
Aarsha Vidya Bharati - Dec 2021

A monthly newsletter that will bring you more happiness, more wisdom and more freedom



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The Glory of Gṛhasthāśrama

(A new series)

Note by Swamini Brahmaṇḍananda – Through our Śāstra we see that most of our Devatas and Rishis were happily married. We have role models in couples such as Kardama-Devahuti, Shiva-Parvati, Laxmi-Narayana, Sita-Rama, Rukmini-Krishna, and Savitri-Satyavan. The stage of marriage, gṛhastha-āśramaḥ was considered the refuge and support of all other stages of life, in the Vedic lifestyle. The students, elderly parents and sannyāsi-s depended on the married couple.

In the tradition of Vedanta there has been an emphasis on the lifestyle of sannyāsa from the time of Adi Shankaracharya onwards although jñānam is and continues to be the goal. Sometimes gṛhastha students of Vedanta wrongly perceive that their stage in life and their growing jijñāsā for mokṣa cannot go hand in hand. This needs to be reviewed. So, the purpose of this article (which I hope may grow into a series) is for us to appreciate how blessed it is to married, have a family and see how it is the best preparation for mokṣa.

Just as the sages and devatas we serve, were married may we see how blessed Gṛhasthāśrama is. I appreciate Rashmi who hesitated and yet responded to my request to get us started.

By Rashmi Kaikini, Mumbai

In the vision of Vedas, entire life is a spiritual journey which includes four stages also called āśramaḥ. The word śramaḥ means effort, a deliberate and directed effort in the knowledge and practice of dharma throughout life. Āśrama is meant for mokṣa (freedom from a sense of bondage) eventually. These four Āśrama, stages, are Brahmacharya - stage of a student life, Gṛhastha - stage of a house holder's life, Vānaprastha - stage of retired life, Sannyāsa - stage of renunciation.



What is the purpose of Gṛhastha Āśrama?

The pursuit of Dharma being the primary purpose of Gṛhasthāśrama, husband and wife take a vow of companionship and contribute to each other's growth and happiness. The stability of this partnership is required for raising emotionally and physically healthy children, steady earning in the profession and achievements that build the fabric of the society. The couple learns to love and accept each other, apply the disposition of karma yoga and bring in kauśalam in their roles in doing their best aligned to Dharma. It also is an opportunity to bring in samatvam, a glad abiding acceptance of the other, titikṣā, forbearance, kṣama, accommodation and trust in life.

How did this stage contribute to my growth?

Relating to partner:

We have had our differences of opinions and still have in many areas. We have fought bitterly, not in speaking terms for days together and yet learnt to accept and live together as there is mutual love, care and trust. What brings steadiness to our relationship is respect to what we do differently and enjoy what we have in common. Some things I had to give up and some he had to adapt and learn and vice versa. Giving space for the other to just be, caring actions, spending quality time and sharing household responsibilities have helped in our marriage of 24 years.

Relating to children:

From taking turns to attend to the new born, doctor visits, deciding which school/college for admission, career decision – has all been a tedious process, but yet when I look back, I feel it is worth it. I remember we had to face lot of discomfort when our daughter was in 10th grade. Constant complaints from the school principal, being called irresponsible - all this we struggled with, but we had each other. One thing that helped is seeing her as an 'individual' with her own likes/dislikes. This helped me to appreciate her strengths and be able to communicate to solve the differences. We encouraged her to attend camps, treks where they get to see and work in villages, allow her to make her own decisions, cook a new recipe, watch a movie together, get her initiated to a japa - all this and much more has helped to sustain a loving relationship.

Relating to in-laws

When a girl marries, she leaves behind her family and comes to stay with her husband's family (Indian tradition) and tries to make it her own. I was blessed to have a very supportive father-in-law. But when it came to another family member I found there was huge difference in our ways of thinking and doing things and this would end up in constant arguments. It took several years for me to accept her the

way she is and focus on her contribution to the family. When my goal changed to a higher purpose or mokṣa, I began to see more of Īśvara in everything and that helped me drop my petty mindset and be accepting.

Relating to community as a family unit :

Participating in family and maṭha related activities, yearly visit to our Kuladevatā, performing śrāddhā of our ancestors, donating to gauśālā-s, attending to our parent's medical needs, etc. have become a part of life.

In my Gṛhasthāśrama, I enjoy the fulfillment of living a life of Dharma, the satisfaction of having decent livelihood, more or less complete life with family and have a relative sense of completeness. Having been there and done that, I am outgrowing the need for more pleasure. I look forward to each day as there is so much joy in everything I do and connect, and serve with the fullness that I am.

The teachings of the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads have enriched this stage of my life. My heartfelt gratitude and pranams to my Guru, Swamini Brahmaṇḍanandaji for the unconditional love and blessings.