflessness; and the test of selflessness is renunciation.

Often people say, “I have mentally renounced everything. I am doing selfless service.” But they are afraid to enter the holy order of sannyasa. Attachments and cravings lurk in the corners of their mind. No doubt they are rendering great service; no doubt in due time they, too, will attain that perfection but it is not possible without complete renunciation, the ideal of a sannyasin.

Sannyasin’s clothes represent highest ideals

The gerua cloth or the orange-colored robe, should put into your mind the ideals of Shankara, of Dakshinamurti.[51](#) Respect all saints.[52](#) Reflect over the purpose for which you have taken birth in this world. Is it for a little position, a little bank-balance, a motorcar? Even the whole wealth of the fourteen worlds is nothing when compared to half a grain of vairagya. Nothing will tempt you in this world if you have real vairagya. “He who wears only a kaupina[53](#) is the happiest man in the world.”

A man of renunciation operates through the purses and banks of the whole world. Maya stands with folded hands to serve that man who has got real dispassion. Dispassion comes from viveka. Dispassion should be born of discrimination. Smasana-vairagya or prasava vairagya will not help one in the spiritual path. Vairagya born of discrimination only will give you real

strength. You may have nothing to eat, nobody to help you, yet strength born of discrimination, strength born of regular meditation, will make you bold, fearless and take you to the other shore of fearlessness and immortality. That strength is necessary. Discrimination and dispassion—he who possesses these alone is really the great man of the world. He is the King of kings, and he owns the wealth of the whole world.

Even a little meditation on: “Brahman is real, the world is illusory,” must be ingrained in every cell. The world is unreal. But Maya is tempting. It makes you forget the Reality. The function of Maya consists in making the real appear as unreal and the unreal appear as real. When you begin to meditate, even if you have no success, you must persist. Regularity is of paramount importance. You must have the conviction that you can get nothing from this world. “Pleasures born of contact, indeed, are wombs of pain, Son of Kunti. They have beginning and an end; the wise does not delight in them.”⁵⁴ “There is no happiness in this world..” “Pain is inherent in the temporal world.” You must constantly dwell upon the meaning of these statements from the scriptures. Then only will your mind be turned inward.

If Devi’s⁵⁵ grace is on us, we can reject the whole world as straw. May the Lord give us this knowledge. “Brahman is real, the world is unreal. The jiva⁵⁶ is identical with Brahman.” Mere intellect is nothing. You might have studied and exhausted all the spiritual books of a library, but it is useless without viveka and dispassion. If you have even a little dispassion, a little viveka, all the objects will have no attraction for you. The man of dispassion is happy. He is the Emperor of emperors. Dispassion will come when you have understood the real nature of the Reality. What is your goal? Satchidananda Swarupa! Do not do parrot-like repetition, but actually feel.

Swadhyaya⁵⁷ for sannyasins

Do not waste your mental energy by studying Siddhanta Kaumudi and Niyaya-shastra for twelve years. What is the use of becoming a dry pandit without self-realization? A dry pandit is like an ass which carries a load of sandalwood on its back. You may, in order to understand thoroughly the Upanishads and the Vedanta⁵⁸ Sutras,⁵⁹ study for one year Laghu Kaumudi (Grammar) and Bhandarkar’s Part I and II, or through the elementary books on Logic, like Bhashaparichheda.

Even if you study a little, you must assimilate and absorb it thoroughly. You must meditate and reflect over it again. It must become part and parcel of your life. Take down notes when you study a book on yoga or philosophy. This is a highly useful practice. This will help you in remembering the essential or fundamental matters. This itself is a kind of lower samadhi, as the mind is deeply occupied in sattwic ideas. This will strengthen the spiritual samskaras and check the outgoing tendencies of the mind. The mind will move towards the atman.

Neophytes should remember again and again some important Vedantic texts daily. Then only their doubts will be removed. Then only will they be established on the path. These textual formulae are such as:

“Being only was in the beginning, One without a second.”[60](#)

“In the beginning all this was the Self, only One.”[61](#)

“This is the Brahman without cause and without effect, without anything inside or outside, this Self is Brahman perceiving everything.”[62](#)

“That immortal Brahman is before.”[63](#)

The Yogavasishtha is a splendid work in jnana yoga.[64](#) You must study it again and again. Avadhuta Gita, Ashtavakra Gita, Ribhu Gita, are excellent books for jnana yoga students. Laghu Vasudeva Manana and Vedantasara are the two books to be placed in the hands of beginners in the study of Vedanta. English translations are available from the Theosophical Society, Adyar, Madras, and the Sri Ramakrishna Mission.

I am very fond of the book Vivekachudamani written by Sri Shankaracharya, that master-exponent of Advaita[65](#) philosophy. The essence of Vedanta is there. It is a treasure of thought and a fount of inspiration. This is a book for constant study. It is your constant companion in your daily life. The style is simple and flowing. I used to carry the book with me always. It is an ideal book for the beginner and an ideal companion and remembrancer for the advanced students also. Study the Mandukya Upanishad. You will know all about OM and the four states. It is one of the classical Upanishads, and belongs to the Atharva Veda. There are twelve mantras[66](#) in this Upanishad.

Sri Gaudapadacharya, the Paramaguru or the grandpreceptor of Sri Shankara has written karikas⁶⁷ on this Upanishad, which are very illuminating and sublime. Without the help of the karikas you cannot have a comprehensive understanding of the mantras, you cannot get a clear insight into the system of thought or philosophy that is propounded in this unique upanishad.

This upanishad does not deal with rituals and upasanas.⁶⁸ It does not contain any story or parable or dialogue. It deals with pure philosophy alone, with metaphysical discussion of the Ultimate Reality or Brahman and the method of approach to the truth. It is said in the Muktikopanishad: “The only means by which the final emancipation is attained, is through the Mandukya Upanishad alone, which is enough for the salvation of all aspirants.”

Meditation—the sannyasin’s foremost duty

To meditate is our foremost duty. It is for that we have taken our birth here. To concentrate, to purify, to meditate and realize our essential divine nature is our foremost duty. Realization cuts the knots of avidya,⁶⁹ kama⁷⁰ and karma⁷¹ and gives us permanent satisfaction and everlasting peace and eternal bliss.

There are various kinds of meditation—saguna⁷² dhyana⁷³ for devotees, nirguna⁷⁴ dhyana for Vedantins. There is jyotir⁷⁵-dhyana: “Light of lights, which transcends darkness, which transcends inertia, which is attainable through knowledge, is seated in your heart.” Nowhere will you find this in the Western philosophical books. It is only a realized sage like Lord Krishna that can give the *summum bonum* of human existence, the essence of all scriptures, in one word: “Light of lights.”⁷⁶ What is the nature of Brahman? It is Light of lights. It is seated in the hearts of all. You study Western philosophical books, ten or fifteen volumes, and at the end you will find yourself to be an agnostic. That is the difference between the teachings of Eastern sages and the writings of Western philosophers. That Light of lights which transcends darkness, which transcends the three gunas, is close to you, closer than the jugular vein, closer than your breath. How to obtain this? Through wisdom, through meditation, you will have to obtain this. Every indriya⁷⁷ is a light. Ear is a light. Eye is a light. Every sense of perception is a jyotish [light], because through the organs of perception you get knowledge

of this world. Each is a light. Intellect is a light. Prana is a light. He who gives light to these—the Light of lights—is your own atman.

If you meditate on this, you will attain jnana and will be established in the supreme Light of lights.

“The sun does not shine there, neither the moon nor the stars, nor the lightnings. Through its light all the objects of this world are illuminated, the senses and mind are illuminated. The mind, intellect and senses borrow their light from the ultimate Source, the fountain-source for everything.” There is another upanishadic verse in which the method of attaining the Self is given. “By truth, by tapas,[78](#) cosmic consciousness, by constant practice of celibacy you will find it in your own body. Jyotirmayah—Light of lights. Subrah—bright, self-effulgent—the atman is. It is attained by those who are free from all doshas,[79](#) who are free from all the thirteen evil vrittis.” Fear is a dosha. Sleep is a dosha. He who has controlled sleep by meditation on the atman, who has stopped the vibration of prana, beholds the Light of lights. The world exists because prana vibrates. Where there is vibration of prana there is life. He who has controlled the prana becomes immortal. He who has conquered sleep attains the Light of lights. He rests in his own atma and enjoys the supreme bliss.

So let us practice meditation, either saguna-dhyana, or nirguna-dhyana or jyotir-dhyana, and become one with the supreme Light of lights, and free ourselves from the trammels of karma and become jivanmuktas[80](#) and bhagavatas[81](#) in this very birth, not in the unknown future, but in this very birth.

Intimate advice to the newly-initiated sannyasins[82](#)

Blessed Sparks of Divinity! Today is a glorious day, for you are reborn in the Spirit. You have emptied yourself of the individual ego and all negative phenomena, and you are filled with the positive truth, the supreme reality. From today you must be completely dead to the delusions of the world and you must live in the grandeur and in the beauty of a glorious life in the Spirit. Realization of the supreme truth is not an easy task. It demands the price of your individuality, your ego, nay, your entire being itself. Be you all real sannyasins, and bring glory and greatness to the sannyasa order. You are dead

to the world of the senses, and to your family. You are identical with Brahman. The very color of your orange robe must remind you of your pure inner Self, your essential nature.

Live a life of detachment and renunciation. Ceaselessly strive to realize your Self or atman. Always contemplate on Brahman. Desire for nothing in this world and hereafter. By doing the viraja homa⁸³ you have sacrificed your body, mind and senses, you have sacrificed your ego and your individual soul. It is the greatest self-sacrifice, the greatest offering, that any man can make. There are only three duties for a sannyasi to perform. To love the whole humanity as his own Self, to do selfless service, and to meditate. Meditation is his duty. Meditation is his food. Meditation is his life.

Not by having a danda, not by shaving the head, not by the dress, is the sannyasin recognized. He who possesses supreme wisdom is a real sannyasin. Shun name and fame. Observe ahimsa, satya, and brahmacharya. Even if you are beaten or kicked or insulted, remain calm. Do not retaliate.

Always meditate on the significance of the Mahavakyas. Do plenty of Pranava⁸⁴ japa. You are all-pervading, changeless, eternal atman. Never forget this. Live in atman. Love your atman in all. See your own Self in all beings. Sing Om. Chant Om. Be you all torch-bearers of truth, corner-stones of spiritual edifice, supporting pillars of the Eternal Dharma.⁸⁵ Bring glory to your order. Shine like Yajnavalkya, Dattatreya, Shankara and Sadashiva Brahmendra.

Instructions to the newly-initiated sannyasins⁸⁶

Initiated today into the order of sannyasa, all of you are called Swamis.⁸⁷ “Swami” means God. So You should possess at least some of the attributes of God. You should manifest divine virtues. Cosmic love, tolerance, service, humility—these virtues you should manifest. You should not hate anyone. You should embrace the whole world. That is sannyasa. The whole world is your body.

Putraishana, vittaishana, lokaishana (desire for progeny, desire for wealth, desire for fame)—all these three “eshanas” you have renounced. The Three “K’s” (kamini, kanchana, kirti—lust gold and fame) you have renounced. It is

very difficult to renounce them, but you have taken the vow that you have renounced them, before the fire. You are now ready to serve the whole world. You have burnt all desires. That is the meaning of the gerua, ochre robe. And you have also burnt the body. All the panchakoshas you have burnt— annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha, manamaya kosha, vijnanamaya kosha, anandamaya kosha and only Parabrahman remains in you. You are nitya-shuddha-buddha atman (eternal, pure consciousness)—shantam, shivam, advaitam. This is the significance of sannyasa.

A glutton is not fit for sannyasa. A little you can eat; anything a little excess is dangerous. People hold the sannyasa order in high esteem. They prostrate to you thinking that you are God. At least you must try to possess some of the divine qualities. Anger, hatred, malice should go away, and a feeling of oneness, love and unity must come. This is called sannyasa.

You must pray to God, to Dattatreya, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara, Shankara, Padmapada, Hastamalaka. We are children of these people. The sannyasin's life is a glorious life. People honor the sannyasins and offer arghya.[88](#)

A sannyasi should not fight with the porters or with the coolies or with the kitchen-in-charge. Maya's center is the kitchen. That is the place where fights and quarrels occur. Never complain, "The In-charge has not given me sugar; he has not given me milk." You should not come down upon any person. Serenity, devotion, dispassion, discrimination, aspiration, renunciation, meditation, all these you must practice. You must study the Prasthanatraya-Gita, Upanishads and Brahmasutras and live in Brahman.

There is no world for you. In deep sleep there is no world for you. Only when there is mind, there is world. Mind is nothing but a bundle of vasanas and samskaras. If you remove these through meditation, there will be no world. It is the mind that causes bondage. Mind with desires for objects leads to bondage. Mind without these desires is paripoorna,[89](#) all-blissful. The wealth of the whole world belongs to you if you have renounced all desires. You need not require a check-book. Nature will meet your requirements wherever you go. Materials will come by themselves. You should possess all divine virtues and radiate peace, bliss, brahmic[90](#) brilliance or tejas.[91](#) Everyone will then invite you. The whole world is your home. There is no such thing as

“stranger.” Everything is Parabrahman. *Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam, Prajnanam Brahma.*[92](#) Satchidananda is Brahman. Brahman means Great, Knowledge, Bliss. Brahman, is paripoorna. If you attain Brahman, you attain everything. Here everything is apoorna.[93](#)

All devas[94](#) prostrate before you; you can command nature; you can command elements; the fire burns on account of the tejas of Brahman. Such is the glory of a sannyasi.

You should control anger. You should have cosmic love. You should not commit any himsa.[95](#) You must maintain perfect ahimsa.[96](#) That is called sannyasa.

You should not have any attraction for the objects of the world. The atman is the whole. Within that there is a vibration. The world is that vibration. Where is Infinity and where is Asia?. If you think of this, it is grand, Where is Hindustan or Pakistan or Asia or Europe, in Brahman? For a sannyasi there is no Hindustan or Pakistan. The world is a footprint of a calf. You are Infinity. *Satyam, jnanam, Anantam Brahma.* Here there is a little happiness, but in Brahman there is undecaying bliss which is not mixed with pain, which is everlasting. In the world man is happy for five minutes, and he weeps for the next five minutes. That is the nature of the world. But here everyone is happy. Nobody can imitate the sadhu’s blissful smile.

Everybody must become a sannyasi one day or the other. Everyone is moving towards Brahman. Where is happiness? You should find out. The deep sleep state gives you the clue that you are one with Brahman, but there is a veil of ignorance. Destroy this veil through satsanga,[97](#) discrimination, dharma-megha samadhi,[98](#) etc.

Do not become angry under any circumstance. Practice kshama[99](#) or forgiveness. Even if anger manifests in the mind, do not give expression to it, nor act upon it. Though this is difficult, for a sincere aspirant the grace of the Lord comes and he becomes established in forgiveness.. Remember you have given abhayam (fearlessness) to all beings.

You must share whatever you have. Do not keep any money in the savings bank account. Your pension should not go to your sons, but it must go to the

poor people, it must go to the whole world. A sannyasin has no body. He is the atma of all beings. That means he possesses everything. You should feel that you are all-pervading atman. You should assert, “Pure Consciousness is Brahman.” The Teacher says, “Thou art That” one Indwelling Consciousness. Like butter in the milk, like fire in wood, like electricity in the insulated wire, this atman pervades all forms.

Everyone wants unalloyed bliss. Everyone desires to exist for ever. Everyone wants unlimited knowledge. These show that you are in essence Parabrahman. Again and again meditate on this formula. Reduce your thirst for worldly objects. Daily spend some time in meditation. Even if you are a king, you may be beaten and taken away by the enemy armies who are more powerful than yours. You are atma samrat. No dacoit can take away this wealth. “This atman is without form.” You should have the strength born of discrimination. You should have the strength born of atmic¹⁰⁰-realization, and not the strength born of position or bank-balance or any property.

A little japa, a little meditation, a little study of upanishads, a little control of anger—all these you should practice. Anger will come, but try to control it. Leave the place at once. Gradually you will gain strength. If you control anger and annoyance, you will have plenty of energy. If the anger is controlled, you can move the world. You will have ojas¹⁰¹-shakti¹⁰² which is very useful for meditation and awakening kundalini. A man who leads a Brahmic life is not afraid of anything. Let any danger come, what is that for you? It is only attachment that causes fear. “From attachment spring fear and anger.” If anyone disturbs you or takes your things, you get angry because you are attached to conditions and things. He who has controlled bhaya¹⁰³ and krodha,¹⁰⁴ is established in equanimity. We should get established in equanimity.

We should have mental strength, moral strength and spiritual strength. A little word makes your blood hot. You must keep quiet if one abuses you. A little wealth, a little position, a little strength, fattens your egoism. Be like the Ujjain saint. If you study Bhagavatam¹⁰⁵ you will find his story. He was driven away by his relatives. People tied his legs and hands, spat on him and mocked at him. But he laughed at them. That is the strength we want. Mental strength is quite different from physical strength. Do japa, kirtan. Meditate that you are infinite bliss, infinite strength. Money gives you a little pleasure

but the atman is an embodiment of bliss. You do not want anything. Practice vichara. Do not get angry. If a man beats you, think and feel that you are the atman.

Om bhuh sannyastam maya; Om bhuvah sannyastam maya, Om swah sannyastam maya, om bhurbhuvasswah sannyastam maya: “I have renounced the pleasures of this world, the other world and heaven,” Every day when you take a bath you should recite this mantra. Even the sun trembles before him who repeats this mantra. Do not desire to go to heaven and enjoy the milk of Kamadhenu.[106](#) All idea of enjoyment in heaven you have given up. You have burnt all desires. Nothing can attract you. Nothing can tempt you. Such is the glory of the sannyasi who has recited this mantra.

Jnanopadesha[107](#) for sannyasins

Every one of you should resort to high self-discipline. You should do selfless service. Man has a constricted heart. Very few people have a large heart of charitable disposition. Man loves only his brother or sister, and a few friends who will help him when he himself is sick, from whom he can borrow. You do not feel, “The whole world is my family.” You will have to crush this smallness of heart through service, generosity, sattwic thinking, daily study of Yogavasishtha and try to put them into practice. Vedanta is not a philosophy; Raja Yoga[108](#) is not a theory. It is vital fundamental experience. Raja Yoga is an experience, even as the tasting of the sweetness of the mango is an experience. It is the experience of those who sit for meditation daily, those who get up at 4 o’clock in the morning (Brahmamuhurta[109](#)).

Brahmamuhurta is most favorable for meditation because the mind is filled with sattwa,[110](#) and the whole atmosphere is charged with sattwa. You have just woken up from deep sleep. Just come down from the experience of the inner being, from the supreme consciousness. That consciousness remains in the mind as “I enjoyed a good sleep.” You were one with the atman, through the veil of avidya or karana-sharira.[111](#) The mind has not taken the form of the raga-dwesa currents of the world; just at that time get up and saturate the mind with sattwa, by reciting some of the slokas like:

*Brahmanandam paramasukhadam kevalam jnanamurtim,
Dwandivatitam gagawasadrisam tattwamasyadilakshyam;
Ekam nityam vimalamachalam sarvadhee sakshibhutam,
Bhavateetam trigunarahitam sat-gurum twam namami.* [112](#)

This is the nature of the Virat. [113](#) This is your essential nature; never think, “I am weak.” Even if you are clad in rags, even if you have nothing to eat, even if your people have deserted you because you have not got much money, this faith will elevate you. You are the soul, Tat Twam. Asi. [114](#) Do not be afraid. You are all-powerful soul. These are your clothing. You are immortal.

This is the truth: You are unborn; that which takes birth is only the body. Just as you see a snake in the rope, this world is superimposed on Brahman. This is the vivarta-vada [115](#) of Sri Shankaracharya. All this is mere appearance.

The Reality behind the names and forms—that is unchanging, that is eternal, that is self-luminous, that is paripurna. These are formulas which give you strength, real strength in times of stress and difficulties.

Advice to sannyasins–1

There are four Mahavakyas or great sentences. They are: *Prajnanam brahma, Aham brahmasmi, Tattwamasi, Ayam atma brahma*. Prajnanam brahma is Lakshana [116](#) Vakya: [117](#) Brahman is Pure Consciousness. The consciousness by which the intellect, mind, prana and the senses function, the consciousness where there is no sankalpa [118](#) or vikalpa, [119](#) is Parabrahman. Aham Brahmasmi is the Anusandhana [120](#) Vakya. I am the all-pervading Brahman, Akasavat Sarvagatah—all-pervading like the ether. A student of Vedanta meditates on this formula, negating the koshas—the annamaya kosha, pranamaya kosha, manomaya kosha, vijnananmaya kosha, and anandamaya kosha. He separates himself from these koshas and identifies himself with the Essence, the atman. Just as you take the pith from the munja grass, you take out atman by meditation on the Pranava, OM, and the great sentences (Mahavakyas). You are in essence Satchidananda, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. Tattwamasi is the upadesha [121](#) vakya. The Teacher instructs the disciple, “Thou art That.” The disciple practices meditation on the Mahavakyas and realizes that he is Brahman, Ayam Atma Brahma—this

Atman is Brahman. This is Sakshatakara¹²² Vakya. Your essential nature is Satchidananda. So do not fight with anybody. Do not ask for tea or coffee. You have no rights, because you are essentially Brahman. You are chinmaya, ¹²³ full of consciousness and bliss.

You have taken the vow to give protection to all creatures. So do not take up a stone and hit monkeys. There is no body for you. Your body has been burnt. That is the significance of the ochre robe. Sannyasa is a sterner stuff. Do not think that sannyasa is meant for getting respect, people will say, “Aiye Swamiji Maharaj.” Even if a man cuts your throat you should say, “I am not this body,” “Soham.” You should remain unperturbed. Any man can do anything for you. He can cut your throat. But you should keep quiet.

You have repeated the mantra: *Om Bhuh sannyastam maya. Om Bhuvah sannyastam maya, Om Swah sannyastam maya, Om Bhurbhuvah swah sannyastam maya.* It means, “I have renounced the pleasures of the three worlds: Bhuloka, Bhuhvarloka, and Swarga.” All the devatas¹²⁴ now tremble before you. Such is the glory of a sannyasin. According to the government census report there are about fifty lakhs [five million] sannyasins. You, sannyasins, should not be a mere addition to that number. You should be real sannyasins.

Service is your motto. Serve, love, give. When you see an old woman carrying a bundle of fuel with difficulty, at once you must take the bundle and help her. That is sannyasa. Service of the poor and the sick is called sannyasa—not only going to Vrindavan and other places. Do not put anything in the savings bank account. There is no tomorrow for you, no storing for you. God or Prakriti¹²⁵ will provide everything for you. You should share whatever you have, physical, mental or spiritual. If you have a cup of milk and if you find a man starving, you must run to him at once and give him that milk. Sannyasa does not mean quoting quotations. Your body and mind are at the disposal of the country. If you find a sick man on the roadside, you should at once lift him and take him to a hospital. You should be ever ready to serve poor people. You should live sharing whatever you have with others, ever meditating, controlling the senses, disciplining the mind and ever resting in your own self, feeling, “Brahman is real, the world is unreal.” But that does not mean that there is no world. It only means that the world is not so real as

Brahman. It does not mean that the world does not exist in the three periods of time like the barren woman's son or the horns of a hare.

You should serve with the constant feeling that you are Brahman, and the whole world is Brahman. You may fall again and again, but rise up again and again and proceed, though with faltering steps. No perishable thing is the atman. "The atman is unborn, eternal, imperishable, ancient. He is not destroyed when the body is destroyed." You should meditate on this formula. It will give you strength and free you from birth and death and the bonds of karma. You will become a jivanmukta, not in the unknown future, but right now in this very second.

You should feel that the whole world is your body, the whole universe is your body. Do kirtan, japa, and prayer. Serve other people and rest in your own swarupa. You are not this body. You are the supreme being, full of knowledge, full of bliss, full of wisdom. "Happiness is only in the Unconditioned." It is Satchidananda. That is why everyone should realize the atman, for there alone you will find eternal bliss.

"He who has no mineness, no egoism, no desires, attains peace." "He who has faith, who ever meditates on the atman and who has controlled all his senses, attains knowledge of the self." "After attaining knowledge of the Self, he enjoys supreme peace.

The happiness that you get in a dak bungalow is not real. Some thief may steal your things and you may feel sad. Eternal bliss is in your own Self. In deep sleep there is no car, or bungalow; there is no attraction or distraction. You experience bliss because you are nearer the atman. That bliss where there is no object, no play of organs, where mind does not function, intellect does not function—that you should attempt to achieve.

Vasanakshaya,[126](#) manonasa[127](#) and tattwa jnana[128](#) are the three stages. When the vasanas, the vrittis of the mind, are destroyed, the mind is thinned out and then Brahmajnana[129](#) or knowledge, of the Self dawns. So may you all try to enjoy the atmic bliss within. **More Articles on Sannyasa**

- [A Brief Life of Swami Sivananda](#)
- [Advice to Sannyasins—part 1](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Advice to Sannyasins—part 2](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati

- [The Ideal of Sannyasa](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Sannyasa Dharma](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Perspective of the Renunciate](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Reflections on Sannyasa](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [The Rugged Path](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati

1) Vritti: Thought-wave; mental modification; mental whirlpool; a ripple in the chitta. [\[Go back\]](#)

2) Author of the Yoga Sutras. [\[Go back\]](#)

3) Abhyasa: Sustained spiritual practice. [\[Go back\]](#)

4) Vairagya: Non-attachment, detachment, dispassion, absence of desire, or indifference. Indifference towards and disgust for all worldly things and enjoyments. [\[Go back\]](#)

5) Samadhi: The state of superconsciousness where Absoluteness is experienced attended with all-knowledge and joy; Oneness; here the mind becomes identified with the object of meditation; the meditator and the meditated, thinker and thought become one in perfect absorption of the mind. [\[Go back\]](#)

6) Dosha drishti: Seeing the defects in samsara and samsaric life. [\[Go back\]](#)

7) Samskara: Impression in the mind produced by previous action or experience; prenatal tendency. [\[Go back\]](#)

8) Shankaracharya: The great reformer and re-establisher of Vedic Religion in India around 300 B.C. He is the unparalleled exponent of Advaita (Non-Dual) Vedanta. He also reformed the mode of monastic life and founded (or regenerated) the ancient Swami Order. [\[Go back\]](#)

9) Violent thieves who prey on travellers. [\[Go back\]](#)

10) Samsara: Life through repeated births and deaths; the wheel of birth and death; the process of earthly life. [\[Go back\]](#)

11) Vichara: Enquiry/investigation into the nature of the Self, Brahman or Truth; ever-present reflection on the why and wherefore of things; enquiry into the real meaning of the Mahavakya Tat-tvam-asi: Thou art That; discrimination between the Real and the unreal; enquiry of Self. [\[Go back\]](#)

12) Paramhansa: Literally: Supreme Swan, a person of the highest spiritual realization, from the fact that a swan can separate milk from water and is therefore an apt symbol for one who has discarded the unreal for the Real, the darkness for the Light, and mortality for the Immortal, having separated himself fully from all that is not God and joined himself totally to the Divine, becoming a veritable embodiment of Divinity manifested in humanity. [\[Go back\]](#)

13) Atma(n): The individual spirit or self. [\[Go back\]](#)

14) Queens [\[Go back\]](#)

15) Maya: The illusive power of Brahman; the veiling and the projecting power of the universe, the power of Cosmic Illusion. [\[Go back\]](#)

16) Prana: Vital energy; life-breath; life-force. [\[Go back\]](#)

17) Brahman: The Absolute Reality; the Truth proclaimed in the Upanishads; the Supreme Reality that is one and indivisible, infinite, and eternal; all-pervading, changeless Existence; Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute (Satchidananda); Absolute Consciousness; it is not only all-powerful but all-power itself; not only all-knowing and blissful but all-knowledge and all-bliss itself. [\[Go back\]](#)

18) Akshara: Imperishable; indestructible, immutable, undying—all in reference to the individual self and the Supreme Self, Brahman. It also means syllable and is used in reference to the ekakshara—the one syllable, the One Imperishable: Om. [\[Go back\]](#)

19) Pundit: Scholar; pandita; learned individual. [\[Go back\]](#)

20) Vidvan: An expert all aspects of the Sanskrit language. [\[Go back\]](#)

21) Satchidananda: Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute; Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)

22) Parabrahman: Supreme Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)

23) The Himalayas. [\[Go back\]](#)

24) Moha: Delusion—in relation to something, usually producing delusive attachment or infatuation based on a completely false perception and evaluation of the object. [\[Go back\]](#)

25) Adharma: Unrighteousness; demerit, failure to perform one's proper duty; unrighteous action; lawlessness; absence of virtue; all that is contrary to righteousness. [\[Go back\]](#)

26) Shastra: Scripture; spiritual treatise. [\[Go back\]](#)

27) Vasana: A bundle or aggregate of similar samskaras. Subtle desire; a tendency created in a person by the doing of an action or by enjoyment; it induces the person to repeat the action or to seek a repetition of the enjoyment; the subtle impression in the mind capable of developing itself into action; it is the cause of birth and experience in general; the impression of actions that remains unconsciously in the mind. [\[Go back\]](#)

28) The central figure of the Katha Upanishad. [\[Go back\]](#)

29) Yama: The Lord of Death, controller of who dies and what happens to them after death. [\[Go back\]](#)

30) Sreyo marga: The path of the good or truly beneficial, as opposed to the path of the merely appealing, pleasant, pleasurable, or that which leads to worldly gain. [\[Go back\]](#)

31) Preyo marga: The path of the pleasing, the pleasant, the pleasurable, or of worldly gain, as opposed to the path of the good or truly beneficial. [\[Go back\]](#)

32) Jnani: A follower of the path of knowledge (jnana); one who has realized—who knows—the Truth (Brahman). [\[Go back\]](#)

- 33) The happiness of one who is liberated even while living. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 34) Brahmavadin: Literally “one who walks the path of Brahman.” One who advocates that there is one existence alone—Parabrahman. Brahmavadini is the feminine form of Brahmavadin. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 35) Viveka: Discrimination between the Real and the unreal, between the Self and the non-Self, between the permanent and the impermanent; right intuitive discrimination; ever-present discrimination between the transient and the permanent. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 36) Kevala Advaitin: A nondualist intent on the attainment of the state of Kaivalya—liberation. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 37) Aparoksha anubhuti: The direct, immediate, intuitive experience or perception of the invisible—the realization of Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 38) Vibhuti: Manifestations of divine power or glory; might; prosperity; welfare; splendor; exalted rank; greatness; miraculous powers; superhuman power resembling that of God (Ishwara). The quality of all-pervasiveness (omnipresence). [\[Go back\]](#)
- 39) Kosha: Sheath; bag; scabbard; a sheath enclosing the soul; body. There are five such concentric sheaths or bodies: the sheaths of bliss, intellect, mind, life-force and the physical body—the anandamaya, jnanamaya, manomaya, pranamaya and annamaya bodies respectively. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 40) Gerua: The brownish orange mud used to dye the clothing of Hindu monastics; the color produced by dyeing with gerua. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 41) Kamandalu: A water vessel carried by a travelling sannyasi; usually made of a gourd or coconut shell, it may also be earthenware. The kamandalu and staff (danda) are considered the insignia of the sannyasi along with gerua clothing. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 42) Raga: Attachment/affinity for something, implying a desire for that. This can be emotional (instinctual) or intellectual. It may range from simple liking or preference to intense desire and attraction. Dwesha: Aversion/avoidance for something, implying a dislike for that. This can be emotional (instinctual)

or intellectual. It may range from simple nonpreference to intense repulsion, antipathy and even hatred. Raga-dwesha is the continual cycle of desire/aversion like/dislike. [\[Go back\]](#)

43) Sattwic: Partaking of the quality of Sattwa. [\[Go back\]](#)

44) Antarmukha: Literally “inner face”—inward vision or perception. [\[Go back\]](#)

45) Swarupa: “Form of the Self.” Natural—true—form; actual or essential nature; essence. A revelatory appearance that makes clear the true nature of some thing. [\[Go back\]](#)

46) Swadharma: One’s own natural (innate) duty (dharma, based on their karma and samskara. One’s own prescribed duty in life according to the eternal law. [\[Go back\]](#)

47) Japa: Repetition of a mantra. [\[Go back\]](#)

48) Kirtan: Singing the names and praises of God; devotional chanting. [\[Go back\]](#)

49) Selfless service. [\[Go back\]](#)

50) Grihastha: A married “householder.” [\[Go back\]](#)

51) Dakshinamurti: A name for Lord Shiva as the silent teacher. Vedic Religion declares that in every cycle of creation God manifests as Dakshinamurti and becomes the guru of the first human beings—those who were most spiritually evolved in the previous creation—teaching them the path to liberation (moksha). [\[Go back\]](#)

52) In India, “saint” is often used when “sadhu” is meant. Sadhu: Seeker for truth (sat); and person who is practicing spiritual disciplines. Usually this term is applied only to monastics. [\[Go back\]](#)

53) Kaupina: A small strip of cloth used to cover one’s private parts. [\[Go back\]](#)

54) Bhagavad Gita 5:22 [\[Go back\]](#)

55) Devi: Goddess; the Supreme Shakti (Divine Power) or Divine Mother. [\[Go back\]](#)

56) Jiva: Individual spirit. [\[Go back\]](#)

57) Swadhyaya: Introspective self-study or self-analysis leading to self-understanding. Study of spiritual texts. [\[Go back\]](#)

58) Vedanta: Literally, “the end of the Vedas;” the Upanishads; the school of Hindu thought, based primarily on the Upanishads, upholding the doctrine of either pure non-dualism or conditional non-dualism. [\[Go back\]](#)

59) Vedanta Sutras: The Brahma Sutras. A treatise by Vyasa on Vedanta philosophy in the form of aphorisms. [\[Go back\]](#)

60) Chandogya Upanishad VI-2-1 [\[Go back\]](#)

61) Aittariya Aranyaka 114-1 [\[Go back\]](#)

62) Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 11-5-19 [\[Go back\]](#)

63) Mandukya Upanishad II-2-11-7 [\[Go back\]](#)

64) Jnana Yoga: The path of knowledge; meditation through wisdom; constantly and seriously thinking on the true nature of the Self as taught by the upanishads. [\[Go back\]](#)

65) Advaita: Non-duality; literally: “not two.” [\[Go back\]](#)

66) Verses [\[Go back\]](#)

67) Karika: Commentary; treatise. [\[Go back\]](#)

68) Upasana: “Sitting near” or “drawing near;” worship; adoration; contemplation of God or deity; devout meditation. [\[Go back\]](#)

69) Avidya: Ignorance; nescience; unknowing; literally: “to know not.” [\[Go back\]](#)

70) Kama: Desire; passion; lust. [\[Go back\]](#)

71) Karma: The law of action and reaction, the metaphysical equivalent of the principle: “For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.” “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Galatians 6:7). It is karma operating through the law of cause and effect that binds the jiva or the individual soul to the wheel of birth and death. [\[Go back\]](#)

72) Saguna: With attributes or qualities (gunas). [\[Go back\]](#)

73) Dhyana: Meditation; contemplation. [\[Go back\]](#)

74) Nirguna: Without attributes or qualities (gunas). [\[Go back\]](#)

75) Jyoti: Light; flame; illumination; luminosity; effulgence. [\[Go back\]](#)

76) “He is the Light of lights.” (Bhagavad Gita 13:17) [\[Go back\]](#)

77) Indriya: Organ. The five organs of perception (jnanendriyas) are the ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose. [\[Go back\]](#)

78) Tapas (tapasya): Austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline; spiritual force. Literally it means the generation of heat or energy, but is always used in a symbolic manner, referring to spiritual practice and its effect, especially the roasting of karmic seeds, the burning up of karma. [\[Go back\]](#)

79) Dosha: Defect; imperfection; blemish; fault; shortcoming. In Yoga philosophy there are five doshas: lust (*kama*), anger (*krodha*), greed (*lobha*), delusion (*moha*), and envy (*matsarya*). [\[Go back\]](#)

80) Jivanmukta: One who is liberated in this present life. [\[Go back\]](#)

81) Bhagavata: A devotee of God (Bhagavan) or Vishnu. [\[Go back\]](#)

82) An intimate talk given by Sri Swami Sivananda, to a batch of newly-initiated sannyasins. It was also tape-recorded. [\[Go back\]](#)

83) Viraja homa: “Universal homa;” the final fire sacrifice done just before taking sannyas in which offerings are made to all living beings in petition for their releasing of the prospective sannyasin from all karmic obligations he might have in relation to them. [\[Go back\]](#)

84) Pranava: A title of Om. It means “Life-ness” or “Life-Giver.” It is the expression or controller of prana—the life force within the individual being and the cosmos. [\[Go back\]](#)

85) Dharma: The righteous way of living, as enjoined by the sacred scriptures and the spiritually illumined; characteristics; virtue. [\[Go back\]](#)

86) A talk given to a group of sannyasins on the day of their initiation into the Order of sannyasa. [\[Go back\]](#)

87) Swami: Literally, “I am mine”—in the sense of absolute self-mastership. It is often used in the sense of “lord” or owner as well as a spiritual guide or authority. God Himself is the ultimate Swami. As a matter of respect it is always used in reference to sannyasis, since they have vowed themselves to pursue the knowledge of the Self, or those considered to be of spiritual advancement. [\[Go back\]](#)

88) Arghya: Offering made in ritualistic worship. [\[Go back\]](#)

89) Paripurna: All-full; self-contained. [\[Go back\]](#)

90) Divine [\[Go back\]](#)

91) Tejas: Radiance; brilliancy (especially spiritual); the element of fire; Agni; heat. [\[Go back\]](#)

92) “Brahman is unending Reality, Knowledge, and Consciousness.” [\[Go back\]](#)

93) Incomplete; lacking. [\[Go back\]](#)

94) Deva: “A shining one,” a god—greater or lesser in the evolutionary hierarchy; a semi-divine or celestial being with great powers, and therefore a “god.” Sometimes called a demi-god. [\[Go back\]](#)

95) Himsa: Injury, violence; killing. [\[Go back\]](#)

96) Ahimsa: Non-injury in thought, word, and deed; non-violence; non-killing; harmlessness. [\[Go back\]](#)

97) Satsanga: Literally: “company with Truth.” Association with godly-minded persons. The company of saints and devotees. [\[Go back\]](#)

98) Dharma-megha samadhi: The final state of one-pointedness, when an individual becomes disinterested even in omniscience, omnipotence, and omnipresence. This state of superconsciousness or samadhi is called dharma-megha—cloud of virtue—inasmuch as it showers nectar drops of immortality through knowledge of Brahman, when all the hosts of vasanas are entirely destroyed. [\[Go back\]](#)

99) Kshama: Forgiveness; patience. [\[Go back\]](#)

100) Atmic: Having to do with the atma—spirit or self. [\[Go back\]](#)

101) Ojas: Vitality; luster; splendor; energy; spiritual energy. The highest form of energy in the human body. In the spiritual aspirant who constantly practices continence and purity, other forms of energy are transmuted into ojas and stored in the brain, manifesting as spiritual and intellectual power. [\[Go back\]](#)

102) Shakti: Power; energy; force; the Divine Power of becoming; the apparent dynamic aspect of Eternal Being; the Absolute Power or Cosmic Energy. [\[Go back\]](#)

103) Bhaya: Fear; terror. [\[Go back\]](#)

104) Krodha: Anger, wrath; fury. [\[Go back\]](#)

105) Bhagavatam: Srimad Bhagavatam. A major purana devoted to the glory and worship of Vishnu and his incarnation as Krishna. The major scripture of the Vaishnavas. [\[Go back\]](#)

106) Kamadhenu: Wishfulfilling cow produced at the churning of the milk ocean. [\[Go back\]](#)

107) Jnanopadesha: Instruction in wisdom (jnana). [\[Go back\]](#)

108) Ashtanga Yoga: The “eight-limbed” Yoga of Patanjali outlined in the Yoga Sutras. [\[Go back\]](#)

109) Brahmamuhurta: “The muhurta of Brahman.” The period of one and a half hours before sunrise (sometime between 3:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m.), which is said to be the best time for meditation and worship. Muhurta: A unit of time—a thirtieth part of a day, forty-eight minutes in length. [\[Go back\]](#)

110) Sattwa: Light; purity; reality. [\[Go back\]](#)

111) Karana sharira: The causal body (where the individual rests during sound, deep, dreamless sleep, the intellect, mind and senses being reduced to an unmanifested potential condition), also known as the anandamaya kosha, the “sheath of bliss.” [\[Go back\]](#)

112) “Salutations to the true Guru Who is the embodiment of the Bliss of Brahman and the bestower of supreme happiness, Who is detached, knowledge personified, and beyond duality, who is like the sky, and is indicated by such Vedic dicta as: “Thou art That,” and Who is One, eternal, pure, immovable, the witness of all the changes in the buddhi ‘intellect’, beyond all states of devoid of the three gunas.” (From the Wishwasara Tantra) [\[Go back\]](#)

113) Virat: The cosmic form of the Self as the cause of the gross world; the all-pervading Spirit in the form of the universe. Note that Sivananda does not equate it with a human guru. [\[Go back\]](#)

114) Tat Twam Asi: “Thou art That;” the Mahavakya from the Chandogya Upanishad. [\[Go back\]](#)

115) Vivarta-vada: Phenomenalism. Vivarta: Illusory appearance; a doctrine of the Nondualistic school of Vedanta philosophy explaining creation as an illusory appearance of the Absolute; apparent variation; illusory manifestation of Brahman; apparent or unreal or seeming change; superimposition; appearance. [\[Go back\]](#)

116) Lakshana: Definition; characteristic; condition; attribute; sign; mark. [\[Go back\]](#)

117) Vakya: Word or statement. [\[Go back\]](#)

118) Sankalpa: Wish; desire; volition; resolution; will; determination; intention. [\[Go back\]](#)

119) Vikalpa: Imagination; mental construct; abstraction; conceptualization; hallucination; distinction; experience; thought; oscillation of the mind. [\[Go back\]](#)

120) Anusandhana: Enquiry or investigation; in Vedanta, enquiry or investigation into the nature of Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)

121) Upadesha: Spiritual instruction. [\[Go back\]](#)

122) Sakshatakara: Self-realization; direct experience; experience of Absoluteness; Brahmajnana. [\[Go back\]](#)

123) Chinmaya: Full of Consciousness. [\[Go back\]](#)

124) Devas; celestial beings; demigods. [\[Go back\]](#)

125) Prakriti: Causal matter; the fundamental power (shakti) of God from which the entire cosmos is formed; the root base of all elements; undifferentiated matter; the material cause of the world. Also known as Pradhana. [\[Go back\]](#)

126) Vasanakshaya: Annihilation of subtle desires and impressions. [\[Go back\]](#)

127) Manonasa: Destruction of the mind. [\[Go back\]](#)

128) Tattwa jnana: Knowledge of Brahman; same as Brahmajnana. [\[Go back\]](#)

129) Brahmajnana: Direct, transcendental knowledge of Brahman; Self-realization. [\[Go back\]](#)

ADVICE TO SANNYASINS—PART TWO

by Swami Sivananda Saraswati



Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh

Identification with the body and the mind is the cause of all sufferings. In reality, you are Satchidananda-swarupa. Identification with this real swarupa is the key to perennial peace and supreme bliss. “This atman is unborn, eternal and ancient.” Be regular in your meditation, japa, kirtan, prayer. People do kirtan for some time, attend satsanga for some time, and then they leave off. This is a sad error. Regularity is of paramount importance in sadhana.¹ Whatever you do, do regularly. Increase the period of meditation gradually. Do not be attracted by the tantalizing tinsels of the world. Nobody has been benefited by material possessions. You may have crores [tens of millions] of rupees in the bank; you may have a hundred motorcars and a dozen bungalows, but peace of mind you cannot have from these. You can have peace of mind only if you are regular in japa, meditation, kirtan and satsanga. Only when you realize the Self will you enjoy perennial peace. Construct a meditation cave in your own heart through regular and systematic spiritual practice and realize Him, not in the unknown future, but right now this very second. Forget not the goal.

Let me remind you of the last word of the Upanishads: Tat Twam Asi—Thou art that supreme, infinite, immortal Satchidananda Brahman. Have constant namasmaran. Even when you are working, mentally repeat Sri Ram, Sri Ram. Sri Ram is not only the avatar of Lord Vishnu, consort of Sita, but He is omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent. Attain self-realization through constant namasmaran² and continuous meditation. May the Lord bless you all!

Non-dual consciousness for sannyasins

Non-dual consciousness is the consciousness of Shuddha³ Satchidananda Parabrahman. It is above cosmic consciousness. Arjuna had cosmic consciousness. Hiranyagarbha⁴ has cosmic consciousness. But this non-dual consciousness is above cosmic consciousness. It is the nirvikalpa samadhi⁵ of Vedantins. It is the asamprajnata samadhi⁶ of rajayogins. In this samadhi there is no triputi⁷—the triad of seer, sight, seen; knower, knowledge, knowable; meditator, meditation, the meditated upon or the object of meditation. There is nothing here. Here is no triputi. It is Christ Consciousness. There are no names and forms. There is no sound or color. There is neither matter nor energy. It is pure Absolute Consciousness, Consciousness *per se*. Jesus said, “The Kingdom of God is within you.” The Kingdom of God is not a place, but a state of consciousness. It is the non-dual consciousness wherein the mind, senses and the intellect cease functioning. It is the realm of intuition.

In deep sleep also there are no names and forms. It is like a glimpse of the non-dual consciousness, but there is ignorance, avidya, karana sareera, anandamaya kosha.

In Vedanta, there are two kinds of samadhis. There is the Advaita Bhavanarupa samadhi. The aspirant meditates on the formula “Aham Brahmasmi” or “Tatwamasi,” the great Mahavakyas of the Upanishads. In the beginning stage it is called Advaita Bhavanarupa stage. He tries to identify himself with the non-dual consciousness, but later on through deep meditation and constant nididhyasana⁸ when he is established in his own Satchidanandaswarupa, it is called Advaita Avastharupa samadhi. He is fully established in non-dual consciousness. There are no names and forms, matter and energy. The thing-in-itself, the transcendent, alone remains. Sri Shankara

and Dattatreya had this experience. Madalasa had this experience. She sang, “Suddhosi, Buddhosi Niranjanosi, Samsara-mayaParivarjitosi” to her children in the cradle and made them jivanmuktas, liberated Sages. “Suddhosi,” you are pure, O children. “Buddhosi”—you are full of knowledge. “Niranjanosi” you are spotless, no lust, no greed, no ashubha⁹ vasanas. “Samsaramayaparivarjitosi”—you are not touched by Maya. This Maya cannot touch you. Avidya cannot touch you. You are pure, eternal, immortal atman. Yajnavalkya had this experience. Vamadeva had this experience. Even when he was dwelling in the womb of his mother, he attained illumination. Chudalai had this experience. She was a sage and a yogini.¹⁰ She had powers. She walked in the sky and appeared before her husband. She stood above the ground and taught him Brahmavidya.¹¹ Sulabha also was a sage and a jnani. She approached Janaka and entered his body through her yogic power. He did not like dandi swamis.¹² She was a dandi swami. She wanted to teach him a lesson. Through her yogic power she entered his astral body, and he charged that Sulabha, as a sannyasini, should not have entered the body of a male. She taught him a lesson. “You still have the consciousness of sex, male and female. You have not attained the highest illumination.” Uddalaka had this experience of non-dual consciousness. He taught his disciple Swetaketu the knowledge of Brahman in different ways. Ashtavakra was a great sage of illumination. He has written Ashtavakra Gita, which is soul-elevating. It raises you to the supreme height of Brahmic splendor. Vyasa, Vashistha, Sukadeva, Gaudapada, Govindapada, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara, Sanatsujata, Hastamalaka, Padmapada, Trotakacharya, Sureshwaracharya, Pattinattar, Appaya Deekshitar, Neelakantha Deekshitar, Shankarananda, Vidyaranya, Sadashiva Brahmendra, Jadabharata, Akalkot Swami—all of them had the experience of non-dual consciousness.

There are various kinds of Vakyas given in the Upanishads: “Prajnanam Brahma,” “Aham Brahmasmi,” “Tattwam Asi,” “Ayamatma Brahma.” The first is the Lakshanabodha Vakya of Brahman. What is this Brahman? It is pure consciousness. Then comes “Tattwamasi,” Upadesavakya. The teacher instructs the student, “Thou art That. You are not the body and mind. You are beyond avidya and all illusory names and forms. If you subjugate avidya and Maya, remove evil vrittis and give up body-identification, you rest in your own swarupa.” Then the student begins to meditate on the “Aham Brahmasmi” formula. This is the Anusandhana Vakya. Then comes

“Ayamatma Brahma”—this atman is identical with Parabrahman. This is the Anubhava Vakya.

There is another kind of Vakya in the Upanishad. It is called Avantara¹³ Vakya. In the plantain tree, before you get the fruits you utilize the leaves, the stem and the flower. This is called “avantara.” In the interval before you get the fruits, you utilize the leaves, flower and the stem. Even so, before you attain the fullest illumination, you meditate on Satchidananda, Satyam, jnanam, anantam Brahma. Brahman is Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute. Satyam is truth; jnanam is wisdom, anantam is infinity.

Then there are Abhedabodha Vakyas, the great sentences which treat of the identity of the individual soul and the Supreme Soul. Dattatreya, says in his Avadhuta Gita, “I am the all-pervading, formless Self.” This is the essence of Vedanta. You can meditate on this formula. There are various Abhedabodha Vakyas and each aspirant may like one formula or another.

Bhuma,¹⁴ Sadashiva,¹⁵ Chaitanya:¹⁶ Chaitanya is that which knows itself and knows others also. Jada¹⁷ is that which does not know itself and does not know others also. Aham Sakshee: I am the silent witness of the mind, intellect and the senses. Aham Avasthatrayasakshee: I am the witness of the three states. This is another beautiful formula: “Shivoham, Shivoham, Shivah kevaloham.”¹⁸ “Shiva” here means Parabrahman only, and not the Shiva with trident. Soham—“I am He.” This is another beautiful formula. “I am He, He am I”—Hamsah Soham, Soham Hamsah. There is greater force when we repeat a formula both in its original order and in its reverse order, just as “God is Love, Love is God;” “God is truth, truth is God.” There was a sage, a contemporary of Sri Ramana Maharshi, Seshadriswami. He liked this formula, “Hamsah soham, soham. hamsah.”

Why do you weep, my Child? There are no names and no forms in you. There is neither bondage nor liberation, neither good nor evil. Stand up. Gird your loins. Fight with the mind and the senses and rest in your own Satchidananda swarupa. There are no names and no forms. The world is not in you. It is only a sankalpa.

I am avyaya—imperishable, ananta—infinite, shuddhavijnana-vigraha—a mass of pure consciousness, prajnana ghana, ananda ghana. A mountain is not so solid as the mass of knowledge. The physical mountain appears as solid, but this wisdom, knowledge of the atman, is more solid, huge, than the Himalayas. So it is called prajnanaghana, anandaghana, vijnanaghana, chidghana. I do not know what is pleasure and what, is pain.

The mental actions are not in you. The actions of the body are not in you. The actions of speech are not in you. Purity, wisdom-nectar, beyond the reach of the senses—this is your divine, essential Brahmic nature.

Then, he denies the whole world. He who is established in his own swarupa, to him the names and forms and the world vanish.

Mahat is the first manifestation of the Absolute. Then sprang up the mind, the senses, the tanmatras, the five elements. The quintuplication of the elements gave rise to the world. Where are varnas,[19](#) where are the ashramas,[20](#) the four kinds of orders?[21](#) Everything is Brahman. There is no world. This is the highest experience of a real sannyasi, of a sage, or a jnani.

Therefore let us try to enter into this non-dual consciousness through equipping ourselves with the four means of salvation by hearing the srutis,[22](#) reflection and meditation. Let us practice constant nididhyasana and meditation on these formulas and attain the state of jivanmukti and highest illumination and rest in our swarupa and radiate joy and peace and bliss to all those who come in contact with us, and radiate peace and Joy and bliss, to the different corners of the whole world.

The Gita-ideal of sannyasa

Follow the Gita-ideal of sannyasa. Practice of physical nudity does not confer mukti[23](#) on you. Remaining inactive in a cave does not raise you to Godhead. Bhagavan[24](#) Krishna has beautifully given the definition of sannyasa in His Gita. Everyone should follow that.

The Gita-sannyasa is for every man and woman in the world. This sannyasa is yoga; and the yoga of the Gita is sannyasa. Yoga and sannyasa are inseparable. Without the renunciation of sankalpas you cannot practice yoga. Tyaga[25](#) and vairagya abhimana[26](#) cling to you when you have renounced

everything except the ego. Now you think, “I am a householder.” When you take sannyasa without renouncing the ego, you will think, “I am a sannyasi.” Such a sannyasi develops his own egoism. He is bound by subtler and stronger ties to the wheel of samsara; for his egoism is subtler and more powerful.

Gita-sannyasa is the culmination of buddhi²⁷ yoga. You should have real viveka. You should have intelligent discrimination between the real and the unreal; you should know what to renounce.

People generally renounce some superficialities and pose to be great sannyasins. Throwing away a cloth, eating some odd things, and such other whimsical practices, mean sannyasa for them. Renunciation of objects is very necessary, no doubt, but without first renouncing the ego this mere external renunciation is of little value. With every object renounced, this internal ego will gain strength. You will proudly think and say: “I have given up sugar; I have given up shoes; I never touch money. I am a great tyagi.”²⁸ If, on the other hand, you renounce the ego through vichara, selfless service, pranayama,²⁹ japa, kirtan, dhyana and swadhyaya, when the ego is thinned out the objects will lose their power of attraction and drop off even without your effort. That is the Gita-ideal of sannyasa.

In the name of sannyasa people condemn service; they condemn murti³⁰-puja.³¹ It is delusion only. Only a Dattatreya, only a Suka Maharshi, could remain immersed in Brahmik bliss all the twenty-four hours. For every sannyasi today, service is necessary; worship is necessary. Without these he cannot evolve.

Yajna,³² dana³³ and tapas

Bhagavan emphatically declares that yajna, dana, and tapas should not be renounced. The universe is maintained by yajna. Self-sacrifice is yajna. Sacrifice of one’s ego in the fire of selfless service unto humanity is a great yajna. Dissemination of spiritual knowledge is the greatest yajna, the womb of all yajnas. Every selfless action is yajna. Every selfless action purifies your heart and takes you nearer to the great goal of self-realization.

Charity is very essential. Gift of money alone is not charity. To pray for another is charity. To serve another with the body is charity. To be kind and loving is charity. To forgive and forget some harm done to you is charity. A kind word said to a suffering man is charity. Everyone can do charity. Everyone should do charity in whatever manner he is capable of.

Tapas is control of body, mind and speech. And the Lord has clearly pointed out that mortification of the body is not real tapas. Control your senses through sama,[34](#) dama,[35](#) titiksha.[36](#) Control your mind through vichara and viveka. Control your speech through the practice of mauna,[37](#) mita-bhashana and madhurabhashana. This is tapas.

These should never be renounced. A man of God is ever busy in the welfare of all beings. He is not an idler. The idler is afraid to work. He is effeminate. To him sannyasa is only a cloak. He cannot mix with anybody. His vairagya is only an excuse for escapism. He is, so to say, afraid of himself. He is the picture of delusion. He is pessimist and is sunk in gloom.

Qualifications of a sannyasi

The real sannyasi, on the other hand, is full of divine virtues. He is all-bliss and peace, and he serves vigorously. He works not for the sake of himself, but for the sake of service itself—in the yajna-spirit. He is outwardly seen to engage himself in actions in the same way as any ordinary man, but there is a vast difference; and that is: the sannyasi is unattached. He does not long for anything. He works selflessly. He does everything as worship of the Supreme Lord. That is the secret of his tranquillity, equanimity, and even-mindedness in success and failure, praise and censure. Such a man is a glorious sannyasi.

There is no work which is specially dear to him; there is nothing which is repugnant to him. He greets every piece of work as service of the Lord. He does every work well. And he offers every work as a flower at the lotus feet of the Lord. Such sannyasins are the greatest need of the hour. The world should have ideal and dynamic sannyasins. May you all become the embodiments of the Gita-ideal of sannyasa!

This is sannyasa, Govinda![38](#)

Now you have all become Brahma-swarupa. Your body, mind, intellect, antahkarana,[39](#) ahamkara[40](#) and soul have all been cleansed of all dross and they have been made Brahmamaya.[41](#) This is the purpose of viraja homa. You should feel this and prove this in action.

“Thou art That.” Feel this. Realize this. That is the goal of life. Study the Chandogya Upanishad where they describe the various aspects of the purport of this great utterance. Then you will feel your oneness with all that exist.

On this great occasion, remember the great acharyas, the ideal sannyasins like Shankara, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara, Sanatsujata and Dattatreya. Always have them before your mind’s eye and keep them as your ideals. Though I initiate you into sannyasa I am only a nimitta[42](#) in their hands. May you all shine like Shankara.

Adoption of sannyasa is not a joke. It is a very serious affair. You have nothing to do with the world. You have renounced the pleasures of the three worlds. You are attached to nothing. You hanker after nothing. You are dead to yourself. The praisha mantra is very, very, powerful. Your lower nature has been completely sublimated. You have offered “pinda”[43](#) for yourself. Keep up this bhava[44](#) throughout.

Be ever vigilant. The dignity of the entire holy order of sannyasa rests on your shoulders. You can add to it or destroy it.

Lead a simple life. Reduce your wants to the minimum in the matter of food, clothing, etc., and then, too, use whatever “luxuries” you have to, with the feeling of remorse: “When shall I be able to get rid of this too?” Always strive to reach up to the mark of a paramahansa sannyasi described in the Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad. You may not be able to follow all the instructions contained there all at once. But strive on steadily to grow in strength of vairagya. You will surely attain the goal.

Let not the prestige of the gerua cloth be lowered by any misconduct on your part. Stick to the cloth even at the cost of your life. Even if one were to cut your throat, you should not abandon the cloth; you should be prepared to cast your body away with the words, “*Shivoham Satchidananda-swarupoham*”[45](#) on your lips. This is very, very important. Wearing the gerua cloth today, a

white cloth tomorrow, a suit the day after, is no good at all; that way you will not reach the goal, and will only ruin yourself; you will get adhogati.

Read the Upanishads, Gita and Brahma Sutras.[46](#) Imbibe their teachings in your everyday life. Any close contact with women,[47](#) Chaitanya Maya,[48](#) is very dangerous. Be very careful. You will delude yourself into the belief that you are above the clutches of Maya; and will get a terrible fall. There, are many instances of sannyasins and yogins getting a fall through this. Woman is more venomous than the cobra.

Cobra kills a man by a bite; but woman kills him by even a mere sight, and not only one life, but thousands of lives will be lost by contact with woman. Be ever vigilant. Maya is so very powerful. Be far away from women. Even if you have to serve women mentally you must be far away from them. You should just do your duty (service) and run away. Even if you are a jitendriya[49](#) and jivanmukta you will have to be careful. You might have a fall. Do not also give cause for suspicion. Even though you may be pure and may have mother-bhava towards women, if you move too closely with them the world will mistake you, and the prestige of sannyasa will go down. Even if a man drinks milk under a palmyra tree, people will only say that he is drinking toddy. Though it does not affect you personally, remember, it lowers the prestige of the most holy order of sannyasa. Therefore, you should be careful. Be careful; be vigilant; be alert. If you are in a dharmashala[50](#) and in the evening you find some women of bad character in the neighboring rooms, you should at once quit the place and take to your heels. Do not tarry there even a minute. Prarabdha[51](#) may impel you to move among ladies; you may have to preach among them. You may have to teach them yoga. In the name of teaching yoga, do not move too closely with them. Many yogins have fallen through carelessness here. Teaching asanas,[52](#) etc., by touching their bodies is very dangerous. If you teach Vedanta to a lady you must be careful not to talk freely with her. You should never live in the house of a grihastha. If you have to work in a village or a town, you should choose a temple or a lonely house as your abode and carry on your work. This applies to your purvashram[53](#) family too. Even if you have to visit them, you should reside in the local temple, not in the same house. Close contact with worldly people is just as dangerous as contact with women. Beware!

Abstain from anger also. You should never, never get angry. Feel that the whole world is your own atman. Abuses and insults are mere vibrations in the air. Bear them. It is a most shameful thing to see sannyasins quarrelling amongst themselves. Give it up totally. Anger is a very powerful enemy of yoga. Beware of krodha. Control it by Brahmabhavana.[54](#)

May you all become jivanmuktas in this very birth!

A sannyasin's story

Rana Raj Singh of Udaipur was sitting in his durbar. A magician arrived and he begged the Rana for permission to display some miraculous feats. The Rana agreed. The magician threw up a thin rope above. The rope went up and remained suspended in the air without any support. The magician said to the Rana that his rope had reached the Yaksha[55](#) Loka[56](#) (the kingdom of the Yakshas), that the Yaksha King was coming down to fight with him with a huge army, and so he was going up to fight with the Yaksha. Saying so, he climbed up the thin rope into the sky and disappeared. After a short while the war tumults began to sound and a huge battle-cry ensued. The sounds of piercing and cutting were heard. The hands, feet, and the body of the magician fell on the ground. The wife of the magician came running towards the fallen, mutilated body and began to weep. She begged the prince to get a pyre of wood, so that she might immolate herself with the dead body of her husband. The pyre was arranged and the wife of the magician got herself burned along with her husband. Shortly afterwards, the magician came down the rope. He bowed low at the feet of the Rana and enquired about his wife. The Rana narrated the whole occurrence, but the magician pretended not to believe. He called aloud to his wife, and lo! the wife at once appeared as if from nowhere.

The nature of Maya's actions is like the feats of the magician. Her acts have no support, like the rope hanging from mid-sky. Upon the supportless thread was enacted the curious display of the magician, the battle, the defeat and the death of the magician, his wife burning herself unto death, and yet both the husband and the wife were alive in fact. Nothing had really happened. The display was a mere illusion. So are the acts of avidya (ignorance). There is birth, decay, death, change, information and deformation, and vast phenomenal transformation. But in fact nothing happens; all is an illusory

appearance. Only the Absolute exists in its eternal, majestic glory. The appearances are created out of delusion.

The touchstone of sannyasa

Two sannyasins dwelt in a holy place. One was a multi-millionaire before he renounced. Even after he became a sannyasi, his children had volunteered to look after his physical needs, and, therefore, he had servants, all comforts and conveniences. The other sannyasi, was leading an extremely austere life. He lived on alms. He had absolutely no possessions except the clothes he wore, a kamandalu and a deerskin.

The poor sannyasi used to admire himself for his spirit of renunciation and laughed at the rich sannyasi. He would even speak disparagingly of the rich sannyasi whenever he met other mahatmas⁵⁷ or devotees: “He must have found himself too old to carry on the household life; so he has made a pretence of renouncing the world and embracing sannyasa. See the luxury he revels in!”

This spark of pride and contempt grew in time into a big conflagration, and the poor sadhu proudly approached the rich man one day and sermonizing on renunciation, he said: “What a great power is there in renunciation! But it must be real, like mine. You have, no doubt, renounced wealth and family but when are you going to renounce this luxurious living, servants, etc?” The rich sannyasi replied instantly: “Just now! Narayan.⁵⁸ Come, let us go to Uttarakashi.”

The poor sannyasi was taken by surprise. He was proud and eager to prove that the rich sannyasin’s offer was a bluff, but he was made to follow the rich sannyasi. They went a mile or two, and as they were leaving the outskirts of the village, the poor sannyasi suddenly remembered that he had left the kamandalu and the deerskin behind! He said, “Sir, please wait; I shall go and fetch my kamandalu and deerskin.” The rich sannyasi gave a significant smile. What is real renunciation? The renunciation of attachment, delusion, “I-ness” and “mine-ness.” The luxurious sannyasi was ready to give up everything in a moment; the poor man clung to his kamandalu and deer-skin

The story of a sannyasi

A person was telling his wife every day: “I am going to take sannyasa” She said, “Yes, you can take sannyasa.” He shaved his head, put on an orange robe, and sat on the bank of a river.

No one cared to give him any food; he was tormented by hunger. He returned to his house at 10 p.m. and tapped at the door. The wife asked, “Who is there?” The man replied, “I am your husband.” The wife said, “There is no place here for one who is a sanyasi. Go at once to Rishikesh, Sivanandashram.”

The man said, “My dear, I only cracked a joke with you; please open the door; I am dying of hunger; I will not think of sannyasa in future. I certainly promise, my dear! Give me some food at once. Even some cold rice will do now.”

Such sannyasins are many in the world. Do not equate them with real sannyasins.

Come, embrace sannyasa

Come, embrace sannyasa! One day or other you have to embrace sannyasa. The Upanishads declare: Nothing except renunciation can give you moksha. If not now, at a later stage, if not in this life, in a life to come. Before you attain the Supreme, you will have to embrace sannyasa.

Some people say, “Why give sannyasa to young people?” Why? They are most fit for sannyasa. Only young people can practice intense sadhana and tapasya. What can an old man do? Just when he is about to die, some one will utter the Mahavakyas in his ears which had already gone stone-deaf! Of what use is such a sannyasa? Glory to the youthful sannyasins who have dared to defy the worldly temptations and embrace the holy order!

Even ladies ought to take sannyasa. There have been most astounding examples in the Upanishads and Yoga Vashista of ladies who possessed Brahmajnana. You are by nature nearer to God. You are loving by nature. You have many divine virtues. Ladies are more attached to their children. That is their weakness. If you try even a little bit, you can achieve the Supreme.

May you all realize the Self in this very birth!

The sannyasa flag⁵⁹ in Sivanandashram

The sannyasa-flag with OM is flying high
In front of Viswanath⁶⁰ Mandir⁶¹ at Sivananda Nagar.⁶²
So many flags as Union Jack, etc.,
Are flying in this world.
But the sannyasa gerua flag excels all others.
In days of yore Samarth Ram Das hoisted it
In the Kingdom of heroic Shivaji.
It is an emblem of renunciation.
It proclaims the message of renunciation, Advaita and peace,
And of attaining the limitless realm of Brahmie bliss.
It signifies victory over mind, nature and the fourteen worlds
It speaks about the glory of sannyasa and Sri Shankara,
Dattatreya, Sanaka, Sanandana and others,
The forefathers and gurus of sannyasins.
Glory to Sri Shankara and his followers and disciples!
Glory to sannyasins, paramahansas and avadhutas!⁶³
Glory to this flag, the symbol of nivritti⁶⁴ and the fire of wisdom.

Renunciation and society's duty to sannyasins

A few slokas from the Avadhuta Gita will keep your mind ever on a high plane. One sentence from the Yoga-Vasishtha will blow up the world or worldliness in your mind and give you strength. Remember always, "*Kowpeenavantah khalu bhagyavantah....*" You can have abiding peace and bliss only in renunciation and not in the objects of this world.

You should develop discrimination, dispassion and non-attachment. You should be able to preserve the equanimity of your mind under all circumstances, like Raja Janaka who said coolly: "If the whole of the Mithila City is destroyed, the Self is not destroyed."

You will always find in the world such supermen of higher wisdom, who are fired with intense dispassion and yearning for liberation. They will renounce the world and embrace sannyasa. There will always be sannyasins in the world. No political or social doctrine or system can put a stop to people renouncing the world and leading the life of sannyasa. Sannyasins and

bhikshus⁶⁵ are the very lifebreath of a nation. Without men of renunciation and spiritual leaders there can be no peace or happiness in the world. They are the suns that dispel the darkness of ignorance and vice. They are the pillars of dharma on which society has been built. They are the very foundation of a nation and the world at large.

Sannyasa is one of the four ashramas of life. Everyone should prepare himself for sannyasa. And there will always be young men who would, through the force of purva-samskaras acquired in past births, boldly renounce the world and embrace sannyasa. The Upanishads emphatically declare that immortality cannot be attained either through the performance of selfish actions even though they may be good and virtuous, or by any means other than renunciation. Only by renouncing selfishness, only by renouncing kartritwabhoktritwa abhimana, only by annihilating egoism and mineness can man achieve immortality. And, remember this, immortality is your real goal, not the pittance of material enjoyments nor even the pleasures of heaven. The Ishavasya Upanishad in its very opening mantra exhorts man to renounce, and enjoy the highest bliss.

Bhagavan Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita extols the glory of renunciation. He has clearly stated in the Gita the true meaning of sannyasa. He does not countenance the mere renunciation of actions, but He insists on the renunciation of karma-phala⁶⁶ or the fruits of actions. The Lord extols the glory of the nitya⁶⁷ sannyasi who longs for nothing and hates nothing. No doubt the path of renunciation is a thorny one; it is the razor's edge.⁶⁸ But there will always be brave, heroic men of discrimination and dispassion who will be fired with the zeal to renounce the world and lead the life of nivritti and attain self-realization. No "ism" can check them. This is the land of Lord Buddha. You all know that Lord Buddha's fiery determination to renounce the world could not be damped by a princely life, wife and newborn babe. The supreme urge to renounce manifests itself in man and grows deep within him. Keen discrimination and fiery dispassion arise in him. He perceives: "Brahman is real. The world is unreal. The jiva is none other than Brahman." He gets a flash of that truth. So he aspires to make it a permanent reality. That flash is quite sufficient to sustain him till he merges into the conflagration of universal consciousness. That flash of understanding destroys all the charms of sensual enjoyments. The happiness of the three worlds appears as a mere straw in his eyes. All his earthly relations appear to him as strangers. He feels

he is independent even as each jiva is essentially independent of others. He knows that family ties are a sort of karma-bandhanam⁶⁹ which are to be snapped if he is to attain Brahma-anubhava.⁷⁰ Such an urge to renounce is irresistible when it arises in man. No obstacle could deter such a man. If society does not want him, he would seclude himself in the heart of a desert or a forest or in a mountain cave and carry on his quest.

But it is the duty of an enlightened society to support such men of renunciation and to help them in every possible way in their quest of truth. They in their turn would serve the society and give men and women the priceless spiritual food.

People very often ask me why I admit young men into my ashram and initiate them into sannyasa. These aspirants appear to be young only to your superficial vision. They appear to be young only so far as their body is concerned. But they are not young in their mind. Their heart is mature. In it have arisen viveka and vairagya. It is due to their purva samskaras.⁷¹ It is due to their yoga sadhana done in previous births. When millions of their follow-men were slumbering, these few brave adhyatmic⁷² soldiers toiled day and night and acquired spiritual wealth. They had made considerable progress on the path to perfection and the Lord has given them inner wisdom very early in their present birth, and also opportunity for further spiritual growth.

It may look as though they neglect their families, that they leave their parents and wife and children in the lurch. This is not the case. These young mumukshus⁷³ have renounced the world in search of God. By this very act of renunciation they entrust their families to the care of the Lord. The Lord will look after them. Indeed it is God who protects everyone; it is only due to delusion and attachment that you think that you look after your children or parents. No, no, no. It is He and He alone that protects, you all. When the son renounces the world, the parents and other members of the family should at once feel that he has done the noblest act; and from that moment they, too, should regain their faith in God; and they too, should aspire in their own station to reach Him.

Rama Tirtha renounced his wife and two children. Did they perish of hunger as many people imagined they automatically would? No. The Lord looked

after their comforts. Both the sons soon became the earning members of the family. None suffered. Such is the grace of the Lord.

In the case of those who marry before they renounce the world, there is a peculiar problem. You cannot ask them: “Why did you marry if you were born with such good samskaras?” It is beyond argument. Such was the will of the Lord. Such was their prarabdha. That marriage experience they had to undergo. Samartha Ramdas renounced the world when the priest who was officiating at the wedding uttered the words, “Beware! The auspicious moment has come.” He left the place immediately and became a sannyasi. Sadashiva Brahmendra got vairagya when his mother asked him to wait for his food on the wedding day. He thought within himself, “If on the very first day of marriage, I have to remain hungry and cannot get my food at the proper time, how much more misery I will have to endure during the latter years of married life!” and he renounced the world then and there.

Srutis declare, “The moment vairagya dawns in you, you should renounce the world.” No one can fix a time for a man to renounce. Everything depends on purva samskaras. Dhruva renounced when he was a boy. Jnana Sambandar attained jnana when he was a baby. Shankara renounced when he was a young man. Lord Buddha renounced after marrying and begetting a son.

It is the duty of saints and elder sannyasins to protect spiritually thirsting aspirants. A spiritually thirsting aspirant, full of vairagya and mumukshutwa, [74](#) is to the saint what an invaluable treasure trove is to a worldly man. Nothing on earth gladdens a saint’s heart as much as finding a real thirsting aspirant. When such an aspirant comes to him and when the guru sees that the aspirant is qualified for initiation, it is the duty of the guru to fulfil the aspirant’s spiritual yearning. He cannot say: “Oh, you are married; I cannot initiate you now.” By throwing him back into worldly life, the guru is really squandering away rare spiritual wealth. It is a serious blunder. It is a great loss to humanity.

This aspirant ought to be helped by the real guru to grow in spirituality and to attain self-realization. After reaching this ultimate goal, after attaining wisdom, this aspirant will not only shine as a jivanmukta, as a supreme example of supermanhood, but he will also render real selfless service to the

world. By keeping this young man away from his family the guru is really rendering inestimable service to humanity, though this is not felt at once.

It is the duty of the wife of such an aspirant to dedicate her life, too, to God and the quest of truth. She should also lead the divine life of purity and godliness; she should also engage herself in ceaseless japa, kirtan and meditation, pray for the success of her husband's spiritual endeavors and at the same time try to realize the goal of life herself. To enable these young women to achieve the goal, there should be ladies' ashrams all over the country where such spiritually-inclined girls and women can be trained to become brahmacharinis, yoginis and jnanins. These institutions will take care of the children, too, and educate them till they are able to take care of themselves. Thus the couple should be enabled to vie with each other in sadhana and spiritual progress. This is an ideal society.

Sannyasa is a mental state

Sannyasa is not wearing ochre-colored clothes. People wear ochre-colored clothes so that people will welcome them saying, "Aiye Maharaj," and give them respect. It is difficult to find out who is a real sannyasi. According to the Gita, detachment, dispassion is sannyasa. Sannyasa is a mental state, not merely showing the color of the cloth. Develop dispassion and viveka. The world is a straw for a man of dispassion. Vairagya is the greatest wealth.

"Kaupinavantah khalu bhagyavantah." Money in the bank cannot make you fearless. It is vairagya that makes you absolutely fearless. Vairagya and abhyasa are the most important sadhana. The enjoyment of the fourteen worlds becomes like a straw to a man of vairagya. Vairagya does not mean that one should put on only a kaupina and eat neem leaves. He who wears only a kaupina and eats neem leaves, may yet fight for a few annas.[75](#) Vairagya, renunciation, detachment is a mental state.

Find out the defects of sensual life. The world appears attractive, but there is cancer, there is tuberculosis, there is paralysis. People become hopeless and helpless. Therefore, vairagya, vivekapurvaka vairagya, vairagya born of discrimination, wisdom, only will help you, but not vairagya that comes on account of difficulties. Therefore develop vivekapurvaka vairagya and virtues like kshama, serenity, titiksha, little by little. You may fail a thousand times,

but again you will rise up, if you have God's grace, if you are eternally vigilant. Always remember the important Gita slokas:

“He who is free from all desires, free from mineness and egoism, will attain peace.”

“He who has faith attains knowledge. He who is devoted to the Self, he who has controlled the senses, attains knowledge. Attaining knowledge, he enjoys supreme peace.”

Become a real mental sannyasi

This world is a world of accidents, fractures, dislocation. So let us be careful. Let us become bodiless, so that there will be no accidents. How to become bodiless? To become bodiless, you should not do karma (action). How to avoid karma? Give up raga-dwesa, likes and dislikes. How to avoid raga-dwesa? Do not have egoism. How to give up egoism? Abandon aviveka, non-discrimination. How to give up nondiscrimination, get rid of ignorance. Ignorance is the first cause for the chain of sorrows—dukkhaparampara. How to get rid of ignorance? Attain knowledge of the Self. Then there will be no egoism, no raga-dwesa (likes and dislikes), no karma, no body and no sorrow. You will merge yourself in Parabrahman, Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. Just as rivers join the ocean, so also the individual soul will join the universal Existence: Satchidananda Parabrahman. Just as camphor melts in fire and becomes identical with fire, even so mind melts in Silence, its Source, Ananda. That is our duty. Everybody should become bodiless through self-restraint, cultivation of virtues, concentration, meditation, identification, illumination, salvation. Then there will be neither mind nor body. That is the goal. That is happiness, Brahmic seat of splendor, immaculate seat of splendor. Become, then, a real mental sannyasi.

Necessity for sannyasa

Immortality is attained, not by work, progeny or wealth, but by renunciation. Renounce your ego, Bear insult. Bear injury.

Brahmajnana is the highest wealth. Even if you possess the wealth of the three worlds, it is nothing, You will be afraid of other things. Fear should go. Worry should go. For that you should have knowledge of the Self.

The root-cause for diseases is selfishness. The root-cause is anger. The root-cause is malice. When you are angry, impurities are thrown in the blood. Hatred bacilli, malice bacilli, jealousy bacilli enter your system and produce diseases.

Our foremost duty is to attain the supreme, ancient wisdom. One may deliver lectures; he may be a learned man. But his learning is useless if he has no dispassion, if he has no detachment. He who detaches himself from the objects of the world is a real yogi, a sage of supreme wisdom. What is needed is detachment. Do not allow the mind to think of objects. Detach the mind from the senses. Then only you will have tranquillity of mind. This is sannyasa.

People are bound by hopes, expectations, works, anxieties. So they do not know that their life is passing away. All the hairs may have grown gray. Many teeth may have fallen. Only a few years of life may be left. But it does not matter. Even in a muhurta, one can attain self-realization, through devotion, dedication, discrimination, dispassion, aspiration, renunciation. You must develop these virtues. Sannyasa is necessary. Your pension should go to the poor people. "Distribute your wealth to the poor and then follow me." You have children and bank-balance. At the same time renunciation or aspiration is not possible even in hundreds of births. You must become dhira.[76](#)

Lord Brahma has put a little rajas[77](#) in the mind. Therefore, man sees only the objects of this universe and not the internal Self. But some dhira, wise man, who turns away from sensual objects, seeking immortality, beholds the Self within.

You should discipline the mind. You must remain in solitude. You must take sannyasa. Then only can you cut off moha completely. Why did Shankara become a sannyasi? Why did Mandana Mishra become a sannyasi? You may talk of Lord Rama or Krishna,[78](#) but it is mere infatuation. The supreme wealth is dispassion, detachment. Detach, attach. Detach the mind from worldly objects and attach it to God. Do constant selfless service in the hospital. Bedpan Yoga is very necessary. You must do Bedpan Yoga. You must crush your egoism. Through self-surrender you can attain God. But egoism and desire assert at every step. These are obstacles for doing self-surrender. But the dhira, desirous of immortality, renounces the sensual

pleasures. You should withdraw the mind, and the senses (indriyas), just as a tortoise withdraws its limbs.

Need for internal and external sannyasa

Only he who has faith, alone can be happy. He is the real man. Self-restraint, japa, kirtan, sattwic diet, getting up at 4 a.m.—all these things will make you a superman.

What do the rich people do? They earn a few lakhs⁷⁹ [of rupees], build bungalows, and then give all their money to their grandchildren! They are eager to see that even their grandchildren are well provided for. Poor ideas! It is adharma for a man whose sons are all fixed up in life, who has completed his period of grihastha life, to remain at home and continue to be attached to his grandchildren. Why are the four ashramas ordained? Some people say, “We are mental sannyasins. We need not embrace formal sannyasa.” Mental sannyasa is necessary; but physical sannyasa also is necessary. There was no need for Yajnavalkya to embrace formal sannyasa. There was no greater sage than he. Yet, he formally renounced the world and entered the fourth order of Life, sannyasa. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the mighty God-conscious devotee too, embraced sannyasa. Mandana Misra took sannyasa. He became one of the greatest disciples of Sri Shankaracharya.

Everybody should prepare himself for sannyasa. But people are afraid of taking sannyasa. They have two weaknesses. They have no titiksha or endurance. They are very much attached to their family. So they are not able to come to places like Rishikesh for sannyasa. Mind is so framed that it binds the individual to the family and to this world. Even sannyasins get attached nowadays. A sannyasi should not go to his country or to his native place or town, for twelve years. Maya is very powerful. Somehow or other a man gets a downfall. Everyone complains that there are not enough good sannyasins; if everyone prepares for sannyasa and then embraces sannyasa, then there will be enough glorious sannyasins in this country.

Sannyasa is the stage of life when you can destroy Maya. Otherwise, you will always be bound, you will always cling to your children. You will give your pension to them! And they will cling to you for the sake of your pension. You

can take your pension and remain in some place like Rishikesh. Far from the clutches of Maya, you will be able to do more sadhana.

Importance of mental sannyasa

You must have read the story of Queen Chudalai in the Yogavasishtha. Queen Chudalai was a yogini. She was endowed with wisdom though she was ruling the kingdom. She had internal vision. She had intuitive experience—aparoksha anubhuti. Sikhidhwaja had no belief in the Queen. He wanted to practice renunciation and meditation, and decided to go to the forest. Queen Chudalai told him: “Remain here. You will get wisdom. I will help you to attain the eye of intuition.” He did not hear. He went to the forest. He practiced various kinds of tapas of a foolish type. Queen Chudalai wanted to examine him. She had yogic powers. She moved in the sky and appeared before him, standing a few feet above the ground in the form of a kumbha muni.⁸⁰ (A yogi shows all these miraculous visions just to show the aspirant that the teacher has got superhuman powers, so that the aspirant will have faith; and only on such occasions does he exhibit such powers.) Sikhidhwaja was much astonished to see the guru standing above the ground. He prostrated before the muni and wanted spiritual instruction.

The muni (who was Queen Chudalai in disguise) said: “You have no idea of renunciation; you have not renounced anything.” He said: “I have renounced everything. I have renounced my kingdom. I have, renounced my wife, How can you say that I have renounced nothing?” The muni said: “No, you have renounced nothing.” He thought that he had the kamandalu and the staff; and he threw away the staff and the kamandalu. Yet, the muni said: “You have no real renunciation at all.” He thought: “I have only this body to renounce.” He ascended a tree and wanted to commit suicide. The muni said: “Yet, you have not attained real renunciation. Real renunciation consists in renouncing desires, in renouncing the vasanas, cravings and the desires, in renouncing the deha-atma-buddhi–buddhi that makes you identify the perishable body with the soul, that makes you mistake the body for the soul. This you will have to renounce; and only that constitutes real renunciation.” Then the muni (Queen Chudalai) gave further instructions. Sikhidhwaja understood the real essence, of renunciation, practiced sravana,⁸¹ manana⁸² and nididhyasana and attained the goal of life.

You can remain in the world. What is wanted is internal mental state of renunciation. That is to be cultivated. Again and again you will have to discipline the mind and free it from the objects. “Detach; attach,” through the practice of the Patanjali Yoga or Raja Yoga: yama,[83](#) niyama,[84](#) asana, pranayama, pratyahara,[85](#) dharana,[86](#) dhyana and samadhi.

More Articles on Sannyasa

- [A Brief Life of Swami Sivananda](#)
- [Advice to Sannyasins–part 1](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Advice to Sannyasins–part 2](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [The Ideal of Sannyasa](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Sannyasa Dharma](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Perspective of the Renunciate](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Reflections on Sannyasa](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [The Rugged Path](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati

1) Sadhana: Spiritual practice. [\[Go back\]](#)

2) Namasmarana: Remembrance (repetition) of the Name of God. Remembrance of the Lord through repetition of His name. [\[Go back\]](#)

3) Shuddha: Pure; clear; clean; untainted. [\[Go back\]](#)

4) Hiranyagarbha: Cosmic intelligence; the Supreme Lord of the universe; also called Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)

5) Nirvikalpa Samadhi: Samadhi in which there is no objective experience or experience of “qualities” whatsoever, and in which the triad of knower, knowledge and known does not exist; purely subjective experience of the formless and qualitless and unconditioned Absolute. [\[Go back\]](#)

6) Asamprajñata samadhi: Highest superconscious state where the mind and the ego-sense are completely annihilated. [\[Go back\]](#)

7) Triputi: “The triple form.” The triad of: knowing, knower, and object known; cognizer, object, and cognition; seer, sight, and seen. [\[Go back\]](#)

8) Nididhyasana: Meditation; contemplation; profound and continuous meditation. It is a continuous, unbroken stream of ideas of the same kind as those of the Absolute. It removes the contrarywise tendencies of the mind.

[\[Go back\]](#)

9) Ashubha: Inauspicious unfortunate. [\[Go back\]](#)

10) Yogini: A female practitioner of yoga. [\[Go back\]](#)

11) Brahmavidya: Science of Brahman; knowledge of Brahman; learning pertaining to Brahman or the Absolute Reality. [\[Go back\]](#)

12) A dandi swami is a monk of strict observance who carries a staff (danda) as an insignia of his monastic status. [\[Go back\]](#)

13) Secondary [\[Go back\]](#)

14) Bhuma: The unconditioned Infinite; Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)

15) Sadashiva: Eternally auspicious; eternally happy; eternally prosperous. A title of Shiva, the eternally auspicious One. [\[Go back\]](#)

16) Chaitanya: The consciousness that knows itself and knows others; absolute consciousness. [\[Go back\]](#)

17) Jada: Inert; unconscious; matter. [\[Go back\]](#)

18) "I am Shiva; I am Shiva; I am Shiva alone." [\[Go back\]](#)

19) Varna: Caste. (Literally: color.) In traditional Hindu society there were four divisions or castes according to the individual's nature and aptitude: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra. [\[Go back\]](#)

20) Ashram(a): A stage of life. In Hinduism life is divided ideally into four stages (ashramas): 1) the celibate student life (*brahmacharya*); 2) the married household life (*grihastha*); 3) the life of retirement (seclusion) and contemplation (*vanaprastha*); 4) the life of total renunciation (*sannyasa*). [\[Go back\]](#)

- 21) That is, people observing the four ashramas: brahmacharis, grihastas, vanapasthas, and sannyasis. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 22) Sruti: Sacred scripture. The Vedas and Upanishads. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 23) Mukti: Moksha; liberation. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 24) Bhagavan: The Lord; the Personal God. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 25) Tyaga: Literally: “abandonment.” Renunciation—in the Gita, the relinquishment of the fruit of action. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 26) Abhimana: Egoism; conceit; attachment; I-sense; pride; the function of the ego; the delusion of “me” and “mine;” identification with the body. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 27) Buddhi: Intellect; understanding; reason; the thinking mind. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 28) Tyagi: A renouncer, an ascetic. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 29) Pranayama: Control of the subtle life forces, often by means of special modes of breathing. Therefore breath control or breathing exercises are usually mistaken for pranayama. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 30) Murti: Image; statue; idol; figure; embodiment. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 31) Puja: Ceremonial (ritual) worship, usually involving the image of a deity. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 32) Yajna: Sacrifice; offering; sacrificial ceremony; a ritual sacrifice; usually the fire sacrifice known as agnihotra or havan. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 33) Dana: “Giving;” gift; charity; almsgiving; self-sacrifice; donation; generosity. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 34) Sama: Calmness; tranquility; control of the internal sense organs; same; equal. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 35) Dama: Self-control; control of the senses; restraint. [\[Go back\]](#)

36) Titiksha: Endurance of opposites; forbearance; tolerance; the ability to withstand opposites like pleasure and pain, heat and cold, etc., with equal fortitude; the bearing of all afflictions without caring to change them and without anxiety or lament. [\[Go back\]](#)

37) Mauna: Silence—not speaking. [\[Go back\]](#)

38) The gist of a lecture delivered to the sannyasins on the day of their initiation into the order on September 12, 1947. [\[Go back\]](#)

39) Antahkarana: Internal instrument; fourfold mind; mind, intellect, ego and subconscious mind. [\[Go back\]](#)

40) Ahamkara: Egoism or self-conceit; the self-arrogating principle “I,” “I” am-ness; self-consciousness. [\[Go back\]](#)

41) Formed of Brahma; filled with Brahma. [\[Go back\]](#)

42) Nimitta: Instrument. [\[Go back\]](#)

43) Pinda: Small ball of rice offered to one’s ancestors as an oblation. Sometimes in the sannyas ritual the prospective sannyasi performs his own funeral obsequies (shraddha ceremony), including making offerings of rice balls to/for himself. [\[Go back\]](#)

44) Bhava: Subjective state of being (existence); attitude of mind; mental attitude or feeling; state of realization in the heart or mind. [\[Go back\]](#)

45) “I am Shiva. I am the embodiment of Satchidananda.” [\[Go back\]](#)

46) Brahma Sutras: A treatise by Vyasa on Vedanta philosophy in the form of aphorisms. [\[Go back\]](#)

47) The advice Sivananda gives to sannyasis regarding the perils of association with women would be given in relation to association with men if he were speaking to sannyasinis. [\[Go back\]](#)

48) Conscious Delusion. [\[Go back\]](#)

49) Jitendriya: One who has controlled the indriyas—the senses. [\[Go back\]](#)

- 50) Dharmashala: A place for pilgrims to stay, either free of charge or at a minimal cost. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 51) Prarabdha: Karma that has become activated and begun to manifest and bear fruit; karmic “seeds” that have begun to “sprout.” [\[Go back\]](#)
- 52) Asanas: Hatha Yoga postures. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 53) Purvashram: Previous stage of life. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 54) Brahmabhavanam: Meditation on Brahman; feeling of identity with Brahman, as well as of everything as Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 55) Yaksha: There are two kinds of yakshas: 1) semidivine beings whose king is Kubera, the lord of wealth, or 2) a kind of ghost, goblin, or demon. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 56) Loka: World or realm; sphere, level, or plane of existence, whether physical, astral, or causal. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 57) Mahatma: Literally: “a great soul [atma].” Usually a designation for a sannyasi or a saint. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 58) Narayana: A proper name of God—specifically of Vishnu. The term by etymology means a Being that supports all things, that is reached by them and that helps them to do so; also one who pervades all things. He Who dwells in man. Literally: “God in humanity.” Sadhus often address one another as Naryana and greet one another: “Namo Narayana”—I salute Narayana [in you]. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 59) It is often the practice in India to attach an orange pennant (sometimes with Om stamped or embroidered on it) to a pole wherever a sannyasi is in residence so people may know and come to benefit by his company. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 60) Vishvanatha: “Lord of the Universe;” a title of Shiva. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 61) Mandir(a): Temple. [\[Go back\]](#)

62) Nagar(a°: City; town. Sivananda Ashram was so large and influential that the area was designated as a town (with its own post office) by the government of India. [\[Go back\]](#)

63) Avadhuta: “Cast off” (one who has cast off the world utterly). A supreme ascetic and jnani who has renounced all worldly attachments and connections and lives in a state beyond body consciousness. The highest state of asceticism or tapas. [\[Go back\]](#)

64) Nivritti: Negation; the path of turning away from activity; withdrawal. Literally, “to turn back.” The path of renunciation. [\[Go back\]](#)

65) Bhikshu: One who lives on bhiksha (almsfood); a mendicant; a sannyasi. [\[Go back\]](#)

66) Karmaphala: The fruit of actions; the consequence of a deed. [\[Go back\]](#)

67) Nitya: Eternal; permanent; unchanging. [\[Go back\]](#)

68) “Like the sharp edge of a razor is that path, so the wise say—hard to tread and difficult to cross.” (Katha Upanishad 3:14) [\[Go back\]](#)

69) Karma bandhanam: Karmic bondage; karmic tie. [\[Go back\]](#)

70) Brahma-anubhava: Direct personal experience of Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)

71) Purva samskaras: Previous samskaras; that is, samskaras brought over from previous lives. [\[Go back\]](#)

72) Adhyatmic: Pertaining to the Self, individual and Supreme. [\[Go back\]](#)

73) Mumukshu: Seeker after liberation (moksha). [\[Go back\]](#)

74) Mumukshutwa: Intense desire or yearning for liberation (moksha). [\[Go back\]](#)

75) A small coin—one sixteenth of a rupee. [\[Go back\]](#)

76) Dhira: Steadfast; strong; bold; courageous. One who possesses these qualities. [\[Go back\]](#)

77) Rajas: Activity, passion, desire for an object or goal. [\[Go back\]](#)

78) As not having been sannyasis. [\[Go back\]](#)

79) Lakh: One hundred thousand. [\[Go back\]](#)

80) Kumbha: Pot; water vessel. Muni: “Silent one” (one observing the vow of silence (mauna); sage; ascetic. A kumbha muni is one who carries a kamandalu (kumbha)—a sannyasi. [\[Go back\]](#)

81) Shravana: Hearing; study; listening to reading of the scriptures or instruction in spiritual life. [\[Go back\]](#)

82) Manana: Thinking, pondering, reflecting, considering. [\[Go back\]](#)

83) Yama: Restraint; the five Don'ts of Yoga: 1) ahimsa—non-violence, non-injury, harmlessness; 2) satya—truthfulness, honesty; 3) asteya—non-stealing, honesty, non-misappropriativeness; 4) brahmacharya—continence; 5) aparigraha—non-possessiveness, non-greed, non-selfishness, non-acquisitiveness. [\[Go back\]](#)

84) Niyama: Observance; the five Do's of Yoga: 1) shaucha—purity, cleanliness; 2) santosha—contentment, peacefulness; 3) tapas—austerity, practical (i.e., result-producing) spiritual discipline; 4) swadhyaya—self-study, spiritual study; 5) Ishwarapranidhana—offering of one's life to God. [\[Go back\]](#)

85) Pratyahara: Abstraction or withdrawal of the senses from their objects. [\[Go back\]](#)

86) Dharana: Concentration of mind; fixing the mind upon a single thing or point. [\[Go back\]](#)

The Ideal of Sannyasa



Sri Swami Sivananda

Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Sannyasa is a term which is used to denote the formal dedication and renunciation of all objective acts, whether they are psychical or physical. There can be two types of renunciation, the renunciation which precedes the knowledge of truth and that which is simultaneous with the knowledge of truth. The one we call vividisha sannyasa and the other vidvat sannyasa. Naturally, the former kind implies an earnest desire, a longing for the knowledge of the cause, the supreme cause of renunciation.

What is it that fires up in the aspirant the spirit of renunciation? It is the instinctive feeling of the presence of something which is different from what

he perceives through the senses. This is the characteristic of the renunciation of the person who has not yet attained knowledge. In a person who has attained the knowledge of truth, renunciation is not instinctive; it is a deliberate act of the consciousness. But in the case of the aspirant who has not yet realized the truth, renunciation is instinctive, and this instinct arises in him on account of purvapunya, the result of past meritorious deeds accelerated by satsanga, the company of the wise and the good persons. It is this that rouses the spirit of renunciation in him.

Discriminative understanding

Every kind of renunciation, if it is spiritual, is preceded by viveka or discriminative understanding, because renunciation is the effect of vairagya, and we know that vairagya¹ is caused by viveka.² There cannot be true vairagya without viveka. Renunciation has no value at all if it is caused by some frustration or failure in life. It becomes long-lasting only when it is caused by a correct perception of truth. That is why the great rishis have said that viveka should precede vairagya and only after that will the other necessary qualifications be acquired by the aspirant. After acquiring all these qualifications, one must approach a preceptor for the knowledge of the truth. We call all these qualifications together the sadhana-chatushtaya,³ the fourfold equipment of the spiritual aspirant, and of these four equipments vairagya is one, and it is the cause of renunciation.

Now what does one renounce? We talk of renunciation. But what is it that is to be renounced? What is the object that is not conducive to one's practising spiritual sadhana?⁴ What is the condition or state which is to be abandoned? This can be known only if you analyze your experience properly. Most of the people lack the capacity of this analysis. You are somehow or other caught up in the meshes of life and you confuse all kinds of experiences together. You take things for granted. The objects which the senses make you perceive, the knowledge which you attain through the senses, is taken by you as the basis of everything in this world. You build the edifice of life on sense-experience.

Implications of experience

Now let us take the position of the ordinary man, the person who takes sense-experience for granted and considers them to be the only truth. I am only

directing your mind from the lower experiences to the implication of those experiences. There are several deeper facts implied in our ordinary experience. We perceive this world, and this perception is a universal fact. Everyone of us knows that there is a perception of what we call the physical world, but a few of us are capable of entering into the implications of this perception.

There is a physical body. Man visualizes that body, and on account of the grossness of the mind, he takes that body to be as it is, as it presents itself to the physical senses, and consequently he develops a particular attitude towards it, an attitude of love or an attitude of hatred. Sometimes an attitude of indifference is developed by him. But the spiritual aspirants who are endowed with true viveka do not take things for granted, and are capable of entering into the meaning of experience.

In every experience we will find that certain fundamental factors are involved. What are those? First, there is a body. Let us take for granted that there is a body. And how is the body made known to us? This body is made known to us through the external indriyas,⁵ the karanas,⁶ organs of senses, and these senses are animated by the mental consciousness. The intelligence that is present in the mind is the ultimate cause of our knowledge of the existence of an external object.

Here we have to make an analysis not only of the nature of the external object, but of our own self. The knower of the object and the object that is known, both of these have to be analyzed; and curiosity enough, we will find that when we try to analyze the nature of the object, we will be taken backwards to the perceiver of the object. That is to say, the nature of the object cannot be known without a correct understanding of the nature of the knower. Why is it so? Because constitution of the knower very much influences the constitution of the object that is known.

The subject who looks at a particular object outside, is not merely a silent witness thereof. He infuses certain characteristics into that object. In other words, he modifies it to a certain extent. That is why he has got a certain distinct attitude towards an object. There are certain attitudes which we develop towards the object. They cause us to like or dislike the object. These attitudes are not universal. They are changing even in the very same person

under different circumstances. This shows that the attitudes which we develop towards the external objects of this world are not present in the objects as such, but somewhere else.

Basis of knowledge

Where are these attitudes present? These attitudes, if not present in the objects, must be present in the process of knowledge by which we are able to know the external objects; but wherefrom does this process of knowledge arise? It must have a basis; and that substance which is the basis of the process of knowledge through which we know the external objects is our own Self. If knowledge is to proceed from the Self, the Self should be of the nature of knowledge, because a conscious result cannot proceed from an unconscious cause.

The process of knowledge is consciousness, and, therefore, the basis of the process is consciousness itself. This is what we understand. If the nature of the object, or, to put it in a better way, the objectness of the object, is given to it by the process of knowledge, and if that process of knowledge is inherent in the Self, which is now proved to be the truth, we have to direct our attention to the Self and not to the external objects which are not real in themselves. So here, when we say that there is nothing real in the object, we must understand clearly what we mean by it.

There are two characteristics of an object—its existence and its outward characteristic. Now, existence is not to be negated. Because God is present everywhere, God is Satchidananda,⁷ pure Consciousness which is existence, and this is identical with vishaya-chaitanya.⁸ As God is universal in nature, He must be the underlying reality of the external objects also. So, when we deny the natural characteristic of the external objects, we are not to deny in them the fundamental reality which is vishaya chaitanya.

Renunciation of the non-eternal

The objects have also nama-rupa,⁹ and these are relative in nature. This fact the viveki¹⁰ understands very clearly. In some this knowledge arises instinctively, on account of past meritorious deeds; in others it arises on account of deep study; in some others still it arises on account of company of

sages; but it must arise in every spiritual aspirant. The moment this consciousness arises in him, he is automatically drawn away from the shadowy forms of the objects, the vestures in which they are embedded.

To use an analogy of the Upanishads, as one removes the pith of the munja grass for the purpose of performing the ritual and separates it from the stalk in which it is encased, so is the action of the viveki. He separates the pith of the Infinite from the object and the subject which he casts off as the outer shell. But when he casts off the outer shell, does he throw away something of existence? For people feel that if everything is God, there is nothing to renounce. What is renunciation then? The doubter does not understand the fact that nothing real is to be renounced, only that which is apparent, that which does not last long, that which is non-eternal, alone has to be renounced. The eternal is never reached through the non-eternal. So he who is intent upon the realization of the eternal cares not for the non-eternal.

Unreality of the relative characteristic

It is the objective character of experience that is called the universe. The universe as such is not unreal, the individual as such is not unreal, but the relative characteristics which are presented to the sense-consciousness are not real. It is one's taking for granted the realities of these relative factors that is the cause of bondage. Man is bound up by the notion of the reality of sense-experience. The process of transmigration is caused by your attaching yourself to some one or other particular form of experience. It is good if you identify yourselves with all the forms in the world, but this is not possible. For the moment one identifies oneself with the universe, one has practically no consciousness of any particular object. One ceases to be a social being, for the time being, and rises above individuality.

All these factors are brought before the mind of the viveki when he analyses the nature of God, the nature of the world, the nature of the soul and the relation among these, and he goes beyond the apparent forms which shroud him up in this relative world. This analysis has to be made by every spiritual aspirant. It is very difficult to make it, and even if it is made once, it is difficult to maintain it for long.

Steadiness in Yoga comes and goes. No person can be sure of his capability to remain in the state of Yoga continuously. As long as the body is there, the

mind will be brought down by some karma of the past. That is why Prajapati¹¹ says to Indra¹² that, as long as the body is there, pain will be there, belief in the reality of the world will be there; but when the person becomes disembodied, he is freed from all pains and pleasures. Becoming disembodied is transcending the consciousness of the body.¹³

It is not merely the death of the body that is meant here. Whether the body lives or not, the liberated one has no consciousness of it; he is immortal. Therefore, whether one has got a body or not is not what matters. Whether there is consciousness of body or not is what is important. Here we make a distinction between jivanmukti¹⁴ and videhamukti.¹⁵ This difference is made from the point of view of the world, because to the jivanmukta,¹⁶ his state is equal to videhamukti, for he is not in the world.

Spirit of Renunciation

The process of the understanding of the difference between the objectivity in the universe and the infinite spirit in it is the background of all acts of renunciation. If you wish to understand what true renunciation is, it is enough if you understand one statement of the Chandogya Upanishad; and from that you will also understand what the nature of God is. That is a grand statement made by Sanatkumara.

The Infinite is called Bhuma by Sanatkumara. Bhuma means completeness, plenitude. He takes the mind of Narada,¹⁷ step by step, from the lower to the higher, and explains that the Infinite is bliss. It is not merely the reservoir of bliss. It is bliss itself. But what is the Infinite? This question arose in the mind of Narada. What is Bhuma?

Sanatkumara then gives a very beautiful description of it. “Where one sees nothing else, where one hears nothing else, where one understands or knows nothing else, that is the state of Bhuma.” And what is this world? We see something else, hear something else, understand something else. Everywhere there is duality. This is the characteristic of the world. The complete opposite of it is Bhuma. In the Bhuma the universe is not physical. Here it is physical. There the universe is eternal. Here it is changing. Here it is objective. There it is infinite or absolute.

Sanatkumara further adds, “Where one sees something else, hears something else, or understands something else, i.e., something other than the Self, that is the small, the painful, the perishable.” That is why the world is called *duhkhalayam*,[18](#) *asaswatam*,[19](#) by Sri Krishna. The world is not *Bhuma* and for the same reason it is painful. Everything in this world is pain. Even the highest pleasure of this world is pain only to the *viveki*—only to the *viveki*, not to all. For even the highest pleasure is only a manifestation of the *sattva* *guna*.[20](#)

So even the highest pleasure is not even a drop of the Brahmic bliss. It is less than *Brahma*-bliss, for it is distorted through *sattva* *guna*, which is influenced by *rajas* and *tamas*. They lie in ambush like a hooded cobra. The moment the excitement of nerves which causes the appearance of *sattva* is over, *rajas* and *tamas* come, and the result is pain.

Play of deception

Patanjali[21](#) gives various reasons why there is only pain in this world. One of them is the rotation of the *gunas* in individual experience. There is never only *sattva*. When a particular quality comes to the forefront, you experience only that, and behind it are present the other qualities. Behind *tamas* are *sattva* and *rajas*. Behind *rajas* are *sattva* and *tamas*. Behind *sattva* are *rajas* and *tamas*.

So the pleasure of this world is only a reflection of the supreme consciousness through the medium of *sattva*, which is a characteristic mode of *prakriti*,[22](#) changing every moment. The modes of *prakriti* are changing; therefore, the pleasure of this world must be changing. Not only are they changing, they are false in their essential nature. They are deceptive and tantalizing. Like the currents of water seen in a mirage, are the values of experiences in this world.

When you try to know the nature of the pleasures of the world, you become aware of the foolishness by which you are misled. You think that you have obtained pleasure. *Vidyaranya* in the *Panchadasi* describes how man’s pleasures are only his foolishness. “O fool, do not think that you are happy in this world by possessing objects. Try to understand what that happiness is.”

When an object is obtained, what happens? Has anybody stopped and thought over this matter? Temporarily the mind ceases to function. It is very difficult to understand this point. Man does not ponder over that matter, for he has identified himself with the mind. He thinks that the mind is himself. He cannot therefore analyze the mind. But through the grace of God if you are enabled to analyze the mind, you will discover that its happiness does not lie in objects, but in a condition of the mind.

Mind derives bliss from atma

The mind goes outward to the object in search of pleasure. At that time there is pain, for the mind thereby is straying away from truth; and when the object is attained, the mind ceases to function, and it rests on its substratum, the Self, and unconsciously tastes the bliss of the Self. The mind thinks that the objects give happiness. It does not know the existence of the Self. It thinks that it has possessed the object and that the pleasure underlies the object. Consequently it concludes wrongly that pleasure is the result of the possession of an external object.

“When the mind turns to the Self, naturally it experiences the bliss of the Self.” Suppose you are able to make the mind consciously turn to the Self, you will be permanently happy, without any resultant sorrow. Yoga bestows on man permanent happiness by arousing that antarmukha vritti deliberately and consciously. By viveka the mind should be educated properly. Without education it will not understand the truth. It will not yield to any kind of force, for it is very subtle. It has to be educated properly and made to understand that the pleasures which it experiences in this world are derived, even in this world, from the Self alone. Then the mind will rest in the atma alone and not in the objects.

Need of sannyasa

There is however the illusion which covers the eye of the Self, on account of which it directs itself to externality. The aspirant must open his internal eye and dispel this illusion.

For the sake of this understanding, the aspirant casts aside his attachment to all the objects of this world, and also to the actions connected with them. This is sannyasa, which means systematically and perfectly setting aside all things,

perfectly abandoning all that is the cause of bondage, i.e., actions directed to the satisfaction of the individual self. So, renunciation is the abandonment of objects connected with this process. “Sannyasa is the relinquishment of ego-centric processes.”

Selfish actions are performed on account of the craving that is present in the mind for worldly pleasures. This must be completely abandoned, as Nachiketas²³ did. Every guru is like that guru of Nachiketas, Yama, and every aspirant should be like Nachiketas. Nachiketas was offered the most tempting things of this world, but he cast them all aside and said, “Can I become immortal by these?” Maitreyi also put the same question. “Even if I become a ruler of the world, one day the world will come to an end, and I will also come to an end.”

“And what next?” This question will arise. And this question can be answered only by the declaration that I have quoted just now, the declaration made by Sanatkumara that the Infinite alone is bliss. The moment you understand the nature of the Infinite, renunciation automatically follows. This is vidwat sannyasa.²⁴ The spirit of renunciation comes in when the truth is realized. If the Self is real, all else must be unreal. Now this kind of renunciation can come to a person only in an advanced stage.

Process of sadhana

In some persons vairagya dawns early, but others get it through nishkama karma.²⁵ That is why Shankaracharya has prescribed three processes of sadhana for the realization of the Self. One is nishkama seva.²⁶ One has to serve the guru and do all things that the guru commands him to do, without grudging, and without using his own intellect. When the guru orders a certain thing to be done, the disciple should obey him implicitly. Such an obedience to the guru is necessary. This is the spirit of nishkama karma, karma done not for the pleasure of the person doing it, but because it is the command of the guru. Then the impurities of the mind, kama,²⁷ krodha,²⁸ lobha,²⁹ moha,³⁰ etc., are removed.

Thereafter one must take to upasana³¹ or contemplation on the ishta-devata³² (the second stage). Here vikshepa³³ of the mind is removed. It is no longer distracted. One has to proceed through these two stages first.

Japa³⁴ also comes under upasana. After these two processes are undergone, the sadhaka³⁵ is asked to equip himself with the sadhana-chatushtaya. Vairagya comes only then, and when one is fully established in the sadhana-chatushtaya, he is fit to hear and ponder the Mahavakyas.³⁶

The result

One must examine the nature of this world and recognize the fact that it is impermanent and also realize that the permanent cannot be attained through the impermanent.

Spiritual realization is the result of supreme renunciation, renunciation extending up to Brahma Loka.³⁷ From Brahma down to a blade of grass, you should not have attachment to anything, for all these are non-self. When you center yourself in the one Consciousness, automatically everything flows to you. All objects of the world will come to you of their own accord. The atma is the center. Everything in this universe is nothing. When, as Christ has put it, you seek first the kingdom of God, all else will be added unto you; if you know that One Being, everything will be known by you. When you realize That, you have realized everything. You become immortal. This is the supreme blessedness, which everyone should achieve. This is the supreme bliss.

Once that bliss of Brahman is tasted, there is no fear or desire. Fear exists on account of desire, and desire completely vanishes when the light of the Self dawns. Sannyasa follows perception of truth. Therefore, let us, try to withdraw our attention from the fleeting phenomena of this universe, and recognize the presence of the Eternal in these fleeting phenomena, and adore it to the best of our ability, through worship, service and meditation.**More Articles on Sannyasa**

- [A Brief Life of Swami Sivananda](#)
- [Advice to Sannyasins–part 1](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Advice to Sannyasins–part 2](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [The Ideal of Sannyasa](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
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- [Reflections on Sannyasa](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [The Rugged Path](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati

1) Vairagya: Non-attachment, detachment, dispassion, absence of desire, or indifference. Indifference towards and disgust for all worldly things and enjoyments. [\[Go back\]](#)

2) Viveka: Discrimination between the Real and the unreal, between the Self and the non-Self, between the permanent and the impermanent; right intuitive discrimination; ever-present discrimination between the transient and the permanent. [\[Go back\]](#)

3) Sadhana-chatushtaya: The fourfold aids to spiritual practice: 1) the ability to discriminate between the transient and the eternal (*nitya-anitya-astu-viveka*); 2) the absence of desire for securing pleasure or pain either here or elsewhere (*iha-anutra-artha-phala-vairagya*); 3) the attainment of calmness, temperance, spirit of renunciation, fortitude, power of concentration of mind, and faith (*shama-damadi-sadhana-smapti*); 4) an intense desire for liberation (*mumukshutwa*). [\[Go back\]](#)

4) Sadhana: Spiritual practice. [\[Go back\]](#)

5) Indriya: Organ. The five organs of perception (jnanendriyas) are the ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose. The five organs of action (karmendriyas) are the voice, hand, foot, organ of excretion, and the organ of generation. [\[Go back\]](#)

6) Karana: “Instrument;” cause; instrumental cause; reason. The means of knowledge and action. The inner and outer instruments (sense organs). [\[Go back\]](#)

7) Satchidananda: Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute; Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)

8) Vishaya-chaitanya: Consciousness as objects; the object known; the consciousness determined by the object cognised. [\[Go back\]](#)

9) Nama-rupa: Name and form. [\[Go back\]](#)

10) Viveki: One who possesses discrimination. [\[Go back\]](#)

11) Prajapati: Progenitor; the Creator; a title of Brahma the Creator. [\[Go back\]](#)

12) Indra: King of the lesser “gods” (demigods). [\[Go back\]](#)

13) “This body is mortal, always gripped by death, but within it dwells the immortal Self. This Self, when associated in our consciousness with the body, is subject to pleasure and pain; and so long as this association continues, freedom from pleasure and pain can no man find. But as this association ceases, there cease also the pleasure and the pain. Rising above physical consciousness, knowing the Self to be distinct from the senses and the mind—knowing it in its true light—one rejoices and is free.” This is a passage from the Chandogya Upanishad. [\[Go back\]](#)

14) Jivanmukti: Liberation in this life. [\[Go back\]](#)

15) Videhamukti: Disembodied salvation; salvation attained by the realised soul after shaking off the physical sheath as opposed to jivanmukti which is liberation even while living. [\[Go back\]](#)

16) Jivanmukta: One who is liberated in this present life. [\[Go back\]](#)

17) Narada: A primeval sage to whom some of the verses of the Rig Veda are attributed. [\[Go back\]](#)

18) Abode of suffering. [\[Go back\]](#)

19) Noneternal. [\[Go back\]](#)

20) Guna: Quality, attribute, or characteristic arising from nature (Prakriti) itself; a mode of energy behavior. As a rule, when “guna” is used it is in reference to the three qualities of Prakriti, the three modes of energy behavior that are the basic qualities of nature, and which determine the inherent characteristics of all created things. They are: 1) sattwa—purity, light, harmony; 2) rajas—activity, passion; and 3) tamas—dullness, inertia, and ignorance. [\[Go back\]](#)

21) Patanjali: The author of the Yoga Sutras. [\[Go back\]](#)

22) Prakriti: Causal matter; the fundamental power (shakti) of God from which the entire cosmos is formed; the root base of all elements; undifferentiated matter; the material cause of the world. Also known as Pradhana. [\[Go back\]](#)

23) The central figure in the Katha Upanishad. [\[Go back\]](#)

24) Vidvat sannyasa: Renunciation after the attainment of the knowledge of Brahman. Asceticism resorted to by the wise (jnani) and perfected ones (siddhas). Renunciation by the wise. [\[Go back\]](#)

25) Nishkama karma: Desireless action; disinterested action; action dedicated to God without personal desire for the fruits of the action; selfless action. [\[Go back\]](#)

26) Disinterested service. [\[Go back\]](#)

27) Kama: Desire; passion; lust. [\[Go back\]](#)

28) Krodha: Anger, wrath; fury. [\[Go back\]](#)

29) Lobha: Greed; covetousness. [\[Go back\]](#)

30) Moha: Delusion—in relation to something, usually producing delusive attachment or infatuation based on a completely false perception and evaluation of the object. [\[Go back\]](#)

31) Upasana: “Sitting near” or “drawing near;” worship; adoration; contemplation of God or deity; devout meditation. [\[Go back\]](#)

32) Ishta-devata: Beloved deity. The deity preferred above all others by an individual. “Chosen ideal” is the usual English translation. [\[Go back\]](#)

33) Vikshepa: The projecting power of the mind, causing external involvement; the movement of pushing outward or away; the projecting power of ignorance; mental restlessness resulting from the awareness moving out from the center that is the Self. [\[Go back\]](#)

34) Japa: Repetition of a mantra. [\[Go back\]](#)

35) Sadhaka: One who practices spiritual discipline—sadhana—particularly meditation. [\[Go back\]](#)

36) Mahavakya: Literally: “Great Saying.” The highest Vedantic truth, found in the Upanishads, there are four Mahavakyas: 1) *Prajñanam Brahma*—“Consciousness is Brahman” (Aitareya Upanishad); 2) *Ayam Atma Brahma*—“This Self is Brahman” (Mandukya Upanishad); 3) *Tat Twam Asi*—“Thou art That” (Chandogya Upanishad); 4) *Aham Brahmasmi*—“I am Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad). [\[Go back\]](#)

37) The world of Brahma, the Creator. [\[Go back\]](#)

Sannyasa Dharma

Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Necessity for sannyasa¹

Sannyasa is an absolute necessity. The mere desire to remain aloof and alone shows that there is an advaitic² inclination in you. Every moment you should be ready for sannyasa. The very longing for sannyasa shows that there is growth of spirituality. Deluded people bring various vain arguments: “Mohammed was a householder, Nanak was a householder, Rama married, Krishna married, and Ramakrishna Paramahansa married!” Delusion! Even if you think you are a jnani,³ you will have terrible downfall when you come in contact with worldly persons and things! Many sannyasins have fallen! Many yogis have fallen! The Bhagavata says that actual fire is not so dangerous, burning charcoal is not so dangerous, as the company of worldly persons, worldly things! Worldly people always talk against sannyasa, against renunciation and tapas! Even a cobra is not so very dangerous as these deluded people!

Even in an advanced stage, people remain in their house with family, wives and children, but take fancy to say, “I have got mental detachment; I am a mental sannyasin.” There is really terrible attachment in them! Sannyasa has its own glory and splendor! Sannyasa is extremely necessary. One may say, “I do not need orange-colored robes;” still sannyasa is necessary. Sannyasa has got its own psychology. All arguments against it are false! The Mundaka Upanishad will tell you how necessary sannyasa is. The world has not produced a greater genius than Shankara,⁴ the greatest sannyasin! Why did Ramakrishna Paramahansa take sannyasa? No use of argumentation and logic—vanity of the intellect! Sannyasa is necessary though you may have advaitic realization! Totapuri, Ramakrishna’s guru, though he had advaitic realization, took sannyasa. Why did Madana Misra take sannyasa? Yajnavalkya had the highest realization, but why did he take sannyasa? The world has not produced a greater sage than Yajnavalkya. Study his instructions to his wife, Maitreyi.

Sannyasa destroys all worldliness, all evil samskaras,[5](#) and establishes you in advaitic meditation. You must come out of your house and wander away begging for alms and fix the mind on the supreme lakshya,[6](#) Brahman. You must meditate without break. Then only you can have the choice either to take or not to take orange robe. But never say, “I have no attachment, I am a mental sannyasin.” You will weep afterwards. Study the Mundaka Upanishad, If sannyasa is not necessary why should there be the four ashramas?[7](#) Were the makers of such rules mere fools? How can you understand the glory of sannyasa while remaining in the house and the office, clubs and hotels, amidst temptations and attractions, lust and attachment? How can you know the glory of the destruction of Maya,[8](#) realization of God? You want to eat, drink and enjoy all the day and night. You are immersed in sensual pleasures. There is no dispassion, no vairagya,[9](#) no renunciation. That is why you are afraid to take sannyasa and try to justify your worldliness through foolish arguments. You are afraid to bear suffering. You always want to be carried away by your sense-craving. How, then, can you know the glory of sannyasa? The attachment to men and women, friends and relatives, money and gold, has to be ruthlessly burnt down to ashes. All the so-called duties of the world have to be kicked away for the sake of that glorious state of self-realization! The Mahabharata proclaims that for the sake of self-realization even the whole world should be renounced without hesitation.

Why do you roll on in this miserable samsara?[10](#) Are you not ashamed? If you have real manliness, you must break the chains of earthly bondage, the bondage of birth and death, old age and disease, hunger and thirst! That is courage! That is heroism! That is manliness! Do not be cowards, start now! Fight for the sake of that state of absolute freedom or kaivalya-mukti![11](#)

The parents nowadays are irresponsible. They are deluded. Thinking that they are educating their children, they allow their children to rot in delusion, worldliness and passion! If there are five sons, the parents want all their sons to become barristers and judges! There is vanity at the root of all this. If at least one of your sons has the glorious fortune to open his inward eye, to realize the futility of earthly life, to renounce all his attachments and to take to the wise path of self-realization, that son has done his greatest duty to his parents, that son has opened the doors of salvation to his parents and family-people! He has become a center of worship and adoration to all people in his country! What is the use of physical service to parents and relatives? What is

the use of fighting for social and political freedom, when everybody is locked up in the jail of ego and delusion? What is the use of beating the air thinking it is a drum? But so is all this activity and business of life in the world which is only an airy nothing when compared to the glorious truth of self-realization! What is the use of working in an office with a slavish mentality, which is but the outcome of ignorance? The pay you receive in the offices is only a bait in this world of Maya! How much have you eaten, how much have you drunk, how much have you enjoyed, how much have you slept? Is there an end for this?

Remember that all that you see in this world and get attached to is the object of your own imagination! Open your eyes! All this is Pure Satchidananda!¹² All this is undivided and immortal Consciousness. Where is father, where is mother, where is wife, where are children? Where is the world? Where is society, where are nations? You are moving and breathing in the mass of Universal Consciousness. Wake up now! There is no way in this world to get eternal happiness and supreme satisfaction! You do not know where lies the real cause of misery and suffering. You do not know where lies the source of real knowledge and bliss. You are sunk in ignorance. Assert now your real birthright, the freedom of self-realization!

It is better for you to throw off everything now itself and come off as a beggar! Then alone you become the richest man! The Upanishad emphatically declares: *Yo vai bhuma tat sukham*. “You cannot have real happiness in this world!” The real shanti,¹³ the peace which the mind is hankering after, is only in the Bhuma.¹⁴ Bhuma is unconditioned, beyond time, beyond space and causation. Bhuma is freedom, freedom from the trammels of flesh, freedom from the tricks of Maya, freedom from the plays of delusion. Bhuma is perfection, beyond all limitations. Bhuma is Infinite Fullness. Bhuma is Brahman, the Eternal Absolute! You will have to remember all this constantly. You will have to write this and read this, talk of this and preach this, meditate on this and live in this, understand this and realize this! “*Yo vai bhuma tat sukham!*”

A blow to the worldly-minded

Sannyasa and Vedanta¹⁵ of some kind always go hand in hand. One does not become complete without the other. Wherever there is real sannyasa there is

practical Vedanta. Wherever there is practical Vedanta there must be sannyasa of the highest type. Sannyasa without Vedanta or parabhakti¹⁶ becomes fruitless. Vedanta without sannyasa becomes a mere intellectualism. When sannyasa and Vedanta melt into one there crops up a sage of supreme wisdom. Sannyasa empties the individual of the ego and the negative phenomena, and Vedanta fills it with positive truth. Sannyasa without Vedanta remains empty, and does not serve its purpose. Even so, Vedanta without sannyasa becomes essenceless, and loses its meaning. Vedanta cannot be grasped without emptying the ego through sannyasa and sannyasa becomes a waste without getting at the supreme ideal through Vedanta.

Sannyasa should not fatten the ego and Vedanta should not make one vain and hollow. Blind faith should be turned into rational faith and reason should be turned into experience. As a pitiable instance at the present day, it may be pointed out that the most treacherous kind of “comfortable religion” and comfortable philosophy is being preached by many of the ultra-rationalists and pedants, and it has become a fashion and a cunning pleasure to talk against renunciation, against the order of sannyasa. “Renounce the ego, there is no need of abandoning family and society; Upanishads declare like that; Gita says like that”—this is the perverted interpretation of the man of vanity and attachment, lust and greed! Man is ashamed to admit his folly in not abstaining from the loathsome sensual enjoyments; he wants to lead a cowardly life of sense-indulgence, and tries to protect himself within the fort of crooked commentaries on the philosophical scriptures. He uses philosophical argument to justify worldly enjoyment. Even a devil has begun to quote the authentic scriptures in order to fulfil its desires and ambitions. Examples of Janakas and Vashisthas are cited as indisputable and authoritative justification for adherence to family life.

One has to be completely dead to the narrowness and the delusion of the world if he is to live in the grandeur and the beauty of life in the Spirit. This truth is forgotten and the play of Satan in the human brain has been at present in the stage of foolish ratiocination and comfortable argumentation. While living in the sensual plane of life, an intelligent exposition of Acosmism and Absolute Idealism in attractive rhetorical language cannot pass for more than a childish prattle. Dreams of bringing God to the sensual earth are nothing but the exhibition of human vanity which is the outcome of his failure in distinguishing between what is really true and existent and what is not.

Realization of the Absolute is not a talk, is not a play, It is the most difficult and the hardest of all tasks. It demands the price of one's very self! Will you pay it? It demands your individual life. It demands your ego; it demands your very being as the cost for self-realization! If that is everyone's goal, if that is every one's ideal, should not the more experienced impart that secret to the lesser ones? Should not every child in the cradle be initiated into the mysteries of existence? Why do you think that you are spoiling the career of the child by teaching it sannyasa and Vedanta? Let the world cease to exist! Let all become sannyasins and Vedantins![17](#) Let there be no more creation! Let there be no more procreation! Let every son and every daughter be taught the truths of renunciation and knowledge of Brahman! Only then does life become fruitful! Only then man becomes a real man!

Let every father take the example of Uddalaka! Let every mother take the example of Madalasa! Let every wife take the example of Chudala! Let every husband take the example of Yajnavalkya! Let all children, the sons and daughters, take the example of the four Kumaras! Then only life is said to be perfectly lived.

Never think that you are spoiling a person by teaching him sannyasa or Vedanta. It is the only lifegiving teaching. All other teachings are mere play of words. Never think you are unfit for self-realization, that you are unfit for sannyasa or Vedanta. This cowardly nature will not leave you if you do not exert to know the truth as it really is. Better aim at a lion and miss it, than hunt a jackal and catch it. Better aim at sannyasa and Vedanta and fail in its practice than live a worldly life and succeed in it. Remember, O remember that you are born for this Supreme End, not for anything else!

May you all empty yourselves of the ego through sannyasa and may you all fill yourselves with the truth of Vedanta!

Glory of Sannyasa

The glory of sannyasa is indescribable,
Yajnavalkya embraced sannyasa!
Shankara embraced sannyasa!
Ramakrishna, Mandana Misra, too.
Even Europeans are sannyasins;

Mr. Nixon and Dr. Alexander also;
And several others, too, have taken to sannyasa!
Even some great men of India
Have not understood
The glory of sannyasa.
It is a great pity indeed!
Let them have their own way;
But we are the children
Of the great four Kumaras,
Dattatreya and Shankara!
O ye aspirants bold,
Who are equipped with the four,
Who have nivritti-tendencies,
Come, quick! Be quick!
Waste not life any more!

Supreme glory of sannyasa

Can you imagine a greater karma-kandi,[18](#) a follower of pravritti marga,[19](#) than the great Mandana Misra? He was the greatest votary of karma.[20](#) He argued with Sri Shankaracharya for days together on the point that sannyasa is not necessary. He wanted to establish that we can attain mukti or salvation by karma marga[21](#) and that nivritti[22](#) is not absolutely essential. But at last Sri Shankara defeated Mandana Misra and he also became one of the four disciples of Shankara. When such a mighty man became a sannyasi, are you not convinced that sannyasa is necessary?

You are not treading the path of the Vedas as Mandana, Misra did. He was an ideal householder who knew the four Vedas, who was devoted to his elders, who walked in the footsteps of ideal grihasthas[23](#) like Yajnavalkya and others. Even he took sannyasa!

What are you doing? In the name of duty you are leading a servile life, cheating others all the twenty-four hours of the day. Your days are too short. You want thirty hours in a day so that you may earn money by unnatural means, lead a reckless life addicted to wine, woman, cinema, liquor, etc. Do you call this life? O atheist! You want to fill your pocket and stomach and that of your relations! You want to move about in cars, eat in hotels, attend

cinemas and nautch-parties! Do you call this life? I call this suicide, blinded by ignorance!

O man! Wake up! Walk in the footsteps of your forefathers, the great Seers! This world is full of miseries and tribulations. The more you think there is joy in it, the more are you deluded! The more you forget your soul, the more are your miseries. Be not deluded by the thought, “I have to look after my family! They will die if I do not earn money for them. My children will weep of hunger,” and so on.

If you cannot live a perfect life in the world, kick the world mercilessly. Practice tapasya. Purify your mind. Serve and love others with a divine bhava![24](#) Now you are ready for sannyasa. Become a paramahansa[25](#) sannyasin and attain the jivanmukti[26](#) state.

The knowledge of Brahman should be taught to those who have purified their hearts by practising the sadhana-chatushtaya,[27](#) who are well-versed in the shastras,[28](#) who possess faith, who are centered in Brahman, and who have duly practiced the vow of shirovratam. Sirovratam is the well-known Vedic vow mentioned in the Atharva Veda. This obviously means the head-vow, the vow of sannyasa or renunciation. This is the ceremony in which the head is shaven.

Sannyasa is necessary for attaining self-realization. Even in the preliminary stage one should join the ascetic order, as this voluntary renunciation while yet a neophyte will qualify the aspirant for Vedantic study.

The sruti[29](#) says: “One should leave the house the very day dispassion dawns in him.”

The sannyasi is free from all kinds of worldly distractions, ties and attachments. The garb puts a check on the aspirant from going astray or doing evil actions. When there is internal change, when one is ready for entering the fourth ashrama of life, why should he be afraid of putting on the orange-colored robe? Why should he say, “I have given coloring to my heart?” It is a sort of timidity and hypocrisy. Vasanas (subtle desires) still lurk in his heart.

Sannyasa has got its own glory and advantages! The freedom of a sannyasin can hardly be described. Only a sannyasin can entirely cut off all connections

and ties. Though you have colored your heart, still all members of your family will cling to you like leeches till the end of your life. You cannot entirely eradicate moha or infatuated love and attachment for your family. When you fall sick You will be tempted to go in for their help and vice versa. The old samskaras will get a new life and moha will bind you with stronger chains once again. It is only when you take sannyasa that they will leave you free. They will leave all hopes which they had on you. Only then you become dead for them. They will not approach you again.

If you like seclusion, if you are free from raga or passion, worldly ambition, karmic tendencies and attractions of this world, if you are reticent and serene, if you have disciplined yourself while remaining in the world, if you can live on simple food, if you can lead a hard life, if you have a strong constitution, if you are not talkative, if you can remain alone without company and talk, if you have a meditative temperament or reflective nature, if you can bear all the difficulties in the spiritual path, if you can lead a difficult life of an ascetic till the end of your life, if you can bear any amount of insult and injury done to you, then you can take to the path of renunciation. Only then you will be benefited by embracing sannyasa. You should actually lead the life of a sannyasi for one or two years in the world itself. Otherwise you will find it extremely difficult to tread the path. For a man of dispassion, discrimination and strong will, this path is all joy and bliss.

May you develop real thirst for release from the bonds of samsara! May your hearts be filled with love of the atman alone! May you develop real vairagya and enter the illimitable kingdom of eternal bliss!

What do scriptures say about sannyasa?

The Narayana Upanishad says: “Not by works, not by progeny, not by wealth, but by renunciation alone is immortality attained!”

“There is no hope of immortality through wealth,” said Yajnavalkya to Maitreyi.

Manu says in his Smriti: “Of all Dharmas,[30](#) ethics and morals, the knowledge of the Self is the highest duty of man. That is the foremost of all sciences, for through that one attains immortality. After ten births one gets the knowledge of the Veda, after hundred births one gets good character and

conduct. After thousand births one gets the knowledge of Yoga, but only after a crore of births one gets the love for sannyasa: In this Dharma called nivritti, the fruit is called Final Emancipation. That knower of Brahman who gives fearlessness to all creatures and takes sannyasa, attains the world of light and splendor. He who gives fearlessness to all creatures, attains fearlessness in the end.”

In the Yajnavalkya Smriti it is said: “Of all works, like sacrifices, rituals, control of senses, harmlessness, charity or study of the Vedas, this one thing is the highest duty: that one should seek the Self through Yoga. A Brahmana should not marry, he should observe brahmacharya, and, keeping his power of purity, should directly take sannyasa after brahmacharya. Seeing that samsara is essenceless, he should seek to get the nectar of immortality.”

The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says: “Desiring for the state of the Self, one should renounce. Established in Brahman, one attains immortality.”

Yajnavalkya said to Kahola: “He who passes beyond hunger and thirst, beyond sorrow and delusion, beyond old age and death—Brahmanas who wish to attain that Self, overcome the desire for sons, desire for wealth, desire for the world, and live the life of mendicants.”

The Jabalasaruti says: “The wanderer, with renunciation, with colored cloth, clean-shaven, desiring nothing, the pure, the faultless, the holy, the beggar, becomes one with Brahman.”

The Mundaka Upanishad says: “They who practice tapas with faith in the forest, the peaceful men of wisdom, who live on bhiksha, who are above passion, depart through the passage of the sun to where that immortal Purusha,³¹ the Imperishable One, abides. Having scrutinized the worlds that are attained through action, a Brahmana should arrive at dispassion and indifference. For the sake of this knowledge, let him go, fuel in hand, to a spiritual teacher who is learned in the srutis and established in Brahman. Those who have ascertained the meaning of the Vedanta knowledge, the earnest seekers after truth, with natures purified through sannyasa yoga, they all, in the region of Brahman at the end of time, are liberated beyond death.”

In the Vishnu-Smriti it is said: “The householder cannot attain even by a hundred sacrifices what state the sannyasin will attain by living properly even

for one night. Purified are hundred families of his ahead, and purified are three hundred families of his of the past, in whose line even a single one takes to the path of sannyasa. The sun trembles when he sees a sannyasin, for he feels that the sannyasin will break the surya-mandala³² with his force of the soul and attain immortality.”

Rishi Jabali says in his Smriti: “The difference between a householder Brahmana who is learned in the four Vedas, who is a performer of Soma-Yaga,³³ who has performed a hundred sacrifices, and a sannyasin who has renounced, is like that between a mustard seed and a mountain or between a glow worm and the sun.”

The Angiras-Smriti says: “Sixty families of the past and sixty families of the future are raised to immortality by one Brahmana who utters the words, ‘sannyastam maya.’³⁴ Sins acquired through family, sins acquired through karma, are all burnt up by the fire of sannyasa, even as a straw is burnt by forest fire.”

It is told in the Mahabharata: “Even if a person wears merely the ochre robe, he is fit to be worshipped.” Such is the glory of sannyasa.

Rishi Atri says in his Smriti: “One sannyasi is far superior to even a thousand brahmacharins,³⁵ a hundred vanaprasthas³⁶ and even a crore of grihasthas. The Lord has two forms: moving and unmoving. The moving form is the sannyasi and the unmoving is the idol worshipped in temples.”

Sri Krishna says to Uddhava: “I am sannyasa among ashramas.” “Only the man of renunciation with knowledge attains Brahman, and none else.” “Action is for the pravritta, the man of the world, and wisdom is for the sannyasin who has risen above worldliness.”

These are the concluding sentences of the Mundaka Upanishad where renunciation and emancipation are extolled: “He who strives by these means, possessed of knowledge, enters into the abode of Brahman. Attaining that state, the seers who are satisfied with knowledge, who are perfected souls, free from attraction, tranquil in mind, attaining that which is universally present, those wise devout souls enter into the All itself. As the flowing rivers in the ocean disappear leaving their names and forms, so the knower, being

liberated from name and form, goes to the Supreme Purusha who is higher than the highest. He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman. In his family no one who is ignorant of Brahman arises. He crosses over sorrow He crosses over sin. Liberated from the knots of the heart, he becomes immortal.”

The views of Shankara on sannyasa

Shankara says that the atman should and can be realized only through knowledge and not by ritual. He positively asserts that, on the dawn of knowledge, karma naturally and necessarily ceases to function. Karma of any kind is, according to Shankara, a hindrance to final emancipation of the soul, and the performance of karma involves one in the cycle of samsara. It is only Brahmajnana³⁷ that rends asunder the knots of ignorance and bestows moksha³⁸ on the soul.

Sannyasa is absolutely necessary whether it be vividisha-sannyasa³⁹ or vidvat-sannyasa.⁴⁰ Without perfect renunciation it is impossible to pursue the path of Brahmavidya.⁴¹ The qualifications necessary for taking sannyasa are:

1. Discrimination between the One Eternal Substance and the appearance of ephemeral phenomena.
2. Dispassion for the enjoyment of things existing either in this or the other world.
3. Possessing the six-fold wealth, viz., tranquillity of mind; control of the senses; cessation from all worldly activity; endurance of the pairs of opposites, like heat and cold, pleasure and pain, love and hatred, etc.; faith in the Vedantic truth as inculcated by the spiritual preceptor; power of concentration of mind.
4. An ardent yearning for liberation.

Shankara is of the opinion that it is foolish to cite instances of Janaka and others who did not take sannyasa but possessed Brahmajnana.⁴² Such instances are quoted by householders who are unwilling to leave their attachments, for there is no reason why they should stick to household life after attaining knowledge. For knowledge by its very nature is against all senses of worldly duty and activity.

The sannyasin can find adequate leisure and freedom from the distractions of life. Renunciation is desirable even to those who have not attained jnana.⁴³ Only the sannyasin can devote the whole time for meditation. Householders cannot give themselves up completely for meditation. The very word “household” signifies pravritti⁴⁴ which is concerned with the world of appearance.

Without abandonment of the concerns of worldly life, knowledge cannot be pursued with unabated vigor and devotion. It does not mean that the sannyasin undervalues human society and discards all men without helping them at all. As the life of a sannyasin is meant only to reach the highest Reality, and as he has already passed through the lower stages of spiritual evolution, he may appear to be not working for the rest of humanity at large; but it is to be borne in mind that he exercises a silent and unnoticed but powerful influence for the good of the public. That itself is the service he is rendering to the society and that is the highest and the most beneficent service that one could ever do to man. One who is intent upon realizing the peace, the bliss, the One Without a Second—Shantam, Shivam, Advaitam—is the most powerful and the useful friend of the world!

Shankara’s arguments for sannyasa

Becoming one with the devas⁴⁵ in heaven is not the highest endeavor of man here. There is something beyond karma, higher than the transitory earthly life, higher than the heavenly enjoyment. Even the devas are subject to the misery of samsara and they are not immortal in the real sense. The srutis declare that Brahman alone is above samsara, above hunger and thirst, etc.

It is said in the Isavasyopanishad, “Only doing karma [i.e., one’s own duty], one should wish to live a hundred years.” The life of man does not extend for more than a hundred years, so that he may take up the path of knowledge after performing karma for one hundred years. The hundred years are taken up by karma. Then, when will one find time for acquiring knowledge before his death? The arguments of the karma-kandins are not sound. For there cannot be any motive or desire to act when there is the knowledge of the highest truth. He does not find any use in the performance of karma. When one gets a desire to know the atman which is free from all the faults of samsara, one does not find any benefit out of actions which he has done or

which he has to do. If you say that he does it because it is so enjoined although he sees no good in it, we say it cannot be, for he has known the atman which is beyond all injunctions. One who knows Brahman cannot be bound by injunctions and rules. Even the Veda is born of him, so he cannot be commanded by the Veda to do any karma. None can be directed by his own words proceeding from his own knowledge. A wise master cannot be directed by an ignorant servant.

The srutis say: “Seek the atman alone,” “This atman is Brahman which is Intelligence-bliss” “Thou art That,” etc. The active self of the Vedic karma-kanda is only a means to realize the real Supreme Self. When knowledge of the real Self dawns, there cannot be a false activity.

Knowing Brahman, a person observes self-denial, which is a cessation of all actions. So long as a man is in ignorance he wishes to have something, to do something, whereas in reality he is full and perfect, and therefore he need not be active for any reason whatsoever. This ignorance exists in all beings.

One acts only when there is desire. A desireless man, whose desires have been fulfilled, who has risen above desires, whose desire is the atman, has no necessity to act. It is not reasonable to ask the question as to why a person who is travelling does not fall into a pit or a mire in broad daylight. If you say that a householder can remain in his state without doing karma after he gets knowledge of Brahman, we say, it cannot be; for the householder’s life is based on desire. Sannyasa is cessation from all desires and not merely a change of the order. Therefore it is impossible for a Knower to lead a householder’s life.

Some may say: “From. this it follows that it is not necessary for a knower even to serve his preceptor or to perform tapas.” Householders who are afraid of begging for bread and are afraid of ridicule argue like this through their sharp intelligence. You cannot say that even begging for bread is a binding rule on a sannyasin. That is not a desire and the sannyasin is virtually a mendicant without rules binding him. He is not liable to any kind of command. Even one who does not know Brahman but who is desirous of emancipation should enter into the order of a sannyasin. The sruti says: “Let one live in the order of sannyasa which is a means to the knowledge of Brahman.” Brahmacharya may help one to attain knowledge but it is not the

case with a householder. When a means is not properly followed it can never accomplish any object. The heavenly bliss of the karma-kandin is only a form of worldly enjoyment. Heaven is only another world. If one professes to have knowledge he cannot do actions, for actions are worldly. The atman is entirely opposed to action and hence it cannot be an auxiliary to the knowledge of it. The sruti says: “When to him everything has become the Self, who should see what and through what should one see?” etc. This nullifies the meaning of actions in one who has knowledge.

It may be argued that the ignorant, seeing that their obligations are not discharged, cannot turn sannyasins. This is not right, for there can be no obligation incurred before one enters the order of a householder. According to the text, “Let one leave his home for the forest, and become a sannyasin, even if he is a brahmacharin; let him immediately turn a sannyasin, either from home or from the forest.” The order of the sannyasin is enjoined even on one who is in the householder’s order.

We read in the Chandogya Upanishad also that in the case of some people performance of agnihotra⁴⁶ for twelve days, and subsequent renunciation, is enjoined. As for the argument that the order of a sannyasin is only for those who are unable to perform karma, we say, it is unsound; as, in their case, there is the separate text of the sruti, “He who has discontinued the fire or never maintained it,” etc. If you say that it is immaterial whether one lives in his house or in the forest, we say, it is fallacious. Self-denial alone being the matter of course with him, he cannot stay in the house as that is prompted by desire, and self-denial is mere absence of it. Acting recklessly is entirely out of question with regard to the man of knowledge, for that is known to be the way of extremely ignorant persons.

Therefore the text “Only doing karma, one should wish to live a hundred years” has been refuted by showing that the text applies to the ignorant, and that karma cannot coexist with knowledge.

History of sannyasins

The history of sannyasins starts with the four Kumaras, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata. These four Kumaras were the mental sons of Brahma, the creator. Brahma created these four Kumaras through his mind

and asked them to help him in the work of creation. The Kumaras refused to fulfil his request. They were nivritti-niratas, possessed of absolute renunciation. In spite of Brahma's anger, they took to the life of nivritti and meditation on Brahman. Brahma in his rage wanted to burn down these Kumaras. But the powerful Kumaras who ever lived in the Supreme Soul, unconnected with pravritti, could not be harmed by Brahma. Brahma's rage burst open through his forehead and from there emerged the ferocious Rudra.
[47](#) Such is the power of renunciation and life in the Absolute.

The Kumaras were initiated by Lord Shiva, in the form of Dakshinamurti, into the mysteries of Brahmajnana, through silence and Chinmudra. Dakshinamurti sat under a banyan tree and taught them jnana by silence. They imbibed wisdom through silence and got rid of their doubts.

Dattatreya[48](#) is the father of all men of renunciation. We are all the children of Dattatreya. Adorations to Him at all times! Dattatreya's Avadhuta Gita and his instructions to king Yadu mark out his Supreme wisdom of Brahman. He lived in Brahman and he breathed Brahman. It is rare to find a sage like Dattatreya.

We trace our ancestry from Lord Narayana.[49](#) From Narayana was born Brahma. From Brahma's mind was born Sage Vashistha, the reputed embodiment of wisdom, the spiritual preceptor of the kings of Ayodhya. He gave us the Yoga-Vashistha, the transcendental guide-light to humanity. Vashistha's son was Sakti. From Sakti was born sage Parasara. From Parasara was born Vyasa, the great Badarayana, or Krishna-Dvaipayana, who divided the Vedas, and wrote the Mahabharata. Vyasa's son was the ideal sage Suka Deva, who gave the Bhagavata to Parikshit. Suka was initiated into sannyasa by Lord Shiva himself. Read the Suka-Rahasya Upanishad. You will find that Suka was initiated into the Mahavakyas[50](#) by Sadashiva at the request of Sri Vyasa Maharshi. The blood of Suka-Deva is said to run in the veins of Gaudapada, the famous advaitic metaphysician, the father of Advaita-Vedanta.[51](#) Gaudapada initiated Govindapada into sannyasa, who, in turn, initiated into sannyasa Sri Shankara, the wondrous giant of Indian philosophy and religion. Shankara's name will be remembered as long as the Divine Names of Rama and Krishna will last in this world. But for the timely incarnation of Shankara the upanishadic wisdom would have sunk into

oblivion. Glory to the greatest sannyasin, Shankara, the “Loka-Shankara,”[52](#) who showered the rain of peace all over the land!

The famous disciples of Shankara, Sureswaracharya, Padmapada, Hastamalaka and Trotaka became the disseminators of upanishadic and Vedantic knowledge all over the four quarters of Hindustan! Glory to all of them! Among the later sannyasins, Sage Vidyananda ranks the foremost. He kept up the light of Advaita[53](#) even in the midst of political bloodshed and suffering in the country. Next to Shankara and his direct disciples, none is so famous in the history of sanyasa and Vedanta as Swami Vidyananda, the disciple of Swami Shankarananda. The commentary on the Bhagavad Gita written by Shankarananda is a boon to the sannyasins. It is specially meant for the sannyasins. It is purely a sannyasic interpretation of the Gita.

There are innumerable sannyasins at present belonging to one or the other of the four centers established by the four disciples of Shankara—at Sringeri, Dwaraka, Badrinath and Jagannath Puri. They are called Dasanami[54](#) sannyasins, i.e., sannyasins with ten names. The credit of vigorous insistence on the necessity for sanyasa goes solely to the adorable advaitic sannyasin, the glorious Shankara!

Glory, glory to the Sages, the gurus, the sannyasins, who have opened our eyes from sleep, who have widened our hearts, brightened our intellects and immersed us in Supreme knowledge!

Modern sannyasins

O ignorant man, who is fully immersed in worldliness! Just hear this interesting story and wake up from the long slumber of ignorance!

Even some Europeans have understood the glory and freedom of sanyasa and have embraced sanyasa. Mr. Nixon, M.A. (Oxon) who was a Professor in Lucknow University is now a sanyasi. He is Swami Krishna Premi. He is a scholar in Sanskrit and Hindi. He does kirtan. He dances in divine ecstasy. He is the author of famous books such as *Yoga of the Bhagavadgita*, *Yoga of the Katha Upanishad*, etc. He gives impressive, forcible speeches in English and Hindi also. You will be stunned when you hear his lectures.

Mr. Alexander I.M.S., who was in the Medical College, Lucknow, is a sannyasin. He stays in Uttara-Brindavan along with Sri Krishna Premi.

Sri Swami Tapovanam, the lion of Vedanta, a Brahmajnani,⁵⁵ the author of several Sanskrit books, the crest-jewel and beacon-light of the Himalayas, lived in Uttarakasi. Even the biggest officers sat at his lotus feet to learn Vedanta.

Sri Malayala Swami, a great Sanskrit scholar, a Brahmajnani, is thrilling the whole of Andhra Province with his lectures and spiritual instructions. He has elevated the people of the entire Andhra. He is the author of several spiritual books in Telugu. He is conducting a beautiful ashram at Yerpedu. He is holding spiritual conferences. He is the spiritual king of Andhra.

Sri Swami Ramdas is spreading his spiritual influence from Anandashram, Kanhangad. His books are a treasure for the world. He is a dynamic yogi and bhakta.

Sri Swami Omkar has got two ashrams, one in Totapalli hills and another in Waltair. He has done great work in America also.

Sri Swami Rajeshwaranandaji has founded the Upanishadic Vihar in Kalahasti. He is the founder of Satchidananda Sangha in Madras. He is assisted by Dr. Sri T.M.P. Mahadevan, M.A., Ph.D., of the Madras University. He has done great spiritual work. He is an orator and an author of several spiritual books.

Many cultured young men from Bengal have renounced the world and joined the Sri Ramakrishna Mission and are doing great spiritual work here and in various parts of America and Europe. Apart from the great direct disciples of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Sri Swami Madhavananda, Swami Nikhilananda, Swami Yatiswarananda, Swami Sasvatananda, Swami Sharvananda, Swami Tyagishananda, Swami Vireswarananda, Swami Ranganathananda and several others are torch-bearers of Divine Wisdom.

Sri Swami Yogananda did great spiritual work in Los Angeles. He was an orator. He was the founder of Self-Realization Fellowship.

A Barrister of Gujarat is now Swami Advaitananda. His articles are appearing in various magazines. He is a dynamic yogi and a sage.

Swami Swayam Jyoti founded an ashram in Chota Udaipur and started a Gujarati Journal, the “Utthan.” He is doing great work in Gujarat.

Swami Purushottamanandaji, who lived in Vashistha Guha, Himalayas, did silent spiritual work.

Swami Karapatri has been a too well-known and famous figure to need introduction. He is living the life of an ideal sannyasin. He conducts great yajnas⁵⁶ for the peace of the world.

Sri Swami Suddhananda Bharati from South India is a jewel among sannyasins. He is a king among poets. He is the author of several important books. He is a yogi and anubhava-jnani. He is radiating his Brahmic effulgence from the South.

The Names Of Swamis Vivekananda, Rama Tirtha, Dayananda can never be forgotten. They have become world-famous figures. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa was a sannyasin, and was a synthesis of the different conceptions of spiritual realization.

It is only sannyasins bold, who have cut off all ties and connections, who are fearless, who are freed from delusion, passion and selfishness, that can do real service to the world. Sannyasa alone can free one entirely from delusion and all worldly attachments.

Glory to sannyasins who are gods on this earth! May their blessings be upon you all!

Sannyasinis

When women are equipped with the four means of salvation, they are also quite eligible for sannyasa. They are as efficient as men in the field of spirituality.

When one is born with sannyasa samskaras no force on the earth can prevent him or her from taking sannyasa. Even if you keep a hundred guards to

prevent them from leaving the house they cannot check them. The father of the great Buddha guarded him in all possible ways, but his horse scaled the heights of the compound and took him to the forest. It is only the effeminate, impotent, timid men (who are only moustached ladies), with no good samskaras, and no spiritual asset, who are spiritual bankrupts, that will cling to things mundane and die like worms. They will speak against sannyasa. He who has understood the glory and freedom of sannyasa, a real child of Sri Shankara, Sri Dattatreya, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana and Sanatkumara, cannot remain even for a day in the pravritti-marga.

Sulabha was a reputed lady sannyasini. She wandered about as a parivrajaki or itinerant woman and had a controversy with Raja Janaka. She was a Brahmajnani.

Sri Gauri Mataji was a sannyasini. She was the president of the Saradamani Ashram. Sri Durga Mataji is the present president of the ashram. She is a graduate.

Sri Omkar-Ishwari was a learned sannyasini. She was a Vedantini. She lived in Rishikesh. She had a small group of disciples; some were males, some were females.

Sri Swami Malayalaswami of Vyasa-Ashram, Yerpedu, Chittor Dt., has many sannyasini disciples.

The late Swami Poornananda of Sivalaya, Rishikesh, a cultured sannyasin of great reputation, had sannyasini disciples.

The daughter of the late Sri Chakravarty of Uttara-Brindavan, Almora, has taken sannyasa.

Even ladies born in rich families, like Sri Sushila Mangaldas of Bombay, do not want to marry and want to follow the spiritual path. This clearly shows that there is a sannyasa tendency in them.

Glorious sannyasinis

The indispensable necessity and the extreme importance of sannyasa can be very well imagined by the fact that it was not men alone but also women that

took sannyasa in doing sadhana for self-realization. We know of the existence of sannyasinis, bhairavis⁵⁷ and yatiswaris⁵⁸ who have been a glory not merely to womankind but to the nation and the world as a whole. The chronicles of Christian mystics teem with immeasurable instances of such renowned all-renouncing nuns who were the examples of fiery aspiration, intense vairagya and supreme tyaga.⁵⁹

In India, the earliest records speak of the renunciation of Maitreyi, after hearing the sublime upadesha by Sage Yajnavalkya. She was permeated with the true spirit of sannyasa. She renounced the world. She is an ideal for all women, for all times.

The names of Sulabha and Gargi are too famous to need elaborate explanation. We hear of the glorious sannyasini Sulabha, the wandering mendicant, the knower of Brahman, conversing with King Janaka of Videha. This is described in the mokshadharmaparva of the Mahabharata. She gives Janaka profound knowledge of the Reality, explains to him the nature of existence and walks away unconcerned with matters of the world. It is told that Sulabha, the dandi-sannyasini, was highly devoted to the religion of final emancipation. She wanted to test Janaka whether he was emancipated or not. She finds countless faults in Janaka and tells him that he is only a lip Vedantin, that he is not emancipated, that his emancipation is only a talk, and that he has not renounced attachment. She illumined Janaka with supreme wisdom and left his palace.

The questions put by Gargi to Sage Yajnavalkya in the court of Janaka mark her out as an ideal sannyasini. "If he will answer me these questions, not even one among you will surpass him in discussions about Brahman," said Gargi to the learned sages assembled in the court of Janaka. How bold should a woman be to question a Brahmajñani like Yajnavalkya! Is this not a sign of absolute renunciation?

The Buddhist and the Jaina order of ascetics had its equal share of world-renouncing nuns as of its famous monks.

Nearer our times, a most brilliant example of a woman sannyasini is that of the great Bhairavi Brahmani who was the tantric⁶⁰ guru of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. She was a fiery example of wonderful renunciation, great

boldness and courage, that distinguished her out as a fearless yogini.⁶¹ Among the later lady devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, and the holy Mother Saradamani Devi, the name of Gauri Mata should be mentioned. She felt the call for the higher life from her very girlhood and resisting all efforts of her relatives to get her married she renounced home and hearth and became a sannyasini. She wandered about fearlessly in many parts of India and performed severe austerities in the Himalayas, and later on, in Brindavan.

Yogini Mata is another such lady and an associate of Gauri Mata. She was a highly spiritual lady living a life of great detachment and intense continuous sadhana. She had performed the purnabhisheka ceremony of the tantras as well as the viraja homa⁶² of the Vedas, both indicative of having renounced the worldly life completely. The present Durga Mata of Saradeshwari Ashram, Calcutta, is a similar sannyasini.

O devis of the world! Should you not strive for the higher, the grand, the sublime, the only real life in the soul? Is it sufficient if you are satisfied with the petty material necessities of life on earth? Do you remember what Maitreyi said to Yajnavalkya? “What shall I do with that wealth of this whole world if thereby I would not become immortal?” said she to her husband. How many of the ladies of this world will be bold enough to assert this wise saying of the upanishadic ideal of a woman?

To chain themselves with the bondage of samsara is not the birthright of the mothers and sisters of the world. To get stuck up in family, children and relatives is not the ideal of courageous and discriminative women. Every mother of the world should realize her responsibility to awaken herself and her children, her family, her husband, to the true light and splendor of spiritual life. What a glorious mother was Madalasa! Did she ask her children to study up to the post-graduate examination and then seek for some employment? *Suddhosi Buddhosi, Niranjanosi, Samsara-Maya-Parivarjitosi*—“You are pure, you are consciousness, you are taintless, you are devoid of the maya of samsara.” Such was the advaitic instruction which Madalasa gave to her children when she rocked them in the cradle. How many mothers of the present-day world have got the fortune to teach their children such a profound knowledge? On the other hand, the present day mothers would try to crush the spiritual tendency of their children even if it is found in them in a microscopic state! What a sad and pitiable condition of

these ignorant mothers! Wake up, O mothers, sisters! Wake up from your deep sleep! Recognize your responsibility! Spiritualize yourselves! Spiritualize your children! Spiritualize even your husbands, for you are the makers of the family! Remember how Chudala illumined her husband. You are the makers of the nations! You are the builders of the world! Therefore spiritualize yourselves! Assert in yourselves the spirit of Sulabha, Maitreyi, Gargi, Gauri-Puri-Devi! Do not be cowardly! Come out of your fleshy homes, the homes of delusion, the homes of vanity!

Be you all real sannyasinis, and bring real glory, real greatness, for that is real boldness and courage, that is real wisdom and understanding! A woman is not a woman if she is devoid of spiritual fire in her, if she is ignorant of a higher life in the soul! A woman's duty is not merely family, her duty is also to transcend family! Her duty does not lie in sarees, bangles jackets, powders and scents! Her duty does not lie in getting employment for her children! Her duty is also concerned with the self, the atman, the Brahman! Such a woman is a real symbol of God, she is to be adored, she is to be worshipped!

Sannyasa ashrama

Sannyasa is the fourth ashrama of life. It is, in other words, the upanishadic life. It is the life of renunciation. It is the last of the four ashramas. In none of these stages should a person grasp at the duties of the other three. He should stick to the dharma of his own particular ashrama.

“*Ahimsa paramo dharmah*” cannot be strictly practiced by householders. It can be practiced by sannyasins who tread the nivritti marga.⁶³ Real sannyasins do not defend themselves even when their lives are in danger, because, they know that existence is in reality changeless. A sannyasin is one who has no body, and who identifies himself with Brahman or the atman.

The duty of a brahmachari is different from that of a grihastha, vanaprastha and a sannyasin. The duty of a grihastha is quite unconcerned with the duty of the other three. Similar is the case with the vanaprastha and the sannyasin. One has nothing to do with the works of the other. The brahmachari studies the samhita⁶⁴ portion of the Vedas as swadhyaya.⁶⁵ The grihastha performs action according to the brahmana⁶⁶ portion of the Vedas. The vanaprastha leads a mystic and secluded life according to the sylvan text or the

aranyaka⁶⁷ portion of the Vedas. The sannyasin contemplates according to the upanishadic or knowledge portion of the Vedas.

The sannyasin is dead to the world and his family. The very color, the very orange robe gives strength and purity. I do not believe those people who say, “We have given coloring to our hearts.” This is timidity and hypocrisy. If there is real internal change, the external change is bound to come. You cannot be a sage inside and a rogue outside. The inner nature will not allow you to keep an opposite nature outside. I do not admit that merely an attainment towards eradication of egoism, sankalpas and vasanas, does really constitute sannyasa. The ashrama-bheda⁶⁸ is absolutely necessary. Why did sages like Shankara and Sri Ramakrishna take sannyasa? Why did Yajnavalkya take sannyasa even after the realization of Brahman? Where is the necessity for this order at all?

Some people say, “Think for yourself, there is no need of spiritual rules or spiritual initiation.” O ignorant man! How can you think for yourself? If I ask you to enquire “Who am I?” you will think you are Mr. so and so, born of such-and-such a person, with such a height and weight, and having such a name. Is this the enquiry of “Who am I?” Is this thinking for yourself? Ignorant people cannot think for themselves.

Some others say, “We can find out good and evil, right and wrong, by consulting our conscience only.” No individual will be able to do this by consulting his conscience merely. Conscience will not help you unless you have reached the height of purity and understanding. The impure conscience cannot give right suggestions. The pig thinks that the whole world is full of pigs only, and that it itself is nothing more than a pig. Similar is the fate of those men of little understanding with an impure conscience who try to think for themselves and get suggestions from their conscience. Conscience is one’s own habit and conviction. The conscience of the individual speaks in accordance with his tendencies, proclivities, inclinations, education, habits, passion and the like. The conscience of a savage speaks a language entirely different from that of a civilized European. How can you depend upon this false so-called conscience? The conscience of an aboriginal brute speaks a language entirely different from that of an ethically developed yogi of India. The sense of duty ingrained in the clerk of a collectorate, a car-driver, a scavenger, are all different. There are ten different consciences in ten

different persons of the same district. Virochana⁶⁹ thought for himself, took guidance from his conscience, and enquired “Who am I?” But with what result? He “realized” that the body is the Self.

The voice of the conscience alone is not sufficient to guide man in his life. Without taking sannyasa you cannot live the life of detachment and renunciation through mere independent thinking and through conscience. The duties of life will be misunderstood without the shastras and the words of the realized persons (apta-vakya). The Lord Krishna says in the Gita: “He who, having cast aside the ordinances of the scriptures, follows the promptings of his desires, does not attain perfection, nor happiness, nor the highest goal.”

Tired with the mundane life of the world, and striving for the realization and correct knowledge of the Self, pondering over the wisdom of the Upanishads which appertain to the science of Brahman, a really wise man should abandon his home and take to the life of sannyasa. Those Brahmanas who, declaring protection to all creatures (i.e., sannyasins), leave their homes and take to asceticism, attain to effulgent regions.

Alone and unbefriended, the sannyasin should roam about for working out the emancipation of his self. Houseless, bereft of the sacred fire, desireless, indifferent and speechless, he should maintain perfect equanimity. Life and death he must not court; like a servant waiting for the receipt of his salary he must patiently wait for the time of emancipation.

Always contemplating on Brahman, non-attached to anything of the world, and desiring nothing both here and hereafter, he should, in the company of his Self alone, roam about in the world, for the bliss of emancipation. He should court peace and live in peace, for peace is bliss, and peace is his ideal.

Vessels made of gourds, wood, earth or bamboo, should be used by the fourth order of ascetics (yatis⁷⁰). After the hearths of the householders have ceased to emit smoke, after pestles and mortars have been laid aside for the day, after the hearth-fires have been extinguished, after the householders have all taken their meals, and plates with leavings have been cast away, then should an ascetic (sannyasin) stroll out for alms, each day in the afternoon.

The sannyasin has only three duties to perform, shaucha,⁷¹ bhiksha⁷² and dhyana.⁷³ There is no fourth duty for a sannyasin. Meditation is his duty, meditation is his food, meditation is his life. He lives meditation, breathes meditation. He is ever intent upon the realization of the Supreme Brahman.

By restraining the senses, by annihilating desire and aversion, by extending compassion to all creatures, by seeing the Eternal Being alone existing everywhere, a sannyasin attains immortality.

By means of yoga, a sannyasin should comprehend the disembodied Self or the Supreme Brahman which runs through all creatures, good or bad, high or low. The all-pervasiveness of this inner Self which spreads among all living and dead beings alike, is unintelligible to the untrained and uncultured intellects; let the sannyasin witness the majesty of this Existence-Knowledge-Bliss by means of profound meditation.

Him, who has fully witnessed this supreme state of existence, actions do not bind; without this knowledge a man shall revert to this mortal world.

The sannyasin should take refuge in the wisdom of Brahman and the sentences of the Vedantas which treat of the eternal truth. Brahman is the refuge of all knowing as well as ignorant beings. It is the final goal of the aspirations of all who wish to become immortal.

Bereft of all work, indifferent to the pleasures of heaven as factors of embodiment and enchainment, on account of the privilege of witnessing the Self, and by constantly brooding over the Supreme Brahman, the wise sannyasin attains the highest bliss!

Gist of the Narada Parivrajaka Upanishad

One should qualify himself with sadhana-chatushtaya before entering into sannyasa. He must be above the tricks and bondages of samsara. He should develop dispassion towards objects which he sees or hears. He must be encircled by the fence of dispassion from all sides. As soon as disgust arises in the mind for all objects of the world, then one should take to sannyasa without any further hesitation. A passionate man should not take sannyasa. A person who takes sannyasa even when he is being overpowered by passion, goes to the regions of darkness and gloom. Whose tongue, genital, stomach

and hands are properly disciplined, that man is fit to take sannyasa. A Brahmana should take to sannyasa even while he is yet a brahmachari—without marriage—for samsara is essenceless. He should try to seek that Essence through renunciation. A man who possesses deep dispassion cannot marry. Works and duties are only for the worldly man; not for the man of renunciation.

As soon as the supreme truth is ascertained, one should abandon his house, family, and take up a staff and leave off his sacred thread⁷⁴ and the hairs on the head.

Who is a real bhikshu?⁷⁵

He who is attached to the Supreme Self, who is detached from the non-self, who has no desire whatever, he is a real bhikshu.

Who is happy, whether worshipped or censured, whether praised or beaten—he is a real bhikshu.

Who possesses the bhava that he is the Supreme Brahman, that he is one without a second—he is a real bhikshu.

Who is an abode of tranquillity, self-control, purity, truth, contentment, straightforwardness, renunciation and egolessness—he is fit to be a sannyasin.

Who knows the true import of the Vedanta, who has given fearlessness to all creatures—he is a real bhikshu.

Who never thinks of his past, who never dreams of his future, who is indifferent to the present—he is fit to be a sannyasin.

Who is able to withdraw all the senses within and throw off all sense objects outside—he is fit to be a sannyasin.

Who lives with his prana,⁷⁶ as if he had no prana (i.e., as if he is dead)—he is fit to be a sannyasin. **More Articles on Sannyasa**

- [A Brief Life of Swami Sivananda](#)
- [Advice to Sannyasins—part 1](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati

- [Advice to Sannyasins–part 2](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [The Ideal of Sannyasa](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Sannyasa Dharma](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Perspective of the Renunciate](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Reflections on Sannyasa](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [The Rugged Path](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati

1) This is a speech delivered by Sri Swami Sivananda on December 28, 1945.

[\[Go back\]](#)

2) Advaitic: Non-dual; having to do with the philosophy of Advaita (Non-Dualism). [\[Go back\]](#)

3) Jnani: A follower of the path of knowledge (jnana); one who has realized—who knows—the Truth (Brahman). [\[Go back\]](#)

4) Shankara: Shankaracharya; Adi (the first) Shankaracharya: The great reformer and re-establisher of Vedic Religion in India around 300 B.C. He is the unparalleled exponent of Advaita (Non-Dual) Vedanta. He also reformed the mode of monastic life and founded (or regenerated) the ancient Swami Order. [\[Go back\]](#)

5) Samskara: Impression in the mind produced by previous action or experience; prenatal tendency. [\[Go back\]](#)

6) Lakshya: Perceivable object; object of concentration-attention; vision. [\[Go back\]](#)

7) Ashram(a): A place for spiritual discipline and study, usually a monastic residence. Also a stage of life. In Hinduism life is divided ideally into four stages (ashramas): 1) the celibate student life (*brahmacharya*); 2) the married household life (*grihasta*); 3) the life of retirement (seclusion) and contemplation (*vanaprastha*); 4) the life of total renunciation (*sannyasa*). [\[Go back\]](#)

8) Maya: The illusive power of Brahman; the veiling and the projecting power of the universe, the power of Cosmic Illusion. [\[Go back\]](#)

- 9) Vairagya: Non-attachment, detachment, dispassion, absence of desire, or indifference. Indifference towards and disgust for all worldly things and enjoyments. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 10) Samsara: Life through repeated births and deaths; the wheel of birth and death; the process of earthly life. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 11) Liberation. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 12) Satchidananda: Existence-knowledge-bliss Absolute; Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 13) Shanti: Peace; calm; tranquility; contentment. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 14) Bhuma: The unconditioned Infinite; Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 15) Vedanta: Literally, “the end of the Vedas;” the Upanishads; the school of Hindu thought, based primarily on the Upanishads, upholding the doctrine of either pure non-dualism or conditional non-dualism. The original text of this school is Vedanta-darshana or the Brahma Sutras compiled by the sage Vyasa. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 16) Parabhakti: Supreme devotion to God. This leads to jnana. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 17) Vedantin: A follower of Vedanta. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 18) Karma-kandi: One who follows the Karma-kanda as philosophy and practice. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 19) Pravritti Marga: The path of active involvement in the world. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 20) Action. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 21) Karma marga: The path of action. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 22) Nivritti: Negation; the path of turning away from activity; withdrawal. Literally, “to turn back.” The path of renunciation. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 23) Grihastha: A married “householder;” the second stage (ashrama) in life. [\[Go back\]](#)

24) Bhava: Subjective state of being (existence); attitude of mind; mental attitude or feeling; state of realization in the heart or mind. [\[Go back\]](#)

25) Paramhansa: Literally: Supreme Swan, a person of the highest spiritual realization, from the fact that a swan can separate milk from water and is therefore an apt symbol for one who has discarded the unreal for the Real, the darkness for the Light, and mortality for the Immortal, having separated himself fully from all that is not God and joined himself totally to the Divine, becoming a veritable embodiment of Divinity manifested in humanity. [\[Go back\]](#)

26) Jivanmukti: Liberation in this life. [\[Go back\]](#)

27) Sadhana-chatushtaya: The fourfold aids to spiritual practice: 1) the ability to discriminate between the transient and the eternal (*nitya-anity-astu-viveka*); 2) the absence of desire for securing pleasure or pain either here or elsewhere (*iha-anutra-artha-phala-vairagya*); 3) the attainment of calmness, temperance, spirit of renunciation, fortitude, power of concentration of mind, and faith (*shama-damadi-sadhana-smaptti*); 4) an intense desire for liberation (*mumukshutwa*). [\[Go back\]](#)

28) Shastra: Scripture; spiritual treatise. [\[Go back\]](#)

29) Shruti: That which is heard; revealed scripture in the sense of divine communication. Usually applied to the Vedas, Shankara also spoke of the Upanishads as Sruti. [\[Go back\]](#)

30) Dharma: The righteous way of living, as enjoined by the sacred scriptures and the spiritually illumined; characteristics; virtue. [\[Go back\]](#)

31) Purusha: "Person" in the sense of a conscious spirit. Both God and the individual spirits are purushas, but God is the Adi (Original, Archetypal) Purusha, Parama (Highest) Purusha, and the Purushottama (Best of the Purushas). [\[Go back\]](#)

32) Surya-mandala: The circle (orbit) of the sun. [\[Go back\]](#)

33) A Vedic sacrifice. [\[Go back\]](#)

- 34) “I renounce.” Part of the formula for taking formal sannyasa. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 35) Brahmachari: A celibate student in the first stage of life (ashrama). [\[Go back\]](#)
- 36) Vanaprastha: Literally: a forest dweller. The third stage of life (ashrama) in which, leaving home and children, the husband and wife dwell together in seclusion and contemplation as a preparation to taking sannyasa. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 37) Brahmajnana: Direct, transcendental knowledge of Brahman; Self-realization. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 38) Moksha: Release; liberation; the term is particularly applied to the liberation from the bondage of karma and the wheel of birth and death; Absolute Experience. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 39) Vividisha sannyasa: Renunciation for the purpose of knowing Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 40) Vidvat sannyasa: Renunciation after the attainment of the knowledge of Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 41) Brahmavidya: Science of Brahman; knowledge of Brahman; learning pertaining to Brahman or the Absolute Reality. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 42) Brahmajnana: Direct, transcendental knowledge of Brahman; Self-realization. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 43) Jnana: Knowledge; wisdom of the Reality or Brahman, the Absolute. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 44) Pravritti: Action; endeavor. Literally: “to turn forth.” [\[Go back\]](#)
- 45) Deva: “A shining one,” a god—greater or lesser in the evolutionary hierarchy; a semi-divine or celestial being with great powers, and therefore a “god.” Sometimes called a demi-god. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 46) Agnihotra: “Fire offering;” a Vedic fire sacrifice. [\[Go back\]](#)

47) Rudra: Shiva. Derived from *rud*—he who drives away sin or suffering. [\[Go back\]](#)

48) Dattatreya: A famous sage, son of the Rishi Atri and Anasuya. His birth was a divine boon, hence his name: *Datta*—“given”—and *atreya*—“son of Atri.” Considered a divine incarnation and known as the Lord of Avadhutas, he is often revered as the embodiment of the Supreme Guru. He is credited with the authorship of the *Avadhuta Gita*, the *Jivanmukti Gita*, and the *Tripura Rahasya*. [\[Go back\]](#)

49) Narayana: A proper name of God—specifically of Vishnu. The term by etymology means a Being that supports all things, that is reached by them and that helps them to do so; also one who pervades all things. He Who dwells in man. Literally: “God in humanity.” [\[Go back\]](#)

50) Mahavakya: Literally: “Great Saying.” The highest Vedantic truth, found in the Upanishads, there are four Mahavakyas: 1) *Prajñanam Brahma*—“Consciousness is Brahman” (Aitareya Upanishad); 2) *Ayam Atma Brahma*—“This Self is Brahman” (Mandukya Upanishad); 3) *Tat Twam Asi*—“Thou art That” (Chandogya Upanishad); 4) *Aham Brahmasmi*—“I am Brahman” (Brihadaranyaka Upanishad). [\[Go back\]](#)

51) The non-dual philosophy of the Upanishads. [\[Go back\]](#)

52) Force of auspiciousness in the world. [\[Go back\]](#)

53) Advaita: Non-duality; literally: “not two.” [\[Go back\]](#)

54) Dasanami: “Ten named.” A term for members of the monastic order of Shankaracharya headquartered in the four quarters of India (Sringeri, Dwaraka, Badrinath and Jagannath Puri). After their proper monastic names they add one of ten titles (Saraswati, Bharati, Puri, Tirtha, Ashrama, Giri, Parvata, Sagara, Vanam, Aranya) according to their monastic succession. [\[Go back\]](#)

55) Brahmajnani: One who possess Brahmajnana—direct, transcendental knowledge of Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)

56) Yajna: Sacrifice; offering; sacrificial ceremony; a ritual sacrifice; usually the fire sacrifice known as agnihotra or havan. [\[Go back\]](#)

57) Bhairavi: A nun of the Tantric sect. [\[Go back\]](#)

58) Wandering ascetics. [\[Go back\]](#)

59) Tyaga: Literally: “abandonment.” Renunciation—in the Gita, the relinquishment of the fruit of action. [\[Go back\]](#)

60) Tantric: Pertaining to Tantra. Tantra: A manual of or a particular path of sadhana laying great stress upon japa of a mantra and other esoteric practices relating to the powers latent in the human complex of physical, astral, and causal bodies in relation to the cosmic Power usually thought as the Divine Feminine. [\[Go back\]](#)

61) Yogini: A female practitioner of yoga. [\[Go back\]](#)

62) Viraja homa: “Universal homa;” the final fire sacrifice done just before taking sannyas in which offerings are made to all living beings in petition for their releasing of the prospective sannyasin from all karmic obligations he might have in relation to them. [\[Go back\]](#)

63) Nivritti Marga: The path of renunciation, of withdrawal from the world. [\[Go back\]](#)

64) Samhita: A division of the Vedas; Vedic hymns. [\[Go back\]](#)

65) Swadhyaya: Study of spiritual texts. [\[Go back\]](#)

66) Brahmana: A Vedic liturgical text explaining the rituals found in the Vedic samhitas (collection of hymns). A guidebook for performing those rites. [\[Go back\]](#)

67) Aranyaka: “Forest book;” philosophical, symbolic, and spiritual interpretations of the Vedic hymns and rituals. Mainly meant for forest-dwelling ascetics (vanaprathas). [\[Go back\]](#)

68) Difference in stages of life (ashrama). [\[Go back\]](#)

69) Virochana: King of the demons (asuras). According to the Chandogya Upanishad, along with Indra he went to the Creator to learn the nature of the Self. Misunderstanding the teaching: “Virochana, satisfied for his part that he had found out the Self, returned to the demons and began to teach them that the body alone is to be worshiped, that the body alone is to be served, and that he who worships the body and serves the body gains both worlds, this and the next.” [\[Go back\]](#)

70) Yati: “Wanderer;” a wandering ascetic. [\[Go back\]](#)

71) Shaucha: Purity; cleanliness. [\[Go back\]](#)

72) Bhiksha: Almsfood—food obtained by begging. [\[Go back\]](#)

73) Dhyana: Meditation; contemplation. [\[Go back\]](#)

74) Yajnopavita: Sacred thread. A triple thread worn by the twice-born (dwijas) that represents the thre-fold Brahman. It is essential for the performance of all the rites of the twice-born. Usually worn only by Brahmins, originally it was worn by Kshatriyas and Vaishyas as well. [\[Go back\]](#)

75) Bhikshu: One who lives on bhiksha (almsfood); a mendicant; a sannyasi; a Buddhist monk. [\[Go back\]](#)

76) Prana: Vital energy; life-breath; life-force. [\[Go back\]](#)

Perspective of the Renunciate

Swami Sivananda Saraswati

The realization of the sannyasin is focused in the first mantra of the Ishavasya Upanishad (*Ishavasyam idam sarvam*).¹ All, this, indeed, is pervaded by the cosmic spirit. The entire universe is an embodiment of God. All that lives and moves in this world is a member of a common universal family.

In earth, air, water and ether, in the woods and the glades, in the hills and the dales, in the brooks and the meadows, in the aged and the young— everywhere is God. The world no longer has any exclusive sphere of possession. It loses its illusive power of bondage. “I am, his, and he is mine” becomes “I am for all, and he is Thine, O “Lord.”

Diffusive spirit

This is the realization of the sannyasin. The spirit of renunciation enables him not to lose sight of the spirit in matter, or the awareness of divinity in the multitude of names and forms. His expansive, diffusive spirit can no more be held down to a particular groove of life. His great longing to release his consciousness from the limitation of evanescent values opens up before him broad vistas of universal spiritual realization.

The sannyasin renounces the world in the sense that he no longer wishes to be bound up with a single family or be an exclusive possession of it, and if he ceases his association with the family in which he was born, it is because his family members are unable to fully accept his dissociation from their possessive, personalized interests which they regard as the hallmark of kinship.

Rational outlook

The kinship of the sannyasin is the kinship of the spirit. He is related to the world, and serves mankind, in the light of his realization. His renunciation is not something negative, but gives him a true understanding of life, and of the objects and the values of the world. His attitude to the mundane world is based on a positive, helpful spirit of detachment.

Attachment is at the root of all suffering. Desire enlivens it, and fulfillment of desire leads to a further increase of attachment and desire. You think that mundane relationship will give you happiness, but when it does not, as it cannot, you come to grief. You get attached to individuals, and when they do not fulfil your expectations, you become sorrowful. Suffering becomes the shadow of one who clings to the brittle objects of the world.

Renunciation of desire

The life of man is pervaded by suffering, because it is never free from desire. When the sannyasin gets involved with desire, even though it is of a different kind—such as the desire to be a great spiritual benefactor of the world—he, too cannot escape from its consequences and shake off the grip of worry.

In renunciation of desires is real joy. The sannyasin thinks, as the Buddha thought: If the desired object is not attained, there is unhappiness. If the desired object fails to respond, there is unhappiness. If the desired object is momentarily attained, there is the anxiety that it might be lost. If the desired object recoils with a negative response, there is still more unhappiness. Thus true happiness consists in the renunciation of desires.

Greatest penance

To say that you have renounced the world, when you did not possess anything substantial, or to say that you have no desire for any worldly object just because you do not have the means to possess the object of desire or lack the initiative and drive to attain it, makes no sense. Renunciation and detachment indicate self-denial, self-effacement and dispassion. It means the pulverization of one's ego. Renunciation or sannyasa is, thus, the greatest of all tapas.

May all sannyasins imbibe the true spirit of renunciation and serve the world effectively and assiduously as humble instruments of God, while exemplifying in their practical lives all that they ask the world to do. May the grace of God be upon all. **More Articles on Sannyasa**

- [A Brief Life of Swami Sivananda](#)
- [Advice to Sannyasins—part 1](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Advice to Sannyasins—part 2](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati

- [The Ideal of Sannyasa](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Sannyasa Dharma](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
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- [Reflections on Sannyasa](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [The Rugged Path](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati

1) “All this—whatever exists in this changing universe—should be covered by the Lord. Protect the Self by renunciation” (Nikhilananda translation). “In the heart of all things, of whatever there is in the universe, dwells the Lord. He alone is the reality. Wherefore, renouncing vain appearances, rejoice in him” (Prabhavananda translation). [\[Go back\]](#)

Reflections on Sannyasa

Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Sannyasins as universal benefactors

Sannyasa is resting in one's own Satchidananda swarupa.¹ Sannyasa is self-realization. Our forefathers, our gurus, Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatana and Sanatkumara—the four Kumaras, the mentally born sons of Brahma—were asked by Brahma to lead the life of householders, but they refused, because they knew the worth of this samsaric life. So they at once entered the nivritti order. They were our sannyasins' forefathers. The sannyasins are the children of Sri Shankara, Gaudapada, Dattatreya—glorious divine personages who had knowledge of Brahman, and who shone with divine splendor having attained oneness with the Paramatman, the supreme soul.

Sannyasa is a life of self-restraint and renunciation—renunciation not only of external objects and worldly activities, but renunciation of egoism, cravings, vasanas,² kartritva-buddhi (the feeling that I am the doer) and bheda buddhi (the intellect that differentiates one from the other), which instead of producing homogeneity produces heterogeneity. External sannyasa is renunciation of objects and selfish activities. It is also necessary, but internal sannyasa is more important, more vital.

A sannyasi is an atma-samrat, a self-king. He is a guide for politicians. He gives advice as to how to rule the country, how to establish dharma. He is the adviser to kings, statesmen, and ministers. He is not a parasite. A sannyasi or sadhu is one who has knowledge of God, who has controlled his indriyas,³ who is compassionate to all, who has equal vision and balanced mind, and who is a friend to everybody. A cosmic benefactor is the sannyasi. A sannyasi is a veritable God on earth.

“*Sakshat Narayano Bhavet.*” A person who has enrobed himself in orange-colored clothes is Lord Vishnu Himself. He is to be adored, and in return he will bless you all. He will bless the householders. He goes to the householders for bhiksha⁴ only to purify them. He elevates them, gives them advice how to lead the life divine, how to control the mind, how to cultivate virtues, how to remove dehadhyasa⁵ and how to identify oneself with the all-

pervading atman. He uplifts the worldly people, raises them to the status of Brahmanhood, and makes them shine with divine splendor and pristine purity.

A sannyasi is not a useless person as some people think. He is a king of the world, he is the emperor of the three worlds. Even the very sight of him will destroy one's sins. Every religion has got this band of anchorites. Buddhism has got Buddhist monks. Jainism has got digambaras and swetambaras. Islam and Sufism have got fakirs. These anchorites are the glory of every religion. They have disciplined themselves. If you remove these people, there is no essence in religion. These people glorify the religions.

Some people bring the charge that a sannyasi is unproductive, a burden on this earth. They say that there are sixty lakhs [six million] of sadhus and sannyasins. This is not a correct census report. There may be one thousand or two thousand good sannyasins. People lying on the road-side in Bombay, Calcutta, and Delhi, have also been listed as sadhus and sannyasins, by the census reporters.

Sannyasins are those who have renounced their own vast wealth, read much, attained distinctions, and are given over to intense meditation and dynamic selfless service. They write articles, and give lectures. They hold classes. They impart instructions to the men of the world. They do work. They are not useless. The whole world is maintained by the glory of the sannyasins. They serve them in a variety of ways. Their very existence is a glory and splendor on earth. When people are in distress, and when they do not know what to do, these sannyasins speak one word. This one word elevates them, removes their sufferings. The very sight of sannyasins destroys one's sufferings. Such is the glory of sannyasins.

There are many hidden sannyasins in the Himalayas. They are sending their thought-vibrations to the world. It is not necessary that a sannyasi should come to the platform and give lectures and interpret the Gita and the Upanishads. They can purify the whole world by their thoughts. Such is the glory of sannyasins.

Sannyasins have established ashrams. They are helping people. They hold Vedantic conferences. These are all productive.

People expect that sadhus and sannyasins should go to the agricultural field and plough the field and produce so many maunds⁶ of rice and go to mills and weave so many yards of cloth. They think that only he who produces fifty yards of cloth, or he who goes to the dairy farm and makes so many maunds of butter or ploughs the fields and raises so many maunds of paddy is productive. To train people in Brahmavidya,⁷ in knowledge of the Self, in self-discipline, in disciplining the mind and the senses, and in attaining discrimination is productive. Ignorant people have no idea of spiritual things. They see only the external objects. They are ignorant of transcendental things.

Sannyasins are storehouses of power

Sadhus and sannyasins are potent powers; they are those that have got through tyaga,⁸ through renunciation, through vairagya⁹ and meditation, an eternal storehouse of energy. Meditation is the key to open the door of Elysian bliss. Renunciation is the first step, and vairagya is the passport to enter into the kingdom of eternal bliss. Our mahatmas are storehouses of energy and power. They are whole-time aspirants and when they utilize their energy we can easily effect the moral and spiritual regeneration not only of India, but of the whole world at large.

We require the cooperation of the sadhus and sannyasins for the moral uplift of the people and for their spiritual advancement. Their instructions will penetrate the heart. They are selfless people, endowed with viveka¹⁰ and vairagya. It is time for the sadhus and sannyasins to pool their energies, time, and wisdom, for the moral and spiritual uplift of the world.

The Yoga of Synthesis is most suitable at the present time. Man is a triune being. He thinks, feels, and wills. So one should practice the Yoga of Synthesis—Karma Yoga,¹¹ Bhakti Yoga¹² and Jnana Yoga¹³ for integral development and perfection. Those who have got karmic tendencies, who have got leisure, can work in the world, for one cannot meditate for twenty-four hours. They can spend some time doing good to the world at large. There must also be sannyasins who can devote themselves to whole-time meditation. We have got medical research institutes, scientific research institutes, and various other research centers. We must also have people who devote their time to concentration and meditation and bring out the atmic¹⁴

pearl. There must be people who devote their whole time for atmic research. It is these people who can contribute to the moral and spiritual uplift of the whole world at large.

God as the greatest sannyasi

A sannyasi is Sakshat Narayana [True Divinity] Himself. The greatest sannyasi is Parabrahman¹⁵ Himself. He is without the least tinge of samsara. ¹⁶ There is no prapancha¹⁷ or vyavahara¹⁸ in Him.

The secret of sannyasa is renunciation of egoism and desires. Renunciation of “I”-ness and “mineness” is real sannyasa. Without yoga, sannyasa is hard to attain. Sannyasa bestows immortality and eternal bliss.

A real sannyasi alone can teach Brahmavidya. The glory of sannyasa is ineffable. Practice of fourfold means, sadhana-chatushtaya,¹⁹ will prepare you for sannyasa. A sannyasi is the happiest and the richest man in the world. Therefore, renounce and rest in the Absolute.

Make courage your rosary, desirelessness your staff, discrimination your deerskin, dispassion your kamandalu, and meditation your holy ash.

Make perseverance your raft, the Name of the Lord your boat, and cross this formidable ocean of samsara fearlessly.

Self-discipline of the Zen sannyasins

The ascetic self-discipline practiced by the Japanese Buddhist monks of the Zen sect is probably more severe than even that of the Trappists or the Cistercians of the Roman Catholic orders. The practice of self-control leading to the complete effacement of self is something which appeals strongly to the Japanese, whose home and school training is such as to demand the sinking of the individual for the good of the community, as well as the complete subjugation of the emotions as the apogee of education.

From olden times, this self-discipline has been a training inseparable from Buddhism, and as Buddhism is the second most powerful religion in Japan, it is natural to find that special attention is paid to the development of the soul-consciousness through the subjugation of the physical and mental

modifications. The sect in Japanese Buddhism which caters especially for this training, is the Zen sect.

The Zen monasteries accept novices quite young. This is imperative, since only the young, hardy and yet submissive, can possibly stand the strain of their rigorous ascetic training, and the docile enthusiast is the only one likely to find it possible to train oneself to accept the hardships that Zen imposes.

The whole idea of Zen is to “rise above oneself.” It is by this that, Zen claims, one may open the mind’s eye to see into the Ultimate. As proved by the results and the study of life, Zen claims to have discovered what true life really is, and what is required for the complete living of life and full play of the soul. And what does it demand?

Long hours of meditation are insisted upon, and there is no room for excuse. So much does Zen insist upon this that there is a monitor appointed to watch over the meditating novices as per the direction of the abbot of a monastery. No failure is allowed to go without punishment. Self-reliance is taught by hard work. The luxuries of life are not provided. Wants are reduced to the minimum. Only bare necessities are conceded. Meals are vegetarian, frugal in quantity and severely simple in quality. Sleep and rest are also restricted. Very little contact with the outside world is permitted.

The supreme aim of Zen is to triumph over the lower self, over the world of material values. Thus Zen demands the most ardent spiritual training and experience. Zen monks, in Japan, are considered among the land’s spiritual and ascetic elite, as rightly they should be, but they ignore this honor and aspire only for a spiritual reward, that of Nirvana.

Sannyasa for the Western world

These days many Western people are taking sannyasa. In our own ashram, there are a number of American and European sannyasins. Hundreds of them have taken sannyasa here in the Sivanandashram and have gone back to their respective countries for dissemination of India’s upanishadic wisdom. Many Americans have taken sannyasa and joined the Ramakrishna Mission. It is gratifying to note that Western people are coming to India to take sannyasa and live a life of yoga and meditation.

Renunciation is the only means for attaining self-realization.

*Na karmana no prajaya dhanena
Tyagenaike amritatwamanasuh.*

“Not by works, not by progeny, not by wealth, but by renunciation alone one attains immortality.” Through sannyasa alone can we entirely cut off moha²⁰ for property and relatives. Sannyasa is very necessary. The glory of sannyasa, the fruit of sannyasa, is indescribable.

Characteristics of a sannyasi

In our country from time immemorial, there has been a great attraction for the life of a sannyasin. If out of thousands even one may not be willing to take to the life of a sannyasin, there will not be one who will not have a real admiration for the person who does take to the life of a sannyasin. The general conception was and is at the present time also, that the person who renounced everything in the world and wandered about from place to place in sun and rain, taking shelter and food wherever he could get it, was certainly a man of sterner stuff than the common person who lived the householder’s life.

In the earliest days there were plenty of forests which attracted the aspirants after truth and knowledge. Perhaps one of the reasons why the wandering monk, living in the forest, was respected by the community, was that our ancient scriptures were all written in the forests. It is the Aranyakas [forest books] and the Upanishads that contain the cream of Indian wisdom which constitute not only our rich legacy from the past but continue to be our present day guides, illuminating us in the manner in which we have to seek for enduring happiness.

Many young people must have been leading the lives of real monks, denying themselves the pleasures of the ordinary man. The practice of austerity under difficult conditions was certainly possible only for men of good mental control, and therefore it became common to entertain the notion that every monk must be a man of rigid mental discipline. The Puranas also point out the way of how a real sannyasin had to conduct himself in his advanced stage of spiritual evolution. The story of Rishabhadeva²¹ is an instance in point. Therefore, in course of time the respect shown for wandering sannyasins who

even discarded their own clothing and denied themselves the ordinary advantages of keeping themselves clean by bathing, etc., came to be greater than the respect shown to ordinary sannyasins.

Administrators of the country also took care to see that sufficient provision was made for such as were desirous of moving from place to place as either vanaprasthas,²² ordinary pilgrims or as sannyasins. Roads connecting important places were lined with fruit-trees like the jack and the mango, throughout long distances, and stone platforms fit for the unloading of the burdens carried on the head by pilgrims going on foot, and even watersheds where water was not ordinarily available, were provided for. The result was that throughout the year any number of people might walk from one place to another along the roads providing themselves with the ordinary conveniences sufficient to meet their simple needs. Likewise, along the banks of rivers were constructed not merely bathing ghats but also mandapas which could be used for prayer and meditation as well as for rest during day or night.

When these arrangements were made even by the government, or by the charitably disposed rich men of the locality, it was but natural that there should be a steady increase in the number not only of the real seekers of truth, but also of pretenders who wanted to exploit the credulity of the masses and earn a convenient living. The success achieved by a few attracted the notice of many and in course of time the number of vagabonds in the guise of monks went on increasing. Since the Hindu ideal was karatala bhiksha²³ and taru-tala-vasa, there was the inevitable combination of mendicancy with monasticism. and, therefore, the number of mendicants steadily increased.

It became difficult to differentiate between the mendicants and the real monks. In fact, people began to consider that monks were only mendicants. Except for a part of the population which continued to regard everybody in the guise of a monk to be worthy of respect, many felt that the monks who were moving from place to place were idlers who ought not to be permitted to continue exploiting the credulous. That idea persists even at the present time, and so very often the real man of spiritual evolution goes absolutely unrecognized by the common man and is perhaps subjected to all kinds of insults. There is no doubt that at least a percentage of the monks that are wandering about the land, must be of a higher degree of development, but

there is no possibility at least for the common observer to separate the chaff from the grain.

Intelligent people at the present time who have spiritual aspirations are faced with a doubt as to whether they ought really to take to the life of a sannyasin for achieving their ideals. In fact, a saint²⁴ is really only another name for a real jivanmukta,²⁵ and it is possible for a man of right evolution to be a jivanmukta whether he is a brahmachari,²⁶ a vanaprastha or a sannyasin. There may not be any need even to give up one's ordinary avocations for attaining the status of a jivanmukta. It is certain that such men of high evolution are extremely rare to find; we shall discover that saintliness is just the nearest approach to godliness.

The distinguishing quality is universal love. Erudition by itself cannot be the mark of saintliness because an erudite man will not be able to love or to be loved as much as a man who has surrendered himself completely to the Lord and who lives in the world only for the purpose of carrying out the behests of the Lord in the manner in which he is able to conceive of them. Such a person will have absolute peace of mind, complete cleanliness and purity, intuitive recognition of what is of permanent value, a quickness of intelligence to understand at one stroke and without much effort the essence of the scriptures, an innate and intense longing for self-denial so that he might be of utmost use to the people around him and, last but not the least of all, deep devotion to and unflinching faith in the dispensation of the Lord.

In seeking for a saint, one should not care for the external garb or for literary equipment or erudition or even for the high name and fame one might have acquired as a bestower of gifts in the form of temples and dharmashalas. These are the unessentials. The real saint is to be judged by his own intrinsic worth. It requires a good deal of discrimination not to be misguided by external excellences in the absence of internal merit. But even the common man will perceive intuitively saintliness where it is manifest.

The mission of sannyasins

Sadhus and sannyasins as a body have a universal purpose for which they exist. They are the custodians of the spirituality of the land and have a definite part to do in the advancement and elevation of humanity. To equip

themselves for the noble task entrusted to their care, the monks and sadhus of the world isolate themselves in the beginning from the rest of mankind as a necessary discipline. But unfortunately we have allowed this separation to become a permanent condition and thus to a great extent the sadhu community has come to regard itself as a unit outside the pale of the rest of humanity struggling valiantly in the plains and the cities.

Losing touch with others has consequently made us forget the part we have to do and to neglect our work as educators and enlighteners of the other three orders. We have once again to bestir ourselves and commence playing our destined part in the nation's life. We are to be one united body dedicated to the noble ideal of exerting ourselves unselfishly and wholeheartedly for ushering in of the new era of brotherhood and peace that must follow after the years of savage strife and bloodshed the world is now plunged in.[27](#)

Every section of humanity will play its part in the reconstruction of the New World on a worthier basis. If the new civilization is to be enduring one (not merely a prelude to a bigger war), it has to be based on lasting values of a spiritual nature. The providing of this fundamental spiritual basis to the new humanity, is the work of the sannyasins and sadhus, monks and celibates of the world.

The onus of spiritualizing the coming generation rests upon the shoulders of the men of Spirit, the sannyasins, the saints, the mahatmas.[28](#) They should do this without fail to keep the glorious tradition of this land and to maintain their respected place as a useful unit of society.

The lay people always look up to the sadhus for active guidance in matters of moral and spiritual import. We have, therefore, to set to work by precept, actual example and active life-work. For verily we represent the force of sattwa and good for overcoming the, force of tamas and evil, that has the world in its grip today.

The mission of sannyasins

The genuine sadhus of our country constitute in themselves a most honorable community, and each of them bears an eloquent testimony to the exemplary nature of his individual character, affords a proof of the heights scaled in the spirit of sacrifice, in the development of spiritual wisdom, in a resolute

disregard of the merely materialistic values and whole-hearted devotion to the supreme ends and values of human existence. It has been, through several centuries, the distinctive role of the enlightened sannyasins to disseminate more by the example of their lives than by the word of mouth, the knowledge which is embodied in the rich cultural heritage of our country. They have sustained and vitalized the wisdom of the ancient Rishis,²⁹ kept up the traditions of spiritual development, breathed thoughts of peace and welfare for all mankind, proved the worth, beauty and suzerainty of the inner spirit in man over the body-mind organism that the human individual is, over the temptations and allurements of the sensual and the worldly, and have sought successfully to establish relations with, the infinite Being that alone sustains all the manifest universes, maintains the dharma in the land of the mortals, and yet yields strength, life and joy to all living forms.

All over India we find strenuous efforts being made for the economic, political and social reconstruction; and where the moral, mental and spiritual culture of the people is concerned, a great responsibility and privileged role rests upon the educated, enlightened, spiritually-developed sadhus. It is only when the basis of all cultures, the foundation of all movements, the divinity in man, is inspired to make itself manifest in the environment of high aspiration and moral growth rendered possible and maintained by the impact of the efforts and labors of the sadhus, that we can find on earth peace, happiness, genuine progress, real prosperity and the delights of a purposive, meaningful and fulfilled existence. **More Articles on Sannyasa**

- [A Brief Life of Swami Sivananda](#)
- [Advice to Sannyasins–part 1](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Advice to Sannyasins–part 2](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [The Ideal of Sannyasa](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Sannyasa Dharma](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Perspective of the Renunciate](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [Reflections on Sannyasa](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati
- [The Rugged Path](#) by Swami Sivananda Saraswati

1) Our true nature as existence-knowlege-bliss. [\[Go back\]](#)

2) Vasana: A bundle or aggregate of similar samskaras. Subtle desire; a tendency created in a person by the doing of an action or by enjoyment; it induces the person to repeat the action or to seek a repetition of the enjoyment; the subtle impression in the mind capable of developing itself into action; it is the cause of birth and experience in general; the impression of actions that remains unconsciously in the mind. [\[Go back\]](#)

3) Indriya: Organ. The five organs of perception (jnanendriyas) are the ear, skin, eye, tongue, and nose. The five organs of action (karmendriyas) are the voice, hand, foot, organ of excretion, and the organ of generation. [\[Go back\]](#)

4) Bhiksha: Almsfood—food obtained by begging. [\[Go back\]](#)

5) Dehadhyasa: False identification with the body. [\[Go back\]](#)

6) A maund is about forty pounds. [\[Go back\]](#)

7) Brahavidya: Science of Brahman; knowledge of Brahman; learning pertaining to Brahman or the Absolute Reality. [\[Go back\]](#)

8) Tyaga: Literally: “abandonment.” Renunciation—in the Gita, the relinquishment of the fruit of action. [\[Go back\]](#)

9) Vairagya: Non-attachment, detachment, dispassion, absence of desire, or indifference. Indifference towards and disgust for all worldly things and enjoyments. [\[Go back\]](#)

10) Viveka: Discrimination between the Real and the unreal, between the Self and the non-Self, between the permanent and the impermanent; right intuitive discrimination; ever-present discrimination between the transient and the permanent. [\[Go back\]](#)

11) Karma Yoga: The Yoga of selfless action; performance of one’s own duty; indifference to the body and the world; service of humanity. [\[Go back\]](#)

12) Bhakti Yoga: The yoga of attaining union with God through the prescribed spiritual discipline of the path of devotion. [\[Go back\]](#)

- 13) Jnana Yoga: The path of knowledge; meditation through wisdom; constantly and seriously thinking on the true nature of the Self as taught by the upanishads. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 14) Atmic: Having to do with the atma–spirit or self. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 15) Parabrahman: Supreme Brahman. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 16) Samsara: Life through repeated births and deaths; the wheel of birth and death; the process of earthly life. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 17) Prapancha: The world; appearance of the world. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 18) Vyavahara: Worldly activity; relative activity as opposed to Absolute Being; empirical/phenomenal world; worldly relation. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 19) Sadhana-chatushtaya: The fourfold aids to spiritual practice: 1) the ability to discriminate between the transient and the eternal (*nitya-anity-astu-viveka*); 2) the absence of desire for securing pleasure or pain either here or elsewhere (*iha-anutra-artha-phala-vairagya*); 3) the attainment of calmness, temperance, spirit of renunciation, fortitude, power of concentration of mind, and faith (*shama-damadi-sadhana-smaptti*); 4) an intense desire for liberation (*mumukshutwa*). [\[Go back\]](#)
- 20) Moha: Delusion–in relation to something, usually producing delusive attachment or infatuation based on a completely false perception and evaluation of the object. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 21) Rishabhadeva: An ancient ascetic who wandered freely through the forests, possessing nothing–not even wearing clothes–virtually unaware of his body. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 22) Vanaprastha: Literally: a forest dweller. The third stage of life (ashrama) in which, leaving home and children, the husband and wife dwell together in seclusion as a preparation to taking sannyasa. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 23) Karatala bhiksha: Using hands (palms) as the begging bowl. [\[Go back\]](#)
- 24) For some unknown reason, in British India it became the custom to say “saint” when sadhu or sannyasi was meant. [\[Go back\]](#)

25) Jivanmukta: One who is liberated in this present life. [\[Go back\]](#)

26) Brahmachari: One who observes continence; a student in the first stage of life (ashrama). [\[Go back\]](#)

27) This was written during the Second World War. [\[Go back\]](#)

28) Mahatma: Literally: “a great soul [atma].” Usually a designation for a sannyasi or a saint. [\[Go back\]](#)

29) Rishi: Sage; seer of the Truth. [\[Go back\]](#)

The Rugged Path



Sri Swami Sivananda

by Swami Sivananda Saraswati

Nothing that is worthwhile is to be achieved without undergoing a corresponding amount of pain and suffering. No enduring ideal can be attained without tire and sweat. The seed splits and perishes to put forth the plant. The flower lays its life to give place to the sweet fruit. It is in the furnace that gold emerges from the ore. Even so, the price of sainthood is to be paid in the interim period of utter loneliness, privation, and struggle which the really aspiring soul passes through. Every soul on the path of God-realization harbours no illusions about the true nature of the spiritual path. There is absolutely no royal road in spirituality.

Adversity is a divine blessing in disguise. Adversity develops the power of endurance and will-force. Adversity develops fortitude and forbearance. All the Prophets, Saints, Fakirs, Bhaktas and the Yogins of yore had to struggle hard against adverse circumstances. The Almighty Lord puts His devotees under severe tests and rigorous trials. Every soul on earth is being tested by God for his sincerity and patience. He puts the aspirants into various kinds of troubles. He will make man utterly hopeless and helpless and watch and see whether one has the real devotion for Him or not in such straitened circumstances. We cannot say exactly what form these trials will take. But the sincere devotee is never afraid of such kind of tests.

A grim endurance of all vicissitudes and a dogged resolution to persevere to the end are essential if one has to realize his ideal. The aspirant has ever to be alive to the stealthy power of unconscious habits creeping into him. Man is a sybarite by nature. One may be really very zealous in his austerities and vows in the beginning, but if one is not on the very proper guard, slowly the vigour will be relaxed, comforts will creep in the mind and man will be caught very miserably. If the body is allowed to relapse into softness and luxury, it will be found that it is well nigh impossible to discipline it again. The mind immediately takes advantage of even the least sign of weakness in the most sincere aspirants. It is like a tiger crouching on its haunches about to spring. One has to keep a very close watch over his own self and should be ever alert with a vigilance against the sudden onslaught of Samskaras.

In truth, spiritual life is for eternity, and realization is infinite. It is not like a period of work, giving place later for a nice vacation. The same high pitch of purity and discipline has to be maintained if life is to mean anything at all. No relaxation of rigour and caution can be afforded. For, the mighty power of cosmic illusion is not a trifle to be toyed with. A fit of passion is enough to blow away the result attained by years of slow and painstaking effort. Remembering this, let the aspirant be ever watchful unto prayer, as the mystics have said. Man's achievements are of no avail before Maya's charms. She reigns supreme on the stage of the divine play. None can dogmatically say that he is beyond all temptations. It is the Lord's Grace alone that not only makes a man pure, but also keeps him pure till the very end. Man on his part is but to exercise a constant humility and an active vigilance.

The great lessons of genuine humility and unremitting caution have to be firmly grasped and borne in mind by everyone who would make any headway on the slippery path that leads from darkness to Light, from the unreal to the Real and from mortality to Immortality. Realization of the Absolute is not a talk, is not a play. It is the most difficult and the hardest of all tasks. It demands the price of one's very self. Will you really and willingly pay it? It demands your ego. It demands your very being as the cost for Self-realization. If that is everyone's goal, if that is everyone's ideal, should not the more experienced ones impart that secret to the lesser ones? Should not every child in the cradle be initiated into the mysteries of existence?

Now the very serious question arises as to why Sanyas is at all necessary. The essential spirit for which Sanyas is being taught to worldly men is this: It is the only life-giving teaching. All other teachings are mere play of words. Never feel for a moment that you are unfit for Self-realization, that you are unfit for Sanyasa or Vedanta. This cowardly nature will not leave you if you do not exert to know the Truth as it really is. Keep before yourself the formula: "Better to aim at a lion and miss it, than hunt a jackal and catch it." Better to aim at Sanyasa and Vedanta and fail in its practice than to live a worldly life and succeed in it.

Really Sanyasa and Vedanta always go hand in hand. One does not become complete without the other. Wherever there is practical Vedanta, there must be Sanyasa of the highest type. Sanyasa without Vedanta or Para-Bhakti becomes a mockery and a vanity. Vedanta without Sanyasa becomes a mere dry intellectualism. When, in a man, Sanyasa and Vedanta melt into one, there crops up a sage of supreme wisdom. Sanyasa empties the individual of the ego and the negative phenomena and Vedanta fills it with positive Truth, the supreme Reality. By a combination of both, blind faith should be turned into rational faith and reason should be turned into personal experience.

One has to be completely dead to the narrowness and the delusion of the world if he is to live in the grandeur and the beauty of "life in the Spirit". This essential truth can never afford to be forgotten. Dreams of bringing God to the sensual earth is nothing but the exhibition of human vanity which is purely the outcome of failure in distinguishing between what is really true and existent and what is not. Hence let us all take our lessons from our elders and what our forefathers have left for us. Let every father take the example of

Yagnavalkya. Let all children take the example of the four Kumaras. Then only life is said to be perfectly lived. Let each and everyone of us ever remember that we are born for the supreme purpose of absolute emancipation and for nothing else. Let us all empty ourselves of the ego through Sanyasa and may we all fill ourselves with the essential truths of Vedanta.

Tat Twam Asi

- Swami Sivananda