



तव कथामृतं तसजीवनम्
tava kathāmytām tapta-jīvanam

Sri Krishna Kathamrita Bindu

Issue No. 111 Fortnightly email mini-magazine from Gopal Jiu Publications

14 September 2005

Śrī Pārśva Ekādaśī, 26 Hṛīṣīkeśa, 519 Gaurābda

Circulation 1,612

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SANNYASA AND FAMILY LIFE

His Divine Grace

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada



In this article, we pose certain commonly asked questions about sannyāsa and family life, with answers from the teachings of Srila A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

What is sannyāsa?

Just like Arjuna. He sacrificed his whole family for Krishna. In the beginning he hesitated, "How can I kill my family members in this fight?" And when he became Krishna conscious, "Never mind, I shall kill all of them." This is called sacrifice. This is Krishna consciousness. He sacrificed all sentiments, all connections, everything, for Krishna. That is called *sannyāsa*, real *sannyāsa*. Although he was a warrior, a fighter, a householder having more than dozen wives, still he was *sannyāsa*, because he sacrificed everything for Krishna. That is wanted. That is Krishna consciousness.

— Lecture on *Bhagavad-gītā*. Los Angeles. 20 December 1968

What is the recommended āśrama in this age?

Generally, if one can remain a *brahmacārī* it is very convenient. And from *brahmacārī*, one can take *sannyāsa*. But in this age of Kali,

[next column](#) 

Bhaktivinode Thakura recommends that it is better to cultivate Krishna Consciousness as a householder.

— Letter to Mandali Bhadra. 2 November 1969

Without a husband, women have great difficulty making spiritual advancement. We have to develop a perfect society with scientific arrangement for making spiritual progress. With so many women in the society, what shall they do? They have also come to Krishna. We cannot reject them. Therefore I have advised my students to get married. I was a householder, and my Guru Maharaja was a life-long *brahmacārī*. We are doing the same work of preaching Krishna Consciousness, so what is the difference between *gṛhastha* and *brahmacārī*? Actual *sannyāsa* means that one has given everything to Krishna. So practically you are already *sannyāsa*. But if you have got a wife, and if she is desirous to raise children, then she will not be very happy if you go away. It is not our business to create havoc. If the wife is very strong then she will appreciate if you take *sannyāsa*. But if there is any question at all then it should be avoided. Just like I never liked my wife, but I knew it was my duty to stay with her until my sons were grown-up. Then I left. If you give your wife one child, then she will be happy and she will have



some life-long occupation. You must consider that.

— Letter. 17 December 1972

Is it necessary to leave one's Krishna-conscious wife to take sannyāsa?

If you have taken a wife for *gr̥hastha* life, why are you neglecting her? That is not *vaiṣṇava*. *Vaiṣṇava* means one is very much responsible. And if he is a householder then he must be responsible. I cannot give *sannyāsa* to any devotee who has not proven himself to be responsible in all respects. Better you prove yourself first by being an ideal householder and forget all this nonsense.

— Letter. 16 July 1972

Regarding taking *sannyāsa*, this mentality that either I will have sex life or I will take *sannyāsa* is not proper. *Sannyāsa* means that one is finished with material life. You have gotten married and are in family life, so you should remain there. You thought that by getting married you would expand your service, so you should do that. Actually, all of my disciples are *sannyāsīs* because they have surrendered everything in the service of Krishna.

— Letter 21 November 1975

Forget taking *sannyāsa* order for the time being. Unless your child is born, there is no question of taking *sannyāsa*. We shall consider the matter further when your child is born. Now you should take care of your wife. The woman should be cared for, especially during pregnancy. At the time of the marriage ceremony there is a promise that the husband will care for the wife throughout her life and the woman will serve the husband throughout his life. When the child is grown up then the husband can take *sannyāsa*.

— Letter. 5 August 1971

Should women take sannyāsa?

Regarding "swamis" and "swaminis", you have been misinformed. Among my disciples there is only one swami, *sannyāsī*, but there is no "swamini." Women are never offered *sannyāsa* in the Vedic culture.

— Letter. 16 July 1970

The spirit soul is equal in either a man or woman. One who is actually engaged in the service of Krishna, there is no such distinction as man or woman. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, 6th chapter, 1st verse it is stated:

*anāśritaḥ karma-phalaṁ kāryaṁ karma karoti yaḥ
sa sannyāsī ca yogī ca na niragnir na cākriyāḥ*

One who is unattached to the fruits of his work and who works as he is obligated is in the renounced order of life, and he is the true mystic, not he who lights no fire and performs no duty.

