

Chapter 12. The Scriptures and Renunciation

Q. Swami, you say that one has to do some things and that one shouldn't do some others. How are we to know which is which? What is the authority?

A. The scriptures (*sastras*) are the authority. The “*Laws of Manu (Manu-smrithi)*” itself declares, for example, that castes (*varnas*) and stages of life are only for physical purification and that they don't affect the gaining or losing of the Highest.

Q. If that is so, why all this bother of caste and stages of life and the rules and regulations binding them?

A. Ah, they are required until you become free from attachment. Until then and for the sake of that, the regulations, limits, and rules have to be obeyed to the very letter. The medicine has to be taken as long as the illness persists. Each type of illness has a special medicine for its cure, doesn't it? And a different course of diet and a special regimen. After one has gotten rid of the illness, one can partake of a feast with the rest. Without accepting this, if the well and the ill both demand the same feast, it will lead to calamitous consequences.

The castes and the stages of life are the medicine prescribed for those who suffer from the ills of worldliness and worldly attachment. Attachment (*raga*) is the illness (*roga*), and it can disappear only by a strictly observed regimen. Unless you get well, you cannot be liberated. This is the true meaning of *Vedanta*. The one who knows this, whatever the stage of life, attains liberation.

Q. Swami! Have any great souls achieved liberation (*moksha*) while in the householder stage?

A. Janaka, Aswapathi, Dilipa —these are examples of people who gained liberation as householders.

Q. Swami! Isn't it necessary to follow strictly the injunction of the scripture (*sruthi*) that enjoins on people the duty of completing the student stage and then, after passing through the next stage of the householder, to enter the forest dweller and observe all the limitations and regulations of that stage, before ultimately taking on the life of full renunciation? Or can one take renunciation even without going through the other steps?

A. Yes, whenever one gets detachment from objects, one can take renunciation. Unless such a chance is seized, one is bound to fall. Whatever stage you are in, when you get full renunciation, you can enter upon the renunciation (*sanyasa*) stage from that very moment. There is no iron rule that you must live through the three earlier stages. This too is the injunction of the scriptures. The reason is this: such a pure soul has undergone the training available in the other stages —purification in the crucible of life— in previous births. Destructive tendencies have been rooted out and the progressive ones, the uplifting ones, have been developed in past births.

Q. How are we to know that such transformation has already been earned in past births? Are there any signs by which we can discover that such and such a stage can be skipped? If there are, please tell me.

A. The fact that a person has no inclination for the other three stages, that one has no attachment or attraction toward them, is a clear sign. If detachment has developed in the past birth, the inclination will be absent. Since the awareness that only the *Atma* is real has dawned, the person is unattached to the three earlier stages of life. When renunciation has appeared, one can give up worldly life even though the series have to be overstepped. This is approved by scripture.

But the person who confers renunciation (*sanyasa*) must examine fully and convince himself that the person on whom renunciation is being conferred is devoid of sensual impulses and attachments. Renunciation should

be given only to one who has no agitation in the mind, as they are called; only such can be said to be unattached.

The candidate should also examine themselves to see whether their inner consciousness is free from the qualities (*gunas*), dull, active, or even progressive. If it is not so free, the candidate will not only break the vows of renunciation and be outcast but may even break down under the burden and meet a calamitous end.

Q. Is renunciation (*sanyasa*) of one kind, or are there different kinds? Please tell me.

A. There are three types of renunciation: physical renunciation, mental renunciation, and *Atmic* renunciation.

Q. What does physical renunciation mean?

A. Renunciation in appearance, as far as the outer body is concerned. One wears the ochre robe, assumes the name, appears in the form, but has no awareness of the *Atma*; one wanders amidst all the objective desires clinging to external things. One is like an ordinary person, for all intents and purposes.

Q. And mental renunciation?

A. In mental renunciation, one gives up all decisions and desires; one has the mind under strict control; one is not guided by impulses or agitations; one is ever calm and collected.

Q. You mentioned *Atmic* renunciation as the third.

A. Here, one breaks through all thoughts about things that are unrelated to the *Atma*, because one is ever immersed in contemplation of the true reality, “I am *Brahman* (*Aham Brahmasmi*).” One is steady in the consciousness of being *Atma*. One’s bliss (*ananda*) is continuous. This is called bliss-filled.

The thickest darkness can be destroyed only by the light that emanates from the splendid solar orb; similarly, without the splendour of *Atmic* renunciation, ignorance cannot be dispersed—the encasements that hide the heart can’t be shattered and the *Atma* can’t shine in its own glory.

Q. How are these types attained? What are the signs that they have been attained?

A. Outward renunciation (*deha-sanyasa*) is attained by discrimination between the eternal and the temporary, the evanescent and the everlasting. Mental renunciation (*manosanyasa*) is reached by conquering the waywardness of speech, senses, and mind. *Atmic* renunciation (*Atma-sanyasa*) is won by filling oneself with the principles of *Vedantic* thought. When these educative influences become strong and you are well established in these virtues and attitudes, then you can get liberated as a result of their combined effects.

Q. Who among these are really fortunate, their lives being spent in a worthwhile way?

A. Well, the one who, like the bee, sucks the honey in the flower in silence and in great bliss, who is intent on uninterruptedly tasting the nectar of *Atmic* bliss; who ignores this world as only a “scene”—that one is the most fortunate, and their life is the most worthwhile.

Q. Then, Swami, what is it that is spoken of by the elders as attaining truth, indestructibility, purity, and inner peace (*sathya*, *nithya*, *nir-mala*, and *santhi*)? How are these to be attained?

A. As I said already, the one who does not get attached to the “scene” but is engrossed in their own *Atmic* bliss—that one attains truth, indestructibility, purity, and inner peace. Even if one of these is attained, that is enough; for one includes all.