

# THE STAGES OF THE INTEGRATED LIFE ACCORDING TO THE BRAHMA SUTRA

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We must know that things are not moving according to our prejudices, according to our religion, our custom, our cult and the cultural background into which we were born. All these have no connection with the truths of life. Usually, we do not want to know the truth as it is. We are men or women, we are from India or America, we are religious or not religious, socialists or Marxists, philosophers, businessmen, or merchants.

These things have no meaning if we look at things from the point of view of the whole world. We should transfer our mind to the total world, *as if the world alone is thinking*. We should not think like a person belonging to any place, but should think like the whole world thinking. The world has no men and women; it may not even know that we are existing as persons. The world has no difference of any kind within itself; the world is a big organism, like our body. It

has no caste, no religion, no philosophy; it is just what it is. Can you live a life like that? Just be what it is.

I am saying all this because one aphorism in the Brahma Sutras is very intriguing, which no commentator has explained properly. This sutra is based on the following concluding passage in the Chandogya Upanishad: 'One who has studied the Vedas from the teacher according to rule, in the time left over from doing service to the teacher, he, who after having come back, settles down in a home, continues the study in more detail, who concentrates all his senses in the Self, who practises non-hatred to all creatures, he who behaves thus throughout his life, reaches the world of the Creator.'

'*Kritsna-bhavat-tu grihinopasamharah*' (III.4.48), is the sutra used to explain the life of a householder. The meaning of the sutra is that the life of a householder is integral. Unfortunately, all the commentators on the Brahma Sutras are Sannyasins. No Sannyasin will accept that a householder is leading an integral life. They will say Sannyasa is higher. Here also there is some prejudice seen. We should never bring ideas of higher and lower in the scheme of things as they are. Sannyasins abhor the word 'householder', so how will they write a commentary on this sutra? They are handicapped in saying anything here. They cannot say that the life of a householder is wholesome; the general idea is that the life of a householder is one of attachment to family, property, and relations. Then what does this sutra mean? How is a householder integral? Neither can the Sannyasins accept that the householder is integral, nor can they say that the Brahma Sutra is saying something wrong, because everyone has high respect for

the Brahma Sutra. It would be like Christians saying that the Bible is wrong, the New Testament is wrong, Christ's teachings are wrong. One cannot say that, since these are holy words. You may disagree with them, but you cannot say they are wrong. So, what the commentators do is that they glide over this sutra. They write only two lines according to the Upanishads: The householder's life is considered as integral. They won't say anything more, and pass on. I read many commentaries to understand what this secret is. No commentary went into the depth of this sutra.

We have cultural prejudice, linguistic prejudice, ethnic prejudice, anthropological prejudice, man-woman prejudice, and we cannot get over these easily. In this condition we can never reach God; it is not possible. God is neither a man nor a woman. He is neither a Brahmin nor a Ksatriya; He is not an Englishman or a Frenchman or an Indian. In what capacity are we going to God? "Oh, I am Christian, my God, I have come." "I am a Brahmin, my God, I am coming to attain salvation." God is just I-AM-WHAT-I-AM.

In what capacity will anyone go to God? Any idea we have about ourselves is basically wrong; and it is not possible to free ourselves from this habit as long as we have a pre-oriented individuality born into a particular family, culture and morality. Morality also differs; it is not a universally unanimous thing working everywhere in the same way.

There is free life in America and Europe; everybody is free and a broadly unconditioned life is allowed there, barring what is illegal. In India, there are great restrictions. For eating there is one restriction, for washing one

restriction, for moving one restriction, as for standing, sitting, looking, and reading. There is an ordinance for everything. The West has a free culture. Because of an instinct in every person to be free and not to be shackled by anybody else, everyone wants to follow the trend of Western culture. Even an orthodox Brahmin does not like his religion; he removes his hair and puts on a tie. People think that it is high culture. What is it that attracts a person like that? Freedom, indeterminism, a kind of non-restriction of behaviour. Who does not like freedom? These days the world is following Western culture everywhere. Whatever country it is, all have the same Western dress, the same tie, the same way of thinking. Why? There is something deep in us which is not in accordance with our adopted religions.

We were discussing earlier the nature of *moksha*. What is liberation? Where do we go when we reach the state of perfect freedom and immortality? All sorts of answers are given. Some say we can only be near God; others say we can be in the vicinity of God, or only in the kingdom of God, or just sit near God, or be God Himself. All these ideas arise because of our way of thinking. "As you think, so will you become." The kind of freedom we expect will be the freedom we conjure up in our minds. As the kind of freedom we are expecting is conditioned by our empirical way of thinking, we cannot answer the question of what liberation is. If we have a logic which is pragmatic, empirical, and practical, we cannot go beyond it. Now, is God thinking in the same way? Has he a logic that is inferential or deductive? Does God argue? Does He require an argument to establish His existence?

Now I am coming to the point of the householder. All this that I have said is an introduction to this interesting subject. A householder is not to be considered as a man of attachment; he has to lead a purely integral life. He is a highly disciplined person. A married man is not necessarily a man of attachment. Attachment is prohibited everywhere. A person should marry for reasons of a different nature altogether. He cannot be attached to his wife, though he has a duty to her; he cannot be attached to his property, or even to his son and daughter, but he has an impersonal duty to perform. That there is such a thing as duty without attachment is normally hard to conceive. The word 'householder' has a special meaning in India. There are four gradational achievements or attainments conceived in ancient India for the development of the person. In the beginning it is conservation of energy, which is called Brahmacharya. The study of holy scriptures, service to Guru and maintaining self-control are the duties at this stage. Ancient Brahmacharins were great and powerful persons; if they uttered a word, it would immediately materialise. Brahmacharins are feared; one cannot irritate them or play jokes with them. They are a magazine of energy.

Brahmacharya is the initial stage consisting of conservation of energy. In ancient days, it was believed that a person would live for a hundred years. Therefore, the calculation is that for twenty-five years one must live like a Brahmachari, with energy arising out of self-control and the study of holy scriptures, and the service of Guru. After that one enters married life and he fulfils the duties of a householder. The duties of a householder are interesting to

note. It is not attachment to family; that would be far away from the truth. In Indian culture, attachment is never allowed. Duty is emphasised as the very purpose of life. The fulfilment of the means of personal and social relationship is the duty of a householder. In the early days of a Brahmachari, he is concerned only with himself. However, it is not always possible to be living only by oneself, because there is society also. There are impulses of self-restraint and also impulses of social relation. There are impulses of acquiring wealth, there are impulses of seeing beauty, and there are impulses of being charitable to people. This is why the sutra says the householder's life is integral. He is a highly respected person, not because he has a family but because he is engaged in doing his duty. Such a person is difficult to find these days. The principle is not at fault merely because it is not followed due to the insistence of the lower instincts. Nobody has time to think over this matter, because there is no one without prejudice and selfishness. The integral life is a life of non-attachment on one side and freedom from hatred on another side. That is why it is called integral. When the social relationships are well fed and taken care of, and the needs of the instinct of living a family life are also matured systematically, impartially, the householder retires from this duty of having relations with society, relations with anybody. Retirement means the freedom from the necessity to be involved in social relations. Social relations are very important; nobody can free oneself from this truth of life. But once one has passed through that stage and has graduated from that stage, then a tendency to super-individuality creeps in.

Up to this level, people were individuals. Brahmacharis are individuals of one kind, the householder is an individual of a different kind. Now, there is a concept of the super-individual who does not think in terms of personal self-restraint, study, Guru-seva, etc.; nor does he think of social relations, but dedicates himself to uniting his mind with universal relations. This is a higher stage above that of a householder. This stage has nothing to do with any kind of dress or gesture. One must be careful and impartial in thinking, be highly dispassionate and true to one's conscience. There is a grandeur in universal relations. All that the Brahmachari did in his individual capacity, all that the householder did in his social capacity are all transcended in the super-mental operation in terms of universal relations. That is the Vanaprastha, a stage staggering to thought.

Then comes Sannyasa. A Sannyasin does not just mean a person who is wearing ochre cloth, which is again a social restriction, a social distinction. A person whose mind is centred in the Universal Absolute is more than a super-individual; he is a Cosmic Individual, known as a Jivanmukta. Sannyasins are respected as God Himself, not because they have a shaven head and have put on the cloth, but because their minds are centred in Absolute Being.

All this is the reason why the Brahma Sutra is saying that the householder's life is integral. I was thinking I must touch this point; it is certainly better to be impartial and free from prejudice. Don't be afraid of the restrictions set by religions and cultural distinctions and ethnic patterns. Science cannot be belittled merely because it makes bombs. Science is not a way of producing destructive weapons. It is

rather a system of thinking and an operation in terms of the law of the universe.

Here is the commentary that one can find on this intriguing sutra, difficult to understand. Even an understanding of the Brahma Sutras will purify the mind. We are not what we are thinking ourselves to be. We belong to another kingdom of eternal values.

Truly understood, the ideal householder's life is almost a miracle. He conserves energy like the Brahmachari in a more widened way. The self-restraint of the Brahmachari is personal and individual. The householder's self-restraint is more difficult because he has to maintain self-restraint personally on the one hand and also be restrained in family relations and the wider human society by restrained behaviour of non-attachment, coupled simultaneously with duty towards everyone in every field of duty. He feeds the Brahmacharis and Sanyasins, very important to note, and feeds guests with love, even sacrificing his own meal when necessary. He takes care of nearby animals and would not hurt even ants in the house and lead them out peacefully. He worships God like the Sannyasin, reads the holy lore like the Brahmachari, and is detached from emotional contacts like the Vanaprastha. His life is a continuous sacrifice. Rightly, the Brahma Sutra mentions him specially as the one whose life is perfectly integrated.

The scheme detailed above is a scientific system which frees a person from psychopathic reactions and turbulence of emotion that may result from overdoing things and erroneously asking for double promotion in one's spiritual search, which ends in anger, disgust, vengeance, vindictiveness, and hatred towards everything. The

mentioned scheme avoids these pitfalls and healthily enables one to rise to the level of a veritable God walking on Earth.

The attempt to overstep the householder's duties and seek the universal aspirations of a Sannyasin directly from the Brahmacharya stage is, indeed, a highly ambitious and laudable enterprise, but here is also a danger. The universal will reject the entry into itself of any element alien to its nature. It is difficult to believe that the individual sense of the Brahmachari can suddenly effloresce into the universal longings of the Sannyasin. People, mostly, suffer a shipwreck here and turn into arrogant and irate specimens due to conjuring up a false imagination of high achievements, while there are actually none. Great things require a great price in the form of determined meditations.