Anyone who is acting for Krishna is a *sannyāsī* or *sannyāsīni*. It is also stated: *striyo vaiśyās tathā śūdrās te 'pi yānti parām gatim* — Though they be of lower birth, women, merchants, and workers can attain the supreme destination. Spiritually everyone is equal. But materially a woman cannot be given *sannyāsa*.

— Letter. 4 February 1976

WHEN THE LORD IS PRESENT NO DARK ACT IS POSSIBLE

*The story of how Ramanujacharya's
disciple Govinda took sannyāsa*

Govinda was the maternal cousin of Srila Ramanujacharya, the empowered *ācārya* of the Śrī Vaiṣṇava-sampradāya. In the beginning of his life Govinda worshiped Lord Shiva, but later became a *vaiṣṇava* and a disciple of Ramanuja. A devoted disciple, Govinda saw Ramanuja as the ever-present Supreme Lord [Ramanuja is considered to be an incarnation of Laksman]. Absorbed in this realization, he experienced neither solitude nor darkness. God in Ramanuja's form ever filled his outer eyes as well as his inner vision. Hence he felt no solitude. He never left Ramanuja's side, and was always engaged in listening to his discourses on spiritual life.

Govinda's mother Dyutimati once approached her son while he was seated within Ramanuja's hearing and informed him that as his wife had come of age it was proper for him to conceive a child with her. Govinda told her, "Mother, let her come when there is solitude and darkness." Several days went by and when

Govinda still had not approached his wife, Dyutimati complained to Ramanuja about his apparent unwillingness to follow the injunctions of Vedic household life to give his wife a child.

Ramanuja instructed Govinda that he should act according to his mother's desire, and for at least one night he should remain with his wife. Govinda bowed assent. A feast was made for the occasion of the nuptial ceremony, and Govinda and his wife were then left together in a bedroom. Left alone with his wife, all that night Govinda talked to her about the philosophy and teachings of Ramanuja. With great ecstasy he spoke to her about Lord Vishnu and his glories, his opulences, and wonders.

Finally, morning arrived and relatives came to offer congratulations to the happy couple. Dyutimati, who was staying in a room next to the young couple, overheard him speaking *hari-kathā* all night to his wife. She chastised her son, "How is it that you were giving a religious sermon all night to your wife in your nuptial chamber?"

"Mother," replied Govinda, "when God is in my heart and is present everywhere and always watching me, how can I escape from him? How can I feel myself alone and in a private place? How then is it possible for me to do anything other than contemplate on him and sing his praises? Without solitude, no secret act is possible; and without darkness, no dark act is possible."

This discussion between Govinda and his mother was reported to Ramanuja. "Govinda," he said, calling him to his side, "You have passed the greatest test. Due to your distaste for worldly life you cannot be a materialist. However, the *śāstra* requires everyone to belong to some definite *āśrama* or order of life. Since you cannot be a householder you should accept the order of *sannyāsa*." This was Govinda's wish and he begged Ramanuja to confer *sannyāsa* upon him at once. It was done and Ramanuja gave him his own *sannyāsa* name, Emberumanar, he whose grace and compassion surpasses even the Lord's. "Noble sire," said Govinda, "this name is too great an honor to put upon a humble

creature like me. Bless me with a name that a shadow like me deserves. "Then," Ramanuja said gracefully, "let it be Embar, the shadow or abbreviated form of Emberumanar".

— Adapted from *Sri Ramanujacharya*, by Sri Alkondavalli Govindacharya. Sri Nrisimhapriya Trust. Chennai. 2004.

SANNYASA IS FOR PREACHING

His Divine Grace

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada
Vaiṣiṣṭya-aṣṭaka 1.8

āra eka "śo-batal" pracāreṇa tare
prabhura sannyāsa yei māyāvādī hare

There is another type of "show-bottle" display, used solely for the purpose of preaching. That is Lord Chaitanya's acceptance of the *sannyāsa āśrama* by which the Māyāvādīs are defeated. ❀

— From *The Poetry of Srila Prabhupada*. Translated by Dasarath Suta Das. Nectar Books. Union City, Georgia, USA. 1998.

THE SON OF SACHI LEAVES HOME TO TAKE SANNYASA

Srila Raya Ramananda

The following songs were collected by the Orissan State Museum in Bhubaneswar from palm leaf manuscripts written in Oriya script. In 1992 they published these and some other rare songs of Raya Ramananda in a book titled, Rāya Rāmānanda Padyāvalī.

nadiāte bhaktagana sakali milila
harināma dhūnī gorā nadīyā kampāla he (1)

sanyāsake jāba boli bole gauramanī
mātāra āgare kahe atirasa khānī (2)

śuna māye ogo āmi sannyāsake jāba
kabu mātā āmi gṛhakhāne rakhāiba (3)

śuni śacī ṭhākūrānī kāndiyām bolite
na jā-a sannyāse gorā āmāre chāḍite (4)

rāye rāmānanda bole vikala hoila
navīna kuñcita keśa gaura muṇḍāila (5)

muṇḍāila keśabhāra kapinī daṇḍa kamaṇḍala

Gathered together with Gauranga, the devotees performed such uproarious *hari-nāma* that all of Nadia trembled. (1)

The golden jewel Gauranga told His mother the unbearable news that he was about to take *sannyāsa*. (2)

“Listen, O mother! I will accept *sannyāsa*. How long will you keep me in this house?” (3)

Hearing this, Sachi Thakurani started to cry and said, “O Gaura, don’t go. Don’t leave me.” (4)

Raya Ramananda says, “I have become perturbed! Gaura has shaved off His youthful curly hair.” (5)

Coda: Cutting the burden of his hair, he has accepted a shaven head, loincloth, staff, and water pot.

muṇḍāila keśabhāra navīna ga-urabara
daṇḍa kamaṇḍala ka-upine (1)

dekhi śacī ṭhākurāṇī paḍila tucchā dharanī
kena keśa gaura muṇḍāila (2)

kāhāra mukha āmi cāite kemani rahibu grīhate
more sane niā gaurāmanī (3)

tumi jadi sanyāse jāba āmire garala khāba
rāye rāmānanda rasavānī (4)

gaurācānda tumi thāki more nā kariā duḥkhī

Youthful Gaura has shaved his head and relieved himself of the burden of hair. He has accepted a *sannyāsa daṇḍa*, *kamaṇḍalu*, and *kaupīna*. (1)

Seeing this, Sachi Thakurani became faint and said, “Why has Gaura shaved his head?” (2)

“How can I live without seeing his face? How can I stay in this house? O Gauramani, take me with you.” (3)

Ray Ramananda says with feeling, “If you accept *sannyāsa*, then I will eat poison.” (4)

Coda: O Gaurachandra, stay here! Don’t put me in distress! ❀

— Translations by Bhakta Pradosh

RADHARANĪ’S LAMENT

Srila Rupa Goswami’s Padyāvalī, text 340

After Krishna had left for Mathura, Radha told Lalita, “Dear friend, if Krishna never returns to Vrindavan, then I will never attain him and he will also not get me. Bereft of his service, what then is the use in maintaining this troublesome body any longer?” She then prayed:

pañcatvaṁ tanur etu bhūta-nivahaḥ svāmīse
viśantu sphuṭaṁ
dhātāraṁ praṇipatya hanta śirasā tatrāpi
yāce varam
tad-vāpīṣu payasa tadīya-mukure jyotis
tadīyāṅgaṇa-
vyomni vyoma tadīya-vartmani dharā tat-
tāla-vṛnte ‘nilaḥ

I bow my head before the creator and beg from him the benediction that when this body dies and it’s elements mix with the prime elements of gross matter, at that time may the water of my body mix with the water where Krishna performs his water sports. May the fire of my body enter Krishna’s mirror. May the ether of my body enter the sky around his courtyard. May the earth in my body merge in the paths where he walks, and may the air in my body be used to fan him. (By Sri Sanmasika) ❀

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SRI KRISHNA KATHAMRITA BINDU

A free bi-monthly service provided by:
Gopal Jiu Publications

c/o Sri Krishna Balarama Mandir
National Highway No. 5, IRC Village
Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India, 751015

Phone: (0674) 2553250, 2557026

Email: katha@gopaljiu.org

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Subscriptions: minimag@gopaljiu.org

Gopal Jiu Publications is a branch of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Founder-Acharya His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada.

